

# NORTHERN CALIFORNIA JUNIOR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

TO: Parents, Players and Club Members of NORCAL

FROM: Lance Burrow, NORCAL President

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Over the past several months, the NORCAL Board of Directors has implemented the playing rules and regulations for the 2010-2011 playing season. These rules have significantly changed the governance of NORCAL over youth hockey in Northern California and I want to give you an overview of these changes in this letter. NORCAL is recognized by the California Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) as the governing body for youth ice hockey competition at the Tier II (AA), A, and B levels in Northern California. Top teams from NORCAL and from the Southern California Amateur Hockey Association (SCAHA) meet each spring for State playoffs conducted by CAHA. Tier I and II teams are eligible to compete towards National championships.

Nationally, youth ice hockey is growing. California youth ice hockey is also growing and we are seeing growth here in the North as well. USA Hockey has recently instituted a number of changes affecting the way in which the sport will be taught, coached, and played in the future. I am, of course referring to the American Development Model which you can learn more about on the USA Hockey website.

Each year in December NORCAL conducts pre-select camp for the purpose of identifying players for advancement to the State select camp and hopefully beyond. Based on the results of pre-select camps in the past few years, a couple of observations have been consistently made. First, the vast majority of players selected to move on to States are Tier I (AAA) or Tier II (AA) players primarily from the one club has a Tier I and Tier II program, and, second, there are a number of very talented youth hockey players in Northern California that do not have practical opportunities to play at the Tier level. While the Board was looking for improvements to the select process for advanced players, it also recognized that any change to NORCAL competitive structure had to take into account the fact that NORCAL's primary mission is to grow the game of hockey in Northern California by attracting and retaining more players and to enhance the experience of every player at all levels of play.

As a result, the Board began having discussions about what could be done to make sure every player was playing at the best level to give him or her a rewarding recreational experience at a reasonable cost, year in and year out. Those discussions resulted in the full Board directing our General Manager and the rules committee to use the rules change

process to address the competitive structure of NORCAL. Subsequently, the rules and regulations for the 2010/2011 playing season incorporating some major changes were voted and approved by your full NORCAL board. These rules are now posted on the NORCAL website.

First, from a governance standpoint a Tier Committee and a Placement Committee have been created and committee members appointed by the Board. The Tier Committee (rule 9.4) consists of the General Manager, John Hamer, as chair, the NORCAL Director of Coaches, John Beaulieu, and three other persons representing at least two different clubs including one club president, one current Tier II coach, and a person who is neither a club president nor a current Tier head coach. Currently the Tier Committee includes Janay Minton, president of the Tri-Valley club, and Hal Nunn, Santa Clara Midget 18 Coach. The remaining member (a current Tier II coach) will be named shortly.

The Placement Committee (rule 9.1) is populated by the General Manager, the Director of Coaches, Chris Hathaway, Member at Large, Mark Mauro, a referee, and Tom Hancock, president of the Fresno Falcon Hockey Club. The Placement Committee is responsible for assisting the General Manager in making all final placement decisions of teams into the various playing levels. This committee will be observing play between the NORCAL teams after they are selected for the purpose of placing them at the appropriate level of play. It is a big job and requires the devotion of a lot of time. I know that these individuals will work hard and diligently in placing teams appropriately.

One of the most important factors discussed at length during the process of adopting these new rules and regulations was cost particularly for Tier teams. A number of working models were discussed at length. Last year and the year before, the Tri-Valley Midget 18 AA team participated in a national finals competition. They did so, and rose to the national competition without once leaving the state of California to play a hockey game. There is a general misconception that Tier hockey has to be expensive. While the cost may be higher than travel hockey, it doesn't have to be excessive. CAHA has a vibrant Tier AA league and firmly sets competitive weekends called CAHA weekends where each competitive level, i.e., 16 midget AA meets and plays a series of games with all of the other teams in their division. CAHA assigns these games to both North and South ice rinks. This year for instance, some of these weekends will be played at Shark's Ice, and in Vacaville. Others will be conducted at venues in the South. While Tier hockey will be more expensive than travel, a team does not need to leave the state of California to be competitive. If you are thinking about Tier hockey for your players you should discuss the financial ramifications with the club or clubs that offer these programs.

A new concept has found its way into these rules and regulations, "relegation." Relegation is defined as the placement of the team into a competitive division other than the team's original declaration. Annually, each club declares to NORCAL what teams they anticipate fielding in a pending season by age group and competitive level. In the past, during the preseason teams have been characterized as "B" teams only. The General Manager along with the assistance of the director of coaches and a member at large were

tasked with evaluating those teams and determining which team would be classified as a B team and which would be an A team. This was done primarily to provide as much parity from a competitive level between those two classifications. While there has been some disagreement through a season or two, the system has worked extremely well. In order to facilitate a AA league the Placement Committee was expanded and its job is to determine competitive level classifications now between up to four different skill levels, AA, A, B, and BB. If the Committee, for instance, determines during the preseason that a team designated as an A team really should be competing at the AA level and there is a NORCAL AA league at that age group, that team will be relegated to playing AA hockey.

When and if a team is “relegated” it will not be forced to play at the higher or lower level if the team chooses not to. However, in the instance where an A team is relegated to AA status and declines relegation, it may play at the lower level but it may not compete in post-season play. These rules can be found in NORCAL rule 9.0 and I invite all of you to read and review them carefully. I also suggest that you read rule 2.6 which discusses competitive levels and provides some insight into how the various levels will be constituted.

I also want to touch on Player Development Requirements (“PDR”). In order to maintain club stability and to encourage clubs to develop players across a range of ages and levels, NORCAL has established a PDR requirement of 50%. This means that in any given year, with the exception of AAA teams, a team must roster a minimum of 50% of its players from within its member club (rule 4.13). CAHA has established PDR at 25% however, several years ago and because of demographics and geography, NORCAL adopted 50% PDR. The 50% requirement will apply to all AA teams as well as teams at the A and B levels. I am confident that these goals can be met and still provide for viable AA teams where clubs decide to field them. By the way, contained within rule 2.6 are some other minimum requirements that clubs have to meet before they field either a AAA or AA team.

Presently, it appears that we are likely to have a peewee AA NORCAL league and an 18 midget AA NORCAL league. Provisionally, the clubs have declared a total of five peewee teams and three, possibly four midget teams. We’ll see where we are after tryouts and where we will be after a preseason where the Placement Committee will do its work in evaluating the teams so declared but, I am hopeful that these two levels will be competing in a NORCAL Tier AA league. Any teams that do play at the AA level will compete through a series of CAHA games, weekends and a play down weekend, for a state championship. Unlike travel where teams at the A and B level play for a NORCAL championship, the top two advancing to states, the NORCAL AA teams will only play competitively for championship purposes at the state level. If NORCAL AA hockey grows this is likely to change so that the top team or teams in NORCAL will send its top team or teams in the various levels on to the state championship.

With all the changes that NORCAL is experiencing, I have asked several people to help me develop a “Hockey Parent 101” seminar which will be presented at times and

places to be determined during our preseason or early in the 2010-2011 season. This is something that I believe has been needed for a long time particularly at the younger age groups who are new to competitive and developmental hockey. This program will provide parents with an overview of the rules of play, the presentation by a coach relating to expectations and team dynamics, and the presentation from a parent about being a good hockey parent. More on this later, but stay tuned and watch the website.

I encourage each and every one of you to participate in the dynamics of your local clubs. It is through your club and its president that you should receive information about our league and it is through your club president that you can best communicate with the board at NORCAL. Board meetings are open to the public and anyone who is a member of the club is welcome to attend and I encourage you to do so if you're so inclined. I and most of the executive board are accessible and then we all have "open door" policies. My e-mail address is lance@burrow-law.com, and I do not mind receiving e-mails. NORCAL's website does contain the e-mail address of everyone on the executive board and any questions that you have can always be directed to us either by e-mail or in person.

I am proud of the steps that NORCAL has taken to improve youth ice hockey in our region. I am indebted to our General Manager, John Hamer, for his friendship, his hard work and his common sense. Also, NORCAL cannot function without our vice president, Carla Dickerson, who chairs the penalty review committee and is always instrumental in organizing and running playoffs and other aspects of the work that we do. I'm looking forward to a great year and watching a lot of hockey. To all the teams good luck and I hope to see you all around the rink.