

V.I.P. and me

(very interesting person)



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By KATHLEEN A. HICKS

KENNETH COX:

Referee-in-Chief: Mississauga Hockey League

Former Referee-in-Chief: Lacrosse

Member: Faustina Club

Executive Member: Little N.H.L.

ME: Most of us know that the Mississauga Hockey League (formerly Toronto Township) began in 1946. When did you become involved in minor hockey in Mississauga?

MR. COX: That's a good many years ago. I began when Lindsay Leslie was referee-in-chief, and we used to work out here as well as in the Toronto Hockey League; so that would be around 1957-'58.

ME: What hockey background did you have?

MR. COX: I played THL up to intermediate, and Kiwi intermediate out of Ravina Rink. Then I played on a championship senior commercial team at Varsity; that was about the last I played.

ME: When did you decide to take up refereeing?

MR. COX: I am an original member of the Faustina Club at Lakeshore where every man has a hockey job to do. Around 1951, they said I should go into refereeing, and I did. I've thoroughly enjoyed it; it has been quite an experience all the way along.

ME: How did the Referee-in-Chief's job materialize?

MR. COX: Zip Thompson took over after Lindsay Leslie, and he was going to retire for business reasons. He asked me to give him a hand, and I used to handle the half-ice games on Saturdays, and do the scheduling for these games. After a year of this involvement, he suggested my name to take over as referee-in-chief, and I was accepted. I have also been on the executive for the Little NHL for 12 years, including the

job of referee-in-chief and two years as president.

ME: Being referee-in-chief is a part-time job for you, your bread and butter job being in the chemical division of Canadian Hansen Ltd. What time is actually involved and what responsibility is required of you in your referee-in-chief position?

MR. COX: That's a good question — every waking hour. (He laughed.) My weekends are completely tied up from October to April; there's no way my wife, Jo, or I can plan on going anywhere throughout the hockey season. Saturdays are full ice games now in seven arenas. I referee two games in the Faustina League every Saturday, and fulfil my duties down there. Sunday it takes me several hours of telephone work to assign the referees for the coming week, which involves about 195 games. And I quite often have to attend discipline meetings on Sunday afternoons to represent the referees in all discipline matters. I don't get around to the arenas as much as I used to, as I must handle 15 to 20 phone calls every night of the week, and this cuts into my time. I like to make an appearance at each arena once in awhile and get to talk to the referees I haven't seen for sometime. I'll take notes and pass on some help to them on things that could be done differently. If I hear some complaints about a referee, I'll go and have a look at him to see if the complaints are founded or not. Sometimes I'll have to meet with MHL directors to look at a team or a few players who are causing some trouble. There's a lot to do, but it's an exciting life.

ME: The recent calculation of players is 6,000 with 350 teams. How many referees are you in charge of, and do you hold meetings on a regular basis?

MR. COX: We have 70 on staff, but we don't have regular meetings; there isn't any open time for meetings because

they have games to do all week. We have a referees' meeting before the season starts, and then we get together before playoffs to discuss what has taken place throughout the year and go over the playoff regulations.

ME: Do you find, with the MHL growing as fast as it is and the increase of games, it is a problem getting enough officials?

MR. COX: It's a problem getting enough senior officials. We have quite a few younger boys coming along. We have fellows who have come up from half ice games who are doing junior games; and I am happy with their performance. We have four sets of brothers working for us, and they usually work together, and we have three father and son sets, too. It's nice to have the same men working together year in and year out, as they get used to each other and know the other's moves so well, that everything falls into line. Some of the senior men like working with younger fellows to bring them along. A lot of the boys have the ability to move up, but their age may be so close to the juniors that they are one of the boys, and they don't get the same respect that the senior men do. I don't flirt with that too much. I know the boys can handle these games, but I don't put them on the junior and juvenile games very often. I have quite a few on their way up who are real good referees.

ME: The annual MHL budget is \$215,000, and most of this goes toward ice rental and refereeing. Years ago, men got into refereeing on a volunteer basis to have the satisfaction of working with the boys. Do you think there is still this dedication, or are many of them just in it for the extra money?

MR. COX: We hope that none of them are in it for the extra

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"It does bother me...when parents become quite obnoxious"

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money. You have to be interested in the game or you couldn't referee. We find fellows in other leagues who just go out for the money are not always good referees — you have to be part of the game. When we do have exhibition games, if I ask my referees to do a game for nothing, they will do it; so that proves it right there.

ME: This year, the Girls' Hockey League became affiliated with the MHL, with 160 girls on nine teams. How have your referees been finding handling female players, and what problems do they come up against?

MR. COX: It hasn't been as rough this year as other years when outside teams used to come in. Some of the fellows don't like working girls' games — but they don't have that many problems. If there is any roughness there, it's awkward for the referees to curb it. But, all considered, they handle it pretty good. One problem we had was getting the girls to wear regular skates — some of them used to wear figure skates. They have to have the regular equipment in the MHL, the same as any other player. We used to have a lot of complaints about abusive language from outside teams. We have junior and senior girls' teams here, and we have no trouble with them to speak of.

ME: Would you explain the referees' clinic and its purpose?

MR. COX: The referees' clinic is held in October, a week before the league starts. We have one night in the classroom and one night on the ice. We have a lot of new fellows out who have never refereed before, so we have slides showing different off-sides situations, and explain the calling of penalties. When we get on the ice, we go over these things again to demonstrate; and we generally have a qualified OHA (Ontario Hockey Association) official to work with us. We review the rule book, and pay special attention to any new rules. A referee can never read the rule book too often.

ME: What qualifications does a young boy require to become a referee, and is there an age limit?

MR. COX: We like to have them at least sixteen. They are dealing with adults — coaches, managers, and parents — and if we get them any younger than that, we can run into problems. First of all, they have to be good skaters; we look for this particularly. Most of our boys are hockey players who play for older teams, and they are great skaters and know their way around a rink. The new boys we start in the paperweight and tyke; some of them come along very quickly and move up to minor atom and atom before the end of the year.

ME: How many new referees do you take on at the beginning

of a season, and do they give you many problems when they are in the novice stage?

MR. COX: I guess this year, we took on 20 or 25 new boys. Of course, this was the first year for us to start off with seven arenas. Most of the new fellows just work on Saturdays. The biggest problem for them is knowing their position on the ice, how to handle situations such as being close to the goal when goals are scored. It's also difficult for them to call penalties when they are taking a lot of abuse from adults on the bench. The young fellows haven't dealt with this type of situation before — it's very rough on them at first. But I am proud of the way they handle themselves in these situations, and they give me few problems.

ME: Is there much of a change-over each year?

MR. COX: We have a basis of about 25 or 30 senior officials who are always with us. Last year, we lost an official to the WHA (World Hockey Association). I lost two or three who moved out of the district; but then, on the other hand, there always seems to be some that come back in who have been attending college or have worked with us before. At the senior level, we don't have that big of a turn-over.

ME: How about taking time off or not showing up for games; what headaches does this give you?

MR. COX: That's the biggest headache — the last minute booking off. Just last night, I had three senior officials book off through sickness, and this creates a big problem to get certain officials to handle certain games. I have to do some switching around from one arena to the other; then at the last minute try and call in some spare ones. As a rule, they are very good. If it happens too often, they just don't work anymore. We just can't put up with it.

ME: Lately there has been a lot of criticism of refereeing and minor hockey in general. What is your opinion about this?

MR. COX: I think it all dates back to ignorance of the rules. In most cases, the people just don't know the rules, for example on offsides, icing, or high sticking calls. Then of course, they can only see one team out there. We do get a lot of abuse, but I don't think we are any worse than or as bad as any other leagues.

ME: Is the situation as bad as the hockey patrons are making it out to be?

MR. COX: If you are talking about language problems, then this is bad with the players and some coaches and managers. It's not only in our league — it's in every league. I think it rubs off from the NHL, where they hold a camera right on the player as he's going to the penalty box and the boys pick

this up. As far as the rough play is concerned, in my opinion, some of this came from the International series — the kicking and butt ending that went on in Russia and Sweden. We've had many, many more penalties this year for butt ending than in other years. Years ago, we would get one or two butt end spearing penalties a year, now we are getting one a week. So it has to come from something, and I think this is where it originated.

MR. COX: I have chaired this event twice, and we start in July to line things up for February. There were six of us on the committee, and we had meetings each month to line up a head table; these sportsmen are difficult to pin down. Everyone was given various jobs, and I more or less oversaw it all. We have had Daryl Wells as our emcee on several occasions. I am also chairman of the committee that picks the athlete of the year in the Lakeshore, and this presentation takes place on the Sportsmen's night.

ME: What is the most pleasant part of your referee-in-chief position?

MR. COX: Dealing with these young people. They get so much criticism these days, but I am very proud to be associated with them; they have been polite and cooperative in the refereeing. I haven't run into more than one or two problems with them in the last couple of years. I think this is remarkable. They will do anything, accept any criticism, and they are all too willing to learn. It just gives me a warm feeling.

ME: Tell me the most unpleasant task you have to perform.

MR. COX: Well, I've had to cut two or three referees because they just didn't fit into our plans. I guess I'm a little too soft hearted, but I finally had to tell them we couldn't use them anymore. That is always unpleasant.

ME: What satisfaction does working closely with the MHL give you?

MR. COX: I've certainly met a lot of fine gentlemen through the MHL, and many nice people in Mississauga. Certainly there is a lot of criticism, but most of it is forgotten after a game. I don't think I've made any lifelong enemies. The people you meet, and when you go into an arena everyone recognizes you, some have problems they want to discuss or have questions to ask, all these things I enjoy. The MHL directors are a fine group of gentlemen; they pretty well leave me on my own to take care of the referees. They sometimes make suggestions, or pass on a little criticism — but not too often, and we do get compliments, too. They back me up one hundred per cent, and I am certainly happy with their support.

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