

Posters alone won't rein in unruly hockey parents

By Jeremy Sandler

Every year 10,000 officials in Canada quit working hockey games, this according to the Canadian Hockey Association's website. Most cite verbal abuse as the main reason for their departure.

Similarly, there are indications that fewer parents are willing to coach because of the criticism and abuse they must endure from bleacher bum moms and dads unhappy that junior isn't getting enough playing time.

Finally, a lot of kids either parrot the unacceptable behavior of adults and challenge the authority of coaches and referees or they tire of the poisoned atmosphere and quit playing hockey.

To combat these trends, the CHA has initiated a poster campaign called the Shared Respect Initiative which aims to encourage good behavior among those involved with minor hockey.

The odds are very high against even major junior hockey players making a living in professional hockey. The great majority won't even get a whiff of the NHL. But walk into any given arena housing pee-wee, midget and bantam hockey leagues and you'll find over-obsessed parents screaming at referees, players and coaches over perceived injustices committed against their children, seemingly oblivious that nothing is at stake.

True, most hockey parents don't do anything wrong. They endure wake ups before dawn, interrupted weekends and bad coffee in freezing arenas so their kids can enjoy the great Canadian game. But one bad apple in a league ruins it for everyone.

More is needed than a benign poster campaign.

The association should mandate that affiliated leagues hold pre-season sessions for parents outlining the types of behavior that won't be tolerated.

More importantly, the CHA should make sure there are consequences for those interfering with everyone else's enjoyment.

Creating a nation-wide database of abusive parents would help leagues across the country keep tabs on troublesome individuals and ban repeat offenders from arenas. Include a good-behavior deposit in the cost of hockey leagues, giving parents and players financial incentive to keep their tongues in check.

But if the CHA thinks posters are what it takes, make them direct.

Pepper parents with the message: "Your kids aren't going to make the NHL!!!"

Or make them answer the following questions.

Have you ever made your child or any other child cry by criticizing their play?

After you yell at coaches, are you relieved they are behind glass and 15 rows below you because otherwise you think they might punch you?

Do your in-game tirades remind people of things Ike Turner yelled at Tina?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, get a grip and get a life.