



PACIFIC COAST AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

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SERVING AMATEUR HOCKEY IN THE LOWER MAINLAND SINCE 1941

REPORT

To: PCAHA Members

From: Ad Hoc Committee on Bodychecking Issues

Date: November 30, 2011

Re: Committee Report and Proposed Resolutions

At the PCAHA President's Caucus meeting on October 30, 2011, it was agreed that a Committee would be struck to consider the extent to which bodychecking should continue to be permitted in games played within the PCAHA. A number of MHA Presidents and Managing Directors volunteered to participate in this Committee.

The Committee met twice, convened both times by Vanna Achtem, PCAHA President. Present at the first meeting on November 5, 2011 were 1 managing director and 4 MHA presidents. The second meeting on November 28, 2011 was attended by 5 managing directors and 10 minor hockey associations were represented by either their president or a representative.

The view of the Committee was that it was not tasked with making a decision on behalf of the PCAHA with respect to whether and to what extent bodychecking should continue to be permitted in PCAHA games. In fact, those present at these meetings expressed a wide range of views with respect to this issue. Rather, the Committee took the view that the question of which divisions and levels should be allowed to bodycheck is an important issue, fundamental to the game, that should be made by the membership at a general meeting. The Committee undertook as its main functions to:

1. pull together concrete and specific proposals and alternatives and make a recommendation as to how and when a decision should be made;
2. collect and assemble the information that the membership should have in hand, and identify the issues that should be considered by the membership, before a decision is made; and
3. consider whether there are any further steps that could be taken to promote body contact hockey across the PCAHA (other than by making it the only option for every recreational player).

Proposals

The question of whether bodychecking should be allowed in games played within the PCAHA is governed by section E(12) of the PCAHA Rules and Regulations. The PCAHA Rules and Regulations are enacted by and can only be amended by the membership of the PCAHA, acting in a general meeting. Typically changes are debated and enacted at the Annual General Meeting in May; however, it is possible to call a special general meeting at any time which would have the power to enact changes to the Rules and Regulations.

The Committee discussed the appropriate time for the making of any decision to change the levels at which bodychecking is permitted. Many of PCAHA's member minor hockey associations open registration to returning players in the spring, and engage in detailed planning for the upcoming season in advance of that time. The Committee was of the view that any decision to change the levels at which bodychecking is permitted should be made at a special general meeting early in the new year, and has recommended that the President's Caucus, currently scheduled for January 22, 2012, be converted to a Special General Meeting at which the proposed resolutions can be considered and decided so that this is known before Associations finalize their plans and begin registration for the new season.

The Committee considered the various options for changes to the rules governing bodychecking, and examined what is being done in other districts both within BC and elsewhere in Canada. The proposals that it recommends be voted upon are as follows:

- that all games played at recreational or "C" hockey levels be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking);
- that all games played at the Peewee recreational or "C" hockey level be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking) – this proposal would be voted on only if the first proposal was not approved;
- that the PCAHA express its encouragement to BC Hockey to eliminate bodychecking in all Peewee "A" competition within British Columbia; and
- that all games played within the PCAHA at the Peewee "A" level be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking) – regardless of whether BC Hockey eliminates bodychecking in Peewee "A" competition elsewhere in the province.

The Committee also considered whether any elimination of bodychecking for recreational hockey should be phased in over time (perhaps starting with the Peewee level, then moving to Bantam in 2 years, and then to Midget). The Committee ultimately concluded that, given that the motivation for this change is the safety of players, it makes sense that any change should be made effective across all divisions to which it is to apply at the same time.

The specific resolutions to be considered are set out at the conclusion of this Report.

Background Information

1. *Risks of Bodychecking*

The incidence of concussions in hockey has gained a steadily higher profile in recent years. Several NHL players found their careers ending early as a result of concussions (Keith Primeau, Eric Lindros), while more recently, Sidney Crosby has had to take many months out of hockey in order to recover from a concussion.

Concern about concussions has spread to minor hockey players and their parents. Enrolment in minor hockey programs is down across the country, and while there may be multiple causes (the cost of hockey during an economic downturn being one), there is no doubt that one cause is concern about the risk of injury in hockey.

A concussion is a common form of brain injury, and can be caused by a direct or indirect hit to the head or body.¹ The brain suddenly shifts or shakes inside the skull. This causes a change in brain function, which results in a variety of symptoms. With a concussion, there is no visible injury to the structure of the brain. But in the minutes to days following a concussion, brain cells remain in a vulnerable state. Features of a concussion include:

- symptoms may or may not be immediately apparent;
- symptoms can be quite subtle and may go initially unnoticed;
- a concussion may result from contact that outwardly seems quite minor;
- while certain combinations of symptoms classically occur, symptoms do not always follow a classical pattern and may vary greatly from person to person;
- some people will recover more quickly from a concussion than others;
- a person who suffers a second concussion shortly after a first may suffer significantly greater effects;
- concussions, or a series of concussions, can in some cases result in permanent damage and seriously affect a person's quality of life.

A number of published medical studies in recent years have tied the incidence of concussions and other serious injuries to bodychecking in hockey. Among the studies are:

- A 2006 study comparing injury rates at different divisions in Calgary minor hockey programs by following 71 teams for the 2004-2005 season.² The study concluded that, compared to players in the Atom division (in which bodychecking was not permitted), players in the Peewee division were at 2.97 times the relative risk of injury, players in the Bantam division were at 3.72 times the risk of injury, and players in the Midget division were at 5.43 times the relative risk of injury. It

¹ Much of this paragraph is taken from the Concussion FAQ section at www.thinkfirst.ca

² CA Emery and WH Meeuwisse, *Injury Rates, Risk Factors, and Mechanisms of Injury in Minor Hockey*, American Journal of Sports Medicine 2006; 34:1960-9 (abstract link: <http://ajs.sagepub.com/content/34/12/1960.abstract>)

also concluded that, within the Peewee division, the risk of injury was the greatest in the most elite divisions. Some 45% of all injuries occurred as a result of bodychecking, with concussion, shoulder sprain / dislocation, and knee sprain being the most common injuries.

- A 2010 review and meta-analysis of existing medical studies aimed at identifying risk factors for injury in youth ice hockey.³ One of the risk factors examined in 10 of the studies that were reviewed was bodychecking. Those studies showed an increased risk of injury and concussion for bodychecking groups as compared with non-bodychecking groups, but had differing numerical assessments of the increase in risk of injury.
- A 2010 study⁴ compared the incidence of injury over the 2007-2008 season as between a group of 74 Peewee teams from Alberta (who were permitted to bodycheck) and a group of 76 Peewee teams from Quebec (a province in which bodychecking is not permitted at the Peewee level). The study showed that there were 241 injuries, including 71 concussions, in the 85,000 exposure-hours of the Alberta teams, as compared to 91 injuries (including 23 concussions) in the 82,000 exposure hours of the Quebec teams. The study concluded that, among 11- to 12- year old ice hockey players, playing in a league in which bodychecking is permitted compared with playing in a league in which bodychecking is not permitted was associated with a 3-fold increased risk of all game-related injuries and the categories of concussion, severe injury and severe concussion.
- A 2011 study⁵ compared the incidence of injury over the 2008-2009 season as between a group of 68 Bantam teams from Alberta (whose players had 2 years of bodychecking experience in Peewee) and a group of 62 teams from Quebec (whose players had no bodychecking experience in Peewee). Injuries suffered during games were divided into four groups: overall injuries (3.99 per 1000 player game-exposure-hours in Alberta, versus 4.54 in Quebec), injuries with more than 7 days of time loss (1.52 in Alberta, 2.17 in Quebec), concussions overall (0.79 in Alberta, 0.91 in Quebec) and concussions with greater than 10 days of time loss (0.18 in Alberta, 0.30 in Quebec).

It is noteworthy that the 2006 study included players at all levels of hockey, while the 2010 Peewee study was restricted to teams in the top 60% of levels and the 2011 Bantam study was restricted to teams in the top 30% of levels. These latter two studies indicate that, in Alberta, at the higher levels of play the injury and concussion rates were higher in Peewee than in Bantam, and the higher the level played the greater the risk of injury.

³ CA Emery, B Hagel, M Decloe & C McKay, *Risk Factors for injury and severe injury in youth ice hockey: a systematic review of the literature*, Injury Prevention 2010; 16:113-8 (abstract link: <http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/content/16/2/113.abstract>)

⁴ CA Emery, J Kang, I Shrier, C Goulet, BE Hagel, BW Benson, A Nettel-Aguirre, JR McAllister, GM Hamilton & WH Meeuwisse, *Risk of Injury Associated with Bodychecking Among Youth Ice Hockey Players*, Journal of the American Medical Association 2010; 303:2265-72 (link: <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/303/22/2265.full>)

⁵ CA Emery, J Kang, I Shrier, C Goulet, BE Hagel, BW Benson, A Nettel-Aguirre, J McAllister & WH Meeuwisse, *Risk of Injury Association with Bodychecking Experience Among Youth Hockey Players*, Canadian Medical Association Journal 2011; 183:1249-56 (link: <http://www.cmaj.ca/content/183/11/1249.full>)

2. Bodychecking in Minor Hockey Across Canada

At present, within PCAHA, the Presidents League offers both bodychecking and body contact (non-bodychecking) hockey at all recreational levels. Lions Gate League offers both bodychecking and body contact hockey at the Peewee level, and bodychecking hockey only at older levels. All three Fraser Valley Leagues (East, West and North) offer only bodychecking hockey at the Peewee and older levels.

Vanna Achtem surveyed the other districts within BC Hockey to determine the extent to which bodychecking was permitted in recreational hockey. The following table summarizes the information obtained:

<i>District</i>	<i>Bodychecking in Recreational Hockey</i>
East Kootenay	Not permitted – Body contact only
North Central	Bodychecking only
North East / Yukon	Not permitted – Body contact only
North West	Bodychecking only
Okanagan Mainline	Not permitted – Body contact only
Peace River	Bodychecking only (play in Alberta league)
Vancouver Island	Not permitted – Body contact only
West Kootenay	Not permitted – Body contact only

All BC Hockey districts currently permit bodychecking in Peewee rep hockey. However, at least one district has indicated that it will propose at the next BC Hockey AGM that bodychecking be eliminated from Peewee rep for the next season, and several districts have expressed support for this proposal.

Peter Zerbinos of Vancouver Thunderbird MHA was volunteered to contact other Hockey Canada branches across Canada to determine the extent to which hockey players within those branches are able to bodycheck in their recreational divisions and at the Peewee rep level. The following table summarizes the responses he received:

<i>Branch</i>	<i>Recreational Hockey</i>	<i>Peewee Rep</i>
Alberta	Permitted, with a choice to play non-bodychecking hockey in recreational leagues in larger urban centres	Permitted
Manitoba	Not permitted	[Did not respond]
Ontario	Not permitted	Permitted
Quebec	Not permitted	Not permitted
PEI	Not permitted	[Did not respond]

Hockey Ontario advised that, although it currently permits bodychecking in Peewee rep hockey, it is reviewing the matter for next season.

USA Hockey announced in June 2011 that, beginning with the current season, it would no longer permit bodychecking at the Peewee level.

3. *Rationale to Eliminate Bodychecking*

Those who support the elimination of bodychecking from recreational hockey note the increased risk of injury (including concussions), and that virtually all adult recreational hockey is now played without bodychecking. Most recreational players will have no cause to play bodychecking hockey after they graduate from minor hockey.

Those who support the elimination of bodychecking from Peewee rep hockey note the significantly higher risk of concussions and head injuries generally during key formative and developmental years.

4. *Reasons to Maintain Bodychecking*

Those who support the continued allowance of bodychecking in minor hockey point to the fact that it is a traditional part of the sport, and that the use of bodychecking to separate player from puck is a big part of the game. Every sport has risks, and the rules of the game are set up in such a way as to manage and limit those risks without undermining the integrity of the game. In minor hockey we have rules to prohibit boarding, checking from behind, and contact with the head, and we expect our officials to strictly enforce those rules in order to protect players. [Whether the rules are in fact consistently enforced is another question altogether.]

In the Greater Vancouver area, the President's C League offers both bodychecking and body contact (non-bodychecking) divisions for Peewee, Bantam and Midget. There are clearly some differences between the types of hockey played. The presence of bodychecking forces players to pass more frequently and discourages individuals trying to carry the puck for long periods of time.

One concern often raised about having different rules at the rep and house levels is the difficulty players would face playing body contact hockey but then wanting either to affiliate to a rep team or try out for rep in a subsequent year. Players who do not play in a bodychecking environment would face some disadvantage in either affiliating to or trying out in future for a rep team; however, those disadvantages can be minimized by players participating in such things as bodychecking clinics, summer hockey schools, and practices with teams to which they affiliate.

Some players participate in bodychecking hockey because they really enjoy the challenge and the physical interaction that such hockey entails. At the same time, those players do not necessarily want to (or may not have the necessary skill to) participate in rep hockey, so removing bodychecking from C hockey might reduce their enjoyment of the sport.

5. Other Impacts of a Decision to Eliminate Bodychecking

It may be that the elimination of bodychecking hockey would result in an increase in the number of players wanting to play rep hockey in order to continue to enjoy the sport as they know it. Associations could respond to this by fielding additional rep teams. The possibility of playing rep hockey may be a solution for some players who value the ability to bodycheck; at the same time, some associations typically provide more ice to rep teams and finding adequate ice for extra rep teams may be a challenge.

PCAHA sponsors separate female hockey leagues, and among its members are several female hockey associations. Bodychecking is not permitted in those leagues. One of the main attractions of such leagues and associations to female players is the ability to play non-bodychecking hockey. It may be that a decision to eliminate bodychecking from the PCAHA's co-ed recreational leagues will lead to more females wanting to play in those leagues, and a corresponding reduction in female hockey leagues.

6. Administrative Simplicity

At present, those associations whose recreational teams participate in the Presidents' League typically run two separate divisions at each age level. The President's League administers separate divisions at each level for these teams to play in. The associations maintain separate wait lists, undergo separate evaluations and balancing processes, and send these teams to separate championships. The elimination of bodychecking hockey would simplify the administration of both the President's League and the member associations.

Promoting a Choice

Section E(13) of the PCAHA Rules and Regulations states that:

In those divisions in which bodychecking is permitted, non-bodychecking "C" league(s) will be offered wherever possible.

The policy of the PCAHA for many years has been to offer minor hockey players a choice between playing the traditional bodychecking hockey and playing in non-bodychecking (body contact) leagues. That policy has seen some success in the President's League. At present, teams from Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, North Vancouver and West Vancouver participate in body contact leagues. Some of those teams are quite strong, and some very good players choose to play in body contact divisions. Players in those associations have a choice between registering for bodychecking or body contact leagues. Needless to say, there has not been a great deal of pressure from families in those areas to eliminate bodychecking in minor hockey – those that want to play hockey without bodychecking have the option to do so.

Leagues elsewhere in the PCAHA have made various efforts over the years to start body contact divisions. Most recently, the Fraser Valley leagues took a survey of parents from their member associations which indicated significant interest in

participation in body contact leagues. As a result, most of the Fraser Valley associations offered their members the opportunity to register for body contact hockey. Only one or two associations had sufficient registration at any one level to field a team – and those who did ultimately decided against participating in such teams if it would mean weekly trips to Vancouver to play league games. The problems these Associations face is that many worry that only the weakest players will want to play body contact hockey, and nobody wants to be the first to try out this new form of hockey.

Many of the associations in the Fraser Valley have expressed concern, based on the failure of their concerted efforts this past year to launch separate body contact leagues, that it is simply not feasible to do so – that is, that recreational leagues should either be all bodychecking or all body contact.

One option that has been discussed but not attempted is to prescribe a ratio – for example, that for every bodychecking team fielded by an association, it must also field a body contact team. This idea has met with opposition on the basis that it would potentially require the use of tryouts to separate stronger from weaker players and the creation of tiered recreational teams, and that many players would simply quit hockey rather than be stuck in what would seem to them to be a lesser form of recreational hockey. As well, some smaller Associations simply do not have enough players to field multiple recreational teams at any given level, and it would be simply not practical to meet a ratio.

DRAFT RESOLUTIONS

1. That the PCAHA support the elimination of bodychecking from competition in its recreational leagues, to be effective after the conclusion of the 2011-2012 season.
2. That the PCAHA support the elimination of bodychecking from competition in recreational leagues at the Peewee division, to be effective after the conclusion of the 2011-2012 season. [Resolution to be proposed only if resolution 1 is defeated.]
3. That the PCAHA support the elimination of bodychecking from competition in Peewee A leagues across British Columbia and encourage the adoption of a resolution to that effect at the BC Hockey AGM in June, 2012.
4. That the PCAHA support the elimination of bodychecking from competition in its Peewee A leagues, regardless of whether BC Hockey eliminates bodychecking in Peewee A hockey elsewhere in the province.

Depending on the outcome of the above resolutions, one of the following amendments to the Rules and Regulations would be proposed:

Option A: That effective as of May 1, 2012, sections 12 and 13 of Section E of the Rules and Regulations be deleted and the following substituted in their place:

12. In all games played within the PCAHA, bodychecking in the Atom division and below and in all "C" leagues shall be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking).

Option B: That effective as of May 1, 2012, section 12 of Section E of the Rules and Regulations be deleted and the following substituted in its place:

12. In all games played within the PCAHA, bodychecking in the Atom division and below, and in all Peewee "C" leagues, shall be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking).

Option C: That effective as of May 1, 2012, sections 12 and 13 of Section E of the Rules and Regulations be deleted and the following substituted in their place:

12. In all games played within the PCAHA, bodychecking in the Peewee division and below and in all "C" leagues shall be in accordance with HC Rule 6.2(b) (no bodychecking).

Option D: That effective as of May 1, 2012, the word "Atom" in section 12 of Section E of the Rules and Regulations be deleted and the word "Peewee" be substituted in its place.