

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOVEMBER 12th, 2023

In this report I'll touch on some 2023 CIHA season highlights by league, describe progress against our 2023 objectives, and present some key challenges and areas of focus for 2024.

Before proceeding, I'd like to acknowledge some important contributions made to CIHA over the past year. CIHA is a charitable organisation that runs almost entirely through generous contributions of time and effort by individuals. I'd like to thank the following who contributed over the past year:

- Committee members and others who make the Seniors, Masters, Women's, and Youth Leagues operate smoothly. Thanks very much to the CIHA Committee members who worked long hours behind the scenes to improve ice hockey in Canterbury.
- Special thanks for Mike Tobin, our Senior League Director. With hundreds of players involved in hundreds of games throughout a year, it is no small task to keep Senior League running smoothly. Thanks to Mike and the respective Grade Managers.
- Thanks to all team managers, game officials, score benchers, first aiders, and those who update our web site with league schedules and game results. And especially to Alison Reid for all her scheduling work that helps keep our leagues ticking along.
- The many volunteer coaches and managers who helped organise and operate all our representative teams: U15s, U18s, U21s, Inferno, and Red Devils.
- Thanks to Sarah Redmayne for the countless hours she volunteers: coach, referee, first aider, and more, including scheduling and mentoring our youth referees.
- Everyone who helped with the highly successful National U12 tournament hosted by CIHA, and especially Kat Tobin for leading CIHA's efforts to organise and execute it.
- All the coaches and organisers of the Youth Development Camps, and especially Neil Carey and Dave Wallace.
- Donors and sponsors who gave generously to fund our activities. Thanks to Dave Wallace, Neil Carey, and others for leading our funding efforts.
- Thanks to the First Aid Training Company for providing free training to CIHA coaches, managers, and other volunteers, and a discount for all CIHA members.
- Alpine Ice management and staff for their professionalism.
- And thanks to the many others who contributed over the year.

Now on to discuss some season highlights, show progress against our 2023 strategy, and describe objectives for 2024.

League Highlights

Learn To Play (All Ages)

- We continued offering a free LTP trial to children and using a concession card payment system, which has proven popular. Youth LTP was offered twice per week throughout 2023 and U12 Super League players also played weekly games in winter, providing them with three skating opportunities each week.
- We offered Adult Learn to Play weekly throughout winter and into Term 4 (shared ice with youth). Feedback has been excellent and playing numbers have grown steadily.
- Around 100 players participated in LTP this year, many of whom advanced to a refereed league. We saw strong organic growth: the most common response when asked “How did you hear about CIHA’s Learn to Play Program?” was “Friend/Family”.
- Ice utilisation continued to improve, with an average of 35 players on the ice at each session (up from 26 in 2021 and 29 in 2022).

Youth Club Leagues

- U12 Super League: Our Under-12 Super League operated very well, with 5 teams playing throughout the winter. We continued efforts to connect these young players and their families to the Red Devils and Inferno, and exhibition Super League games were played not only during Red Devils game intermissions this year, but also during Inferno intermissions. A highlight for this age group and CIHA was hosting the National U12 Tournament in October, which featured 21 teams from around the country, 150 players, and 221 games in one weekend! Feedback was extremely positive, and CIHA is expected to host the tournament again in 2024.
- U15/U18s: the number of players in our club Under-15 and Under-18 leagues continued to grow. With just over 40 players in 2021, we had to combine U15s and U18s together to form 3 teams. In 2022 we separated the leagues into 2 teams each, and in 2023 there were enough players to expand to 3 U15 teams, with more than 80 total U15/U18 players, doubling in just two years. Term 4, 2023 enrolment has been stronger than expected and these leagues should have another good year in 2024, potentially expanding to 4 U15 teams. Importantly, the rate of player development has been excellent, and survey satisfaction scores remain very high.
- High Schools: Our High School league ran well with 4 full teams, with a significant number of players playing ice hockey for the first time in 2023!

Adult Leagues

- All refereed adult leagues moved to online registration in 2023, meeting a goal set in 2022.
- Women’s: CIHA organised a Global Girls’ Game event in February, which saw around 40 players participating in 2 games. We made the difficult and initially unpopular decision to delay the Women’s League season to summer 2023-2024. But the decision paid off: Women’s League now has the highest participation it’s had in many years, with 3 full teams (up from 2 in the past several years) and plans to expand to 4 teams in summer 2024-2025. Feedback from players has been excellent.

- Masters: Due to scheduling conflicts, Masters moved from Wednesday nights to Tuesdays. While this change was not ideal, player numbers have remained largely unchanged.
- Senior League Grade 4: Along with Women's League, Grade 4 was deferred until summer, with Adult Learn to Play / Skills sessions offered throughout winter. While CIHA has reverted summer 2023-2024 G4 to its historical games-only format, early feedback suggests players may prefer the format from summer 2022-2023 that combined coached trainings and refereed games.
- Senior League Grades 2-3: All G2-G3 players registered online in 2023, completing CIHA's move to online club league registration, and team managers are no longer financially responsible. Despite some initial player and managers concerns, the transition went extremely smoothly, and survey results show satisfaction actually slightly increased in both leagues.
- Senior League Premiers / Grade 1: CIHA experimented with a longer stop-clock format for Premiers in winter to better align with actual NZIHL game play. While the format was very popular with players, it also significantly increased game cost. Red Devil participation was lighter in 2023 than 2022, with players citing burnout and high costs in winter. As a result, CIHA will explore moving Premiers to summer in 2024.

Youth Representative Teams (U15, U18)

- Youth playing numbers, as well as average player skill level, continue to increase, resulting in competitive trials and larger training squads in 2023.
- On-ice and off-ice training was conducted throughout the season with a focus on both skills and fitness.
- The rep U15 team finished 3rd in round robin play (of 5 teams) and took home bronze in the tournament round.
- The rep U18s had a strong regular season, finishing 2nd in round robin play (of 4 teams) before coming up short in the tournament round with a tough OT loss in the semi-final and eventually finishing 4th.
- Looking over the past 5 years, Canterbury youth rep team performance has sharply and steadily improved.

Adult Representative Teams (U21s, Inferno, Red Devils)

- U21s: As in 2022, U21 players had a single, long weekend of competition in Dunedin. Cross-regional teams were formed, with balance in mind, and players competed in an exciting 4v4 format.
- Inferno: This was expected to be a rebuilding year for the Inferno—and it was. While the game results fell short of recent years, there is a strong pipeline of junior players coming up (with many named to the 2024 NZ U18 Women's team), which should help the team be competitive for years to come. For the first time, tickets were required for entry, purchasable online using the same platform as the Red Devils. The fan support was great to see in the two home game weekends, with ticket sales grossing over \$5k for the team. Thanks to the Inferno coaches, managers, and other volunteers, and to Matt Chavez and everyone else who helped produce the live streams.
- Red Devils: 2023 saw the return of NZIHL imports, with a noticeable step up in the level of skill and competition across the league. While the Red Devils had solid play, it was somewhat of a frustrating season, with the puck just not bouncing in Canterbury's

favour as often as it might have. Home game attendance and fan support remained as strong as ever, with solid ticket and merchandise sales to help offset player costs. Sponsorship was excellent—many thanks to all the generous Red Devils supporters, the Red Devils managers who secured donations, Matt Chavez again on the live stream, and everyone else who worked so hard behind the scenes for the boys.

Finally, congratulations to all the players, coaches, and managers selected to represent New Zealand in the 2024 worlds. Well done, and best of luck next year.

Progress Against 2023 Objectives

Last year around this time, I laid out three primary objectives:

(1) Grow CIHA Membership

As I've stated in previous years, the biggest risk to our great sport in Canterbury is our dependence on a single aging ice rink. If anything changes our ability to use the rink, our club is dead. I've stated that the best way to manage this risk is to ensure the success of our most important partner, Alpine Ice. And the best way to do that is to grow our membership, since we book more ice when we have more players, which benefits the Alpine business—and it also means more players can share in the fixed costs of operating CIHA, among many other benefits of increased membership.

Although CIHA membership growth was hardly noticeable this year, increasing from 557 to 559 players, our overall membership numbers have increased vastly since setting this goal in 2020. And it's possible that this strategy may have had an impact this year...

In an exciting development for all ice sports in Canterbury, the Alpine Ice business was sold in 2023 to new owners, local to Canterbury, who are committed to the success of the facility and have stated goals that include a greater partnership with CIHA, as well as enhancing the facilities and customer experience over time.

This is a fortunate development for our club since it nearly ensures that the rink will continue to operate for many years to come. And new ownership may present exciting opportunities for our club. I look forward to CIHA and Alpine working more closely together in the coming year.

(2) Improve Member Satisfaction

CIHA conducted its 4th annual member survey in October 2023, collecting 175 responses, to try to better understand member satisfaction. The anonymous survey asked members to rate their feeling toward various aspects of ice hockey in Canterbury. High-level results are shown below, including an "Overall Happiness" measure, the average of all scores, which has remained at an unchanged, respectable level in recent years.

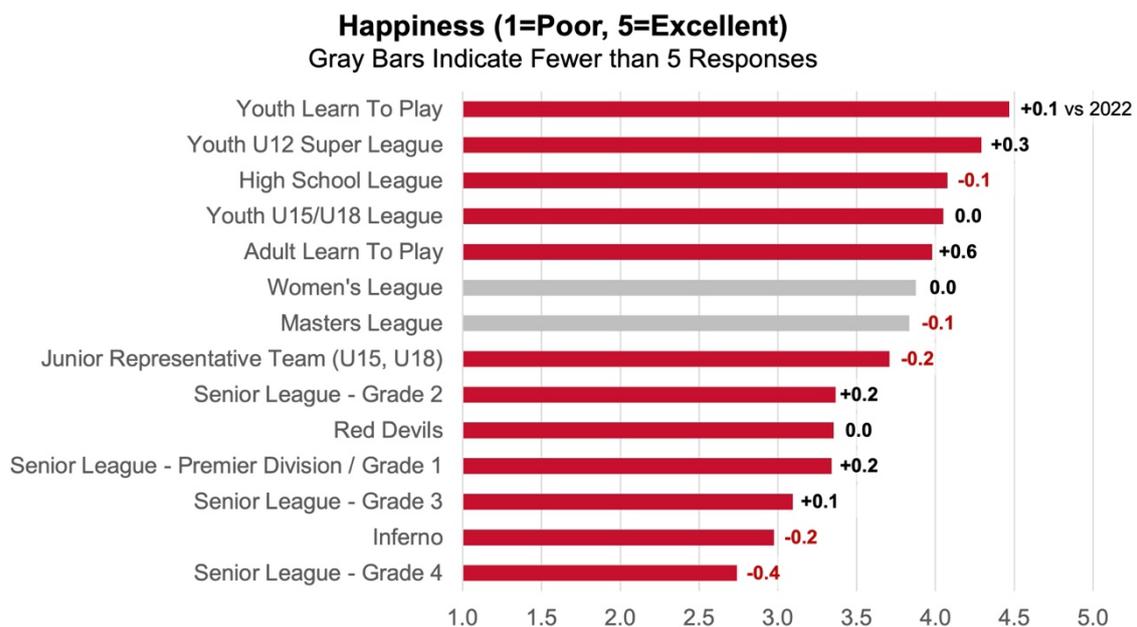
(1=Poor, 5=Excellent)

What Is Your Feeling Toward...	2020	2021	2022	2023
Ice Times	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.5
Value for Money	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Game Officials*	-	3.5	3.6	3.6
Your League**	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.6
Your Team**	3.5	4.1	4.0	4.2
Alpine Ice	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.9
NZIHF	3.1	3.6	3.9	3.6
CIHA	2.9	3.7	3.7	3.7
Overall Happiness (Average of Scores)	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.5

* = Game Officials question was added in 2021

** = Prior to 2023 these two questions were combined as “Feeling Toward Your League/Team”

The survey also asked respondents to select their primary league of participation in 2023 to try to shed some light on how members in each league feel. Some leagues had few responses, so those results have little statistical significance. But most leagues had a reasonable sample size and comparing the overall happiness of the leagues provides some insight. The difference in happiness from 2022 to 2023 is shown to the right of each bar.



The general pattern is akin to previous years, with Learn to Play and Youth leagues having the highest ratings. CIHA offered Adult Learn to Play throughout winter in 2023 and into Term 4, and feedback has been positive, which is reflected in the survey results. At the same time, satisfaction with Senior League Grade 4 dropped a lot, which is an interesting pattern since Grade 4 is largely a league for new/inexperienced players keen to learn to play.

By and large, CIHA had mixed progress in improving member satisfaction, with an overall sideways pattern.

(3) Manage Key Challenges

We identified four key challenges to manage in 2023. I'm happy to say we generally made good progress:

- **Increasing Ice Costs.** There's no magic bullet here: ice costs, and therefore playing costs, will continue to increase. But over the past year we secured around \$45,000 in grants and sponsorships for the benefit of youth players and rep teams, along with executing numerous fundraising activities. We sold online tickets to Inferno games for the first time, grossing over \$5,000 in ticket sales for the team—a vast improvement over gold coin donations in years past. And we increased the number of players on the ice in most leagues and particularly Learn to Play, better utilising the ice and blunting cost increases on a per-player basis.
- **Financial Risk.** Historically the CIHA senior leagues operated financially using a process whereby team managers would commit to fielding a team and take responsibility for receiving and paying the team's invoice for its league costs (and collecting ice fees from their teams' players). This "manager-is-financially-responsible" model was fraught with risk, and CIHA completed the final stage of transitioning away from this model in 2023 when Grade 2 and Grade 3 moved to online individual advanced registration. The process went seamlessly and has been extremely successful.
- **Waning Volunteerism.** We identified the challenge of fewer individuals offering less of their time in the face of increasingly stressful and complicated lives. CIHA utilised a part-time Account Administrator throughout the past year, which has worked very well and will continue. Early consideration was given to introducing a paid General Manager role, but detailed consideration was deferred to 2024.
- **Game Officials.** Following a CIHA Member vote at the 2022 AGM, the CIHA constitution was altered to add a Director of Officiating position on the CIHA Committee, responsible for oversight of officials in Canterbury, including CIHA referee recruitment, development, and advancement. While CIHA succeeded in its goal of adding the position, minimal progress was made in recruiting, developing and advancing referees.

Overall, CIHA made good progress against 2023 objectives, particularly in managing ice costs and financial risks. The sale of the Alpine Ice business is an exciting development, and means our members have a place to play for years to come—and CIHA is eager to see how a closer partnership with Alpine Ice can be mutually beneficial. Some objectives were not met, particularly in terms of rebuilding the officiating program and improving the culture between players and officials, which leads to 2024 challenges and objectives.

2024 Challenges

2024 challenges are largely similar to 2023, but differ slightly with a changed priority:

- **Ice Availability.** CIHA's 2024 ice booking process with Alpine Ice has just begun and Alpine has communicated that the allocation process for ice sports will be different than in years past. Alpine has communicated that certain ice blocks CIHA has previously received will no longer be available to us, for example. CIHA will meet with Alpine soon to better understand the changes, but directionally it appears that there

will likely be less ice available for CIHA—or certainly less ice at prime times our members find highly desirable. This could present significant challenges to our club.

- **Playing Cost.** Prices have increased on just about everything over the past 3 years, especially energy—and a lot of that is needed to operate an ice rink. We’ve received 2024 pricing from Alpine, which has again gone up, reflecting a ~27% cost increase over 3 years for ice booked for club play. Other player costs are increasing as well:
- **Waning Volunteerism.** As stated previously, CIHA can only operate through the generous donation of time and expertise from scores of volunteers. Yet times are changing, with individuals leading increasingly busy lives with less free time, while also facing higher costs of living. In 2023, CIHA increased reimbursements for the first time in many years for scorebenchers, game officials, and first aiders. While this is a positive step for volunteers, it further adds to the cost players face.
- **Game Officials.** As I stated last year, there is a dwindling number of overworked game officials in Canterbury. And, although an “us vs them” mentality between players and officials is nothing new to our sport, it is far too acute in Canterbury, particularly in comparison to the size of our community. This challenge continues into 2024.

2024 Objectives

In addition to working to grow our membership and improve member satisfaction, which can be viewed as “evergreen goals”, the key challenges just discussed inform our 2024 objectives.

(1) Reassess All League Formats and Schedules

Simply put, the days of some CIHA leagues occupying prime ice slots for games played with teams of 10 skaters per side (and maybe only 8 or 9 skaters showing up) are over. We don’t yet know what our ice allocation will look like in 2024, but we know some slots will no longer be available to us. With less available ice, higher playing costs, and more players, CIHA must reassess all league formats and schedules to determine how to provide enjoyable and affordable playing experiences under these new constraints.

I fully expect some changes will be necessary, and as a result some players will be unhappy. But change is inevitable given the circumstances and can be positive—as was the case with CIHA’s decision to move Women’s League to summer season this year, for example. Persistent low to mediocre survey satisfaction scores in some leagues further underscore the need to reassess the way leagues operate and how we might improve them.

(2) Promote “Volunteer to Play”

We often hear from players that ice hockey is becoming too expensive—and what can be done to lower costs. At the same time, volunteerism is waning, with fewer game officials and first aiders, for example. Coincidentally, the reimbursement rate for officiating a game, or serving as a scorebencher or first aider, is comparable to the cost of playing a game.

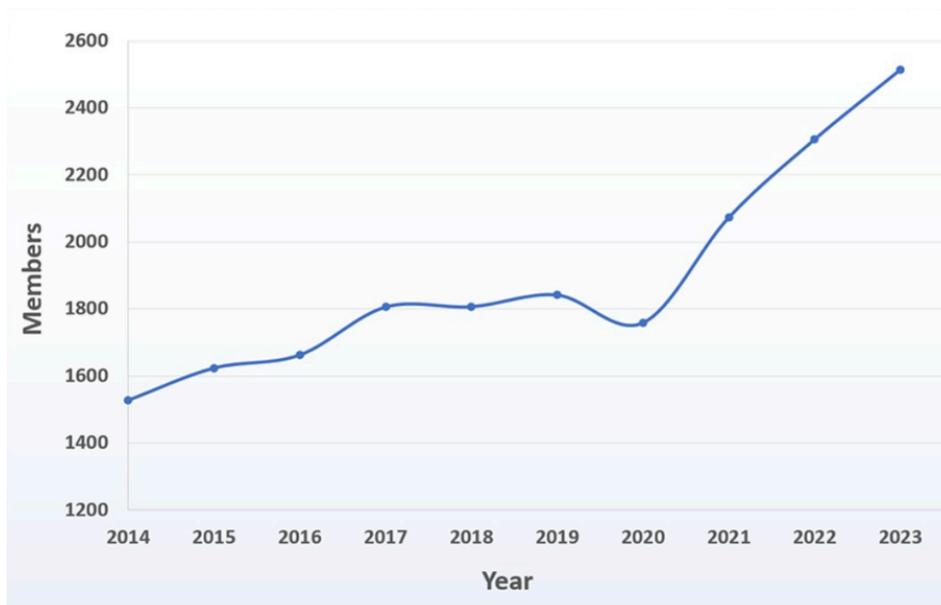
We will therefore explore a “Volunteer to Play” initiative, which would more clearly communicate to our members the opportunities they have to get involved as a volunteer, and how it can benefit not only the club, but them.

(3) Explore Adding a General Manager

A carryover objective from 2022, our club is likely to benefit greatly by adding a General Manager, responsible not only for overall club operations, but also for improving the playing experience for our members, across all leagues and teams. The Auckland Ice Hockey Association has employed a General Manager for several years with excellent results, which can serve as a template. CIHA will explore and consider adding a GM in 2024.

(4) Formalise a Referee Recruitment, Training, and Advancement Program

CIHA player numbers have increased sharply over the past few years, as has ice hockey across New Zealand, as shown in the NZIHF Membership chart below:



Player numbers are growing, but the number of referees is not keeping pace. In 2024, CIHA will formalise and execute a referee recruitment, training, and advancement program.

Concluding Remarks

We've made good progress in 2023 but have a new set of challenges and objectives for the coming year, and I'm excited about the possibilities for our club in 2024. Thanks again to the many, many volunteers who make it all possible, and see you at the rink!

Kind Regards,
Tom Fontaine
President, Canterbury Ice Hockey Association