

February 8th, 2019

WHA Families,

Many of us at the younger levels are wrapping up our seasons in the next couple of weeks while some are diligently preparing for state tournament play. Some teams will be going to state tournaments and some will not. Some teams will conclude a winning season and many have struggled mightily along the way. That is ok!! The emphasis is on player development and not the record. Player development, hard work and perseverance are the recipe for success...both at the rink and in life. I am sure that all of our players have learned many skills and lessons this year that will serve them well in both areas. I recall a Nike poster that I had as a young man. The statement on the poster read "The road to athletic greatness is not marked by perfection but the ability to constantly overcome adversity and failure."

With the season coming to a conclusion, let's make sure we end on a high note. A letter went out from SDAHA this week notifying you of an alarming trend amongst spectators in our state. Our WHA Board made a commitment at the beginning of the season to work together to change this culture. I myself, have been very discouraged at the behavior of our spectators. I rarely hear positive reinforcement or encouragement from our fans. The only time I seem to hear anyone cheering loudly is when they don't like the referee's call. Or when play starts to become a little bit "chippy" we begin to cheer for our own player to go back and get retribution-this situation leads to an escalation in dangerous hits and poor hockey. Sometimes the issues are big, with parents cussing loudly at the referees from the stands and sometimes the issues are small as I listen to parents complain amongst themselves about the referees, other players on the team, or the coaches. ~~I think,~~ I know we can do better! This culture does not cultivate a fun nor a winning atmosphere. Our coaches are working to teach these young players poise and confidence on the ice. The athlete must control his/her emotions on the ice and direct all of their energy towards efforts that will impact his team and the game in a positive manner. I think it is fair that we expect our parents to model the same behavior in the stands and at home. Hockey is an intense and emotional game, I understand, but we must do better as parents, spectators and leaders.

One other situation that I would ask you to be aware of is coaching from the stands. Receiving instructions from several sources is very confusing for players. Remember that there should be only "One instructional voice". Your role as the parent is to encourage and support. The coaches role is to instruct.

I have had many conversations with parents this year when I make them aware that their behavior may not be appropriate. I have asked our board for help in this regard as well. Now, I am asking for your help as well. If you find your neighbor or friend is failing to exhibit poise and confidence, be a calming influence and find a way to let them know they need to tone it down. The conversations are always difficult and awkward, but we must do our best to create a positive culture for both the parent and the player experience.

I hope that we do not need to rely on the referees, many of which are children still to control the behavior of our fans. I am confident that I can count on all of you to help improve this situation. Let's all work together to create a POSITIVE culture that our young athletes and fans can enjoy!

My challenge to all: Release your player to the game! Cheer for good sportsmanship! Cheer for victory AND defeat. Tell your player you love them and remember to ask them where they want to eat!!!

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Eric Skott
WHA President

