

## USFHA Presentation

### History

A town hall meeting was called at the U19 indoor nationals this year to have an open forum on the direction that the USFHA was taking and the role that the clubs would take in that progression. The concept was for open discussion between the clubs and some members of the USFHA staff. In reality the discussion at this meeting focused on the product that was being delivered at the U19 NIT event. This will be addressed when I present the feedback concerning USHFA events. Since that initial meeting we had a second town hall meeting at the U16/U14 NIT and have had several conference calls. I was asked to represent the discussions that have taken place here today.

### Definition of clubs

What is the definition of a club? Growing up in England this was 7 men's teams, 4 women's teams, co-ed teams and youth teams. As a 14 year old playing on the 7<sup>th</sup> team I was able to learn and develop my skills from those players who may have been in the twilight years of their playing careers. That foundation allowed me to work my way through the progressions until at the age of 19 I was selected to be on the club first team. There may be some clubs that fit this definition. Others are full time operations with 200+ players who compete both indoors and outdoors while others may be less than 20 players and are an extension of their high school teams. Some are based in large urban areas with access to state of the art facilities; while others are in rural areas with limited facilities. Some clubs have coaches with vast levels of playing and coaching experiences while others are started by a parent with little knowledge of the game but a passion for providing opportunities for kids. No matter where a club falls within a definition they are the foundation of the hockey community in the US.

### Events

The U19 NIT did not meet the standards that a national tournament should. The floors were damaged and broken, the boards did not meet any standard acceptable to play the game to the level of the teams using them and the size of the courts was unacceptably small. The USHFA staff did hear the concerns and made minor adjustments based on what could be done overnight. The following week the staff did make a number of significant adjustments at the U16 / U14 NIT. Any national event that is sponsored by the USFHA should be undertaken with the concept of producing the very best opportunity for players and coaches to show their skills. In the last 10 years the number of games at festival has been reduced from 7 to 6, entry fees have risen, umpire fees have been added. The clubs and ultimately the players parents are willing to pay the entry fees, travel costs and time commitment if they feel they are getting value for money.

The introduction of events such as the Disney Tournament and National Club Championship do provide additional opportunities for players, the issue is that the demand quickly exceeded opportunities and many clubs were not afforded the opportunity to participate.

With all events the reason that there is a high demand is that players (and their parents) want to be seen by college coaches with the hope that they will be offered the opportunity to continue to play hockey in college, without the allure of the college coaches the demand for these events would drop. With the NCAA examining recruiting windows and the length of the season this could have a significant impact on events such as festival.

The USFHA needs to establish what makes each event that they produce unique. If the futures tournament is aimed at showcasing the best individual athletes in the country then ensure the best athletes are there, if the national club championship is established to crown a champion then ensure that all clubs have that opportunity to compete. At the conclusion of every event a questionnaire should be sent to each club that participates so that feedback can be given, encouraging feedback can only help in making the event better the next time it is held.

The main focus has been on national events, the USFHA has the ability to work with multiple entities to provide regional events. For some areas of the country this may be in place and would just be added support for others it could provide the catalyst for the expansion on hockey in the area.

## Finances

The USFHA relies primarily on the money collected from membership dues, tournament entry fees and futures. Until recently the financial undertakings were not made available to its members. The recent posting of financial statements allows the membership to form opinions and questions based on real data rather than speculation. One request that has been a constant in the dialogue that has taken place is that the financial reports are as transparent as possible

It would seem from this data that the coaches are compensated well for their work with the national teams. Later will be some thoughts on how this investment can pay dividends not only to the 100 athletes on the national teams but also the 15,000 youth members.

A key focus of the board needs to be the use of some of the finances raised by the membership to be reinvested in the grassroots programs. Ultimately this investment in the youth programs may help to take the national teams into the top 10 in the world rankings.

With regards to NIT's the event has grown every year, Mr. Lock in one of his newsletters said that the NIT made a profit of \$175,00. This money needs to be reinvested into the event, purchasing the boards that meet FIH standards, paying a little more to a company so the floor they install provides a safe surface that allows the players to demonstrate their skills. Having one less court would allow all the others to be regulation size.

Mr. Hogan indicated that part of his development as the head of officials was the use of technology. Invest in visual materials that can be used by players, coaches and officials to get a better understanding of the rules and their interpretations. The national coaching staff and players could help in this process by demonstrating the latest strategies and skills used at the international level. Will every club coach and player understand everything, no but they will have something to work from that shows the next level in their development as a player or coach.

## Future

The current business model seems to have a major focus on the peak of the pyramid (national teams) and very little on the wide base (youth clubs) that support the entire organization. The national teams are the representatives of the USFHA, how many of those players are known by the general membership. I would propose that the national team coaches offer free clinics as part of their job description to help in the development of coaches at the grass roots level. Members of the national team attend clinics, futures sites and major events as part of the role of being on the national team.

The recent formation of the club task force is an indication that the USFHA has heard that the current model of operations is not universally seen as working. This group is trying to address many of the issues that have been raised by clubs around the country; the key to moving forward is that the Board and the USFHA staff take these recommendations and finds a way to make them work. My fear is that if the clubs concerns are not addressed then we eventually face a divided hockey infrastructure which is not good for the game.

The focus of this presentation has been the clubs and their importance to US field hockey. The expansion of the club programs will hopefully find ways to get a higher % of the 64,000 high school players involved in hockey. There also needs to be an effort to address the lack of focus for the adult players. It is sad that at the age of 22 most college players are ending their hockey careers. Without opportunities to play they have no incentive to join the USFHA.

The recent ruling by the independent panel would indicate that the recent elections have to be started from the beginning. I would ask that the current board look at either adding an additional position to the board that represents the clubs or take one of the At-Large positions and make that a club representative. There are many talented people within the clubs who have a passion and vision for the future of Hockey in the US, I would ask that you use them.