

U18 2021/22 Season report

The first challenge in U18 was the late start which led to having to divide the players based on positional play and not necessarily strength to simply get them on the ice. After two rounds of play the coaches held one meeting to shuffle players. Another round of play occurred, and a second meeting was held to again make further adjustments. Even after the two shuffles, not enough movement was made which left the division unbalanced for the remainder of the season. On that note, we would like to caution the executive on the idea of bringing outsiders to balance the teams as this would most likely result into creating a set of new issues. We do understand the potential for an updated evaluation process which hopefully will result in better balanced seasons. Now we say this with a grain of salt as all teams may start off appearing balanced, but there is always a team that pulls away when January rolls around. This can occur from both hard work during the first half of the season, or an opportunity to head to an away tournament. A suggestion moving forward to next season that could be more strategic and useful would be to have an independent person present when the coaches meet to rebalance the teams as to ensure that everyone behaves fairly with the best interest of the whole division in mind.

We had four teams this season as we didn't have enough to make five even with the four kids on the wait list. We had coaching challenges which left teams short on the bench at times during the season. It seems each year it has been an issue to get all the bench staff up to date quickly on their credentials as they need to take time out of their already busy day to do mandatory courses. Finding volunteers has become very challenging as you find yourself in the upper divisions. We did not take lightly the decision to not create a fifth team. After long discussions it was agreed that it would have caused short player benches (2nd and 3rd year players with jobs and significant others), and more importantly, turned out to be impossible due to a shortage of full-time goalies. The division also needs to hold space on the teams knowing we would be receiving Rep cuts as late as the beginning of January.

There were some concerns raised by the statistician involving the U18 division and penalties. Misinformation was provided in the first half of the season which left some of the players fearing for their playing season when they stepped onto the ice. The penalty information wasn't corrected immediately, and the division wasn't made aware of the correction until the second half of the season which made for some anxiety with the players under the microscope. The position called a mandatory coach only meeting where the threat was made that if penalties were to continue to be on the rise this individual has the authority to shut down the entire division's season. It all came down very heavy handed and left a bad taste in everyone's mouths. The other concern felt this season amongst the parents was some of the officiating. The division understands that there is a lack of bodies to fill the slots and can appreciate that brand new individuals have stepped up to do the job, however; U18 is quick paced, and more mentorship from the top needs to be provided to these refs so they can feel confident when on the ice. The inconsistent officiating, and direction provided to the officials at the start of the year was a contributing factor to increased penalties. Too often there was a lack of control on the ice which posed a safety concern when dealing with players at this age group. Thankfully they have one "feet to the fire" season under their belt with both regular play and tournament play so they can feel confident moving forward next year.

On a positive note, we hosted the very first House tournament since Covid and it was a very successful one. It was made up of 12 teams and we had one of our very own competing for the bronze. Thankfully our tournament coordinator, Elaine Sutter, has been around the Association for quite some time and knows a thing or two about putting them together. The players ended the season feeling grateful to have had a full (Covid-free) season behind them and have the next one to look forward to.

Finally.....CONGRATULATIONS to all of our 3rd year U18 players for completing your Minor Hockey careers. We hope you and your parents have enjoyed the journey, you've learned life skills and made lifetime friendships. Good luck on your future endeavors!

Very kindly!
Alix and Melissa