



PRESS RELEASE

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LEAGUE TO SUPPORT NCAA OFFICIATING INITIATIVE *“Proper Rules Enforcement” is Point of Emphasis*

On the eve of the 2004-05 season opener, the Hockey East Association is prepared to be an active supporter of a new NCAA officiating directive.

“We embrace the spirit and substance of the NCAA’s laudable effort to tighten up on-ice adherence to the rules book,” said Commissioner Joe Bertagna, a former chair of the NCAA Rules Committee. “By identifying ‘Proper Rules Enforcement’ as the sole ‘Point of Emphasis’ this season, the NCAA is sending the right message for the times. We don’t need new rules to re-claim our game. But we need to more consistently call the book as written.”

A two-page “Letter to the College Hockey Community” (attached) spells out the NCAA’s impetus for this initiative in detail. All conferences are in the midst of meetings with officials, coaches and administrators to facilitate the implementation of the NCAA’s directive.

“If we are to be successful in this effort, everyone observing our game should notice a difference,” added Bertagna. “Coaches may be a little apprehensive right now but we have identified just three specific areas where we will start this crackdown. It is something we have to do to start a process of making the rules work for all players out there.”

[NOTE: A referee and an assistant referee will be on hand to answer questions at the 21st Annual Hockey East Media Day this Thursday, September 30, at the FleetCenter.]

The Hockey East Association is a nine-team, Division-I men’s college hockey conference, with offices based in Wakefield, Mass. Founded in 1983, the league recently celebrated its 20th anniversary season, and has won four NCAA championships in the past 12 years. The conference also sponsors a women’s league, founded in 2001, which will feature eight Division-I programs in 2005-06.

- two pages attached -

Open Letter to the College Hockey Community (page 1 of 2)

[Note: The following is an open letter to the college ice hockey community, as submitted by the NCAA commissioners and supervisors of officials, in conjunction with the NCAA Men's and Women's Ice Hockey Rules Committee.]

INDIANAPOLIS — Over the past year, a common discussion has taken place in both the professional hockey community and the college hockey community. The discussion has focused on somewhat recent developments in the game, many, but not all of which have resulted in a decrease in offensive opportunities on the ice.

These developments have been identified as wide ranging and include, but are not limited to, the areas of technology, officiating, coaching, equipment, and talent. Many of these areas are inter-related. Technology allows players to train better and become bigger, stronger, and faster. Technology allows coaches to break down game tapes and better prepare for an opponent. Technology leads to larger, lighter, more protective equipment for goaltenders and non-goaltenders alike. Input from coaches has influenced how the game is called by on-ice officials.

There is a growing consensus among many of us in the college hockey community that the time has come to affect changes of our own. The “us” refers to the NCAA Rules Committee, the College Hockey Commissioners and Supervisors, NCAA Staff, and many head and assistant coaches. This document has been produced to identify the changes that are being sought this winter.

First Step

The NCAA men's and Women's Ice Hockey Rules Committee reviewed the overall state of the game at its annual meeting in June 2004. The committee, after some consultation with commissioners and supervisors, voted only one Point of Emphasis for the upcoming season: proper rules enforcement.

Purpose

The stated purpose of this initiative is to allow all players to benefit from the rules book and how the book is called. While the “let them play” philosophy has become deep rooted and the concept of “penalty selection” is universally accepted, we believe these philosophies need to be amended. The “you can't call everything” approach has allowed too many infractions to go without a penalty being called and the result is a different game. The result is, in our opinion, a less attractive game.

Critics of this initiative may suggest we are adding new penalties to an already bloated rules book. We are not adding any new penalties. The book currently has all the penalties needed for a great game to emerge. We are simply calling for the existing book to be called more responsibly.

Critics of this initiative may suggest we are asking officials to call more penalties. No one is asking for more penalties to be called. We are establishing new standards and expect the players and coaches to adapt. If they choose not to, more penalties are likely to be called. In the end, the players and coaches will have more to say about how many penalties will be called than the officials.

Target Areas

We have a general target: allowing all players the right to meet their offensive and defensive responsibilities without being held, hooked, or otherwise obstructed. Note that while we hope to see increased offensive opportunities from this initiative, there is evidence that attacking players are also frequent offenders in the area of obstruction. (See face-off “picks.”)

We also have identified three specific target areas. These are:

- a) Offensive players coming through the neutral or offensive zones being unfairly/illegally held-up while they make a legitimate attempt to get or remain open for a pass from a puck-controlling teammate.
- b) Offensive players coming through the neutral or offensive zones being unfairly/illegally held-up while they attempt the legitimate pursuit of a loose puck.
- c) Players along the boards, **on or** away from the puck, being unfairly/illegally restrained.

- more -

Open Letter to the College Hockey Community (page 2 of 2)

Defining the Standard

The NCAA Ice Hockey Rules Book already defines the above actions as penalties. However, we feel that too often these situations are allowed to play out without penalties being called. And so the following standard is being adopted for the 2004-2005 season.

In all of the areas above, we feel that a player who, through the use of physical skill and/or anticipation, has a positional advantage on an opponent, shall not lose that advantage through the illegal use of hands, arms, or stick. Any player in pursuit of a puck or open lane shall not lose a perceived positional advantage by the illegal use of hands, arms, or stick by an opponent. If a player is deprived of that advantage by an illegal act (i.e., hook, hold, interference, etc.), the appropriate penalty must be called.

A "positional advantage," in other terminology, might be called "a step," as in, "He had a good step on him but the guy hooked him just enough to come up even with him."

Please note: the illegal acts we are targeting include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

- Using a free or open hand or arm to restrain an opponent, along the boards ("pinning") or in open ice.
- Using a free or open hand to grab any part of an opponent's uniform ("tugging"), equipment, or stick.
- Tying up an opponent by illegal use of hands, arms or stick, rather than by body position.
- "Picking" a player who does not have possession of the puck, and, in the process, preventing him or her from moving to open or unoccupied ice in any zone.
- Placing the stick between an opponent's legs, preventing his or her right to participate in the play.

NOTE: We are identifying a limited number of situations and actions. But they MUST be called. For this initiative to be effective, players, coaches, and the public should notice a difference in how the game is called in 2004-05.

Weathering The Storm

For this initiative to work, all parties must know that we are determined to see it through. The standard is what it is. If you take away a player's legitimate positional advantage through an illegal action, no matter how slight ("a little hook," "a slight tug," etc.), it is a penalty. It must be called. And this means:

- a) Officials have to understand this and make the call.
- b) Supervisors and commissioners must work to stress to their officials that they must make these calls.
- c) Officials who show a pattern of not making these calls must pay a price; i.e., lose assignments.
- d) Players and coaches have to accept that penalties will result if they continue these practices.
- e) Commissioners must respond strongly to coaches who criticize officials who do their job as directed or who criticize this initiative itself.
- f) This initiative must be seen through for the entire season.

A Start

The attempt to treat the above situations with more stringent enforcement is only the start of a longer process. We hope to see greater enforcement in a wider area of situations beginning in the 2005-06 season. One area for future consideration is the culture of "situational standards." By this, we mean the changing of standards according to the time and score of the game. Is there a tougher standard to meet in overtime for a penalty to be called? If Team A receives a penalty in overtime, don't we currently expect the standard to be lightened so that a penalty can be called on Team B to mitigate the situation? Isn't the standard different for a team already killing a penalty?

Unlike the topic of restraining fouls detailed above, there is no consensus currently on the concept of "situational standards." And so we wish to begin a national dialogue on the subject in the coming months to see if there is reason to address this in the future.