



PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

NOVEMBER 23rd, 2025

As I approach the end of my tenure as President, I'd like to present some of the highlights over the past year, discuss progress against our objectives, and offer a few thoughts looking ahead to 2026.

CIHA is a non-profit organisation that relies almost entirely on the generous contributions of time and effort from individual volunteers. Before proceeding, I'd like to acknowledge the many important contributions made over the past year. My sincere thanks go to:

- Senior League Director Alison Reid. With hundreds of players and hundreds of games, keeping Senior League running smoothly is no small task. Thanks also to the Grade Managers and other Senior League committee members for keeping things on track.
- Dave Wallace for overseeing our teen programmes through a year with significant changes, including the addition of a new youth representative team, and for having such a positive impact on the experiences of these youth players and their families.
- All club team managers, game officials, score benchers, first aiders, and those who update our website with schedules and results. A special thanks to Alison Reid for her extensive scheduling work, particularly in coordinating officials for our adult leagues—an enormous undertaking.
- The many volunteer coaches and managers who organised and supported our representative teams (U14s, U16s, U18s, Inferno, and Red Devils). Thanks to Darren Ward for leading our adult rep team merchandising efforts with great success.
- Everyone involved in delivering the highly successful National U12 Jamboree hosted by CIHA, and especially to Kat Tobin and Neptune Jiang for leading CIHA's organisation and execution of the event.
- Mike Tobin for leading weekly winter youth goalie trainings, and to Steve Duggan and other volunteers who have made a real difference for our young goalies.
- All the coaches and organisers of Youth Development Camps, especially Neil Carey.
- Donors and sponsors who gave generously to fund our activities.
- The First Aid Training Company for continuing to provide free training for CIHA coaches, managers, and other volunteers, and discounted rates for all CIHA members.
- Alpine Ice management and staff for their professionalism and close collaboration with CIHA, which had a very visible and positive impact on ice hockey this year.
- The many others who contributed throughout the year—your support is essential to everything we do.

Now on to discuss some season highlights, show progress against our 2025 strategy, and touch on some thoughts for 2026.

League Highlights

Adult Representative Teams (Inferno and Red Devils)

- The Inferno had a strong season, finishing 2nd in round-robin play (out of four teams) and earning silver after a hard-fought 1–2 loss in the finals. The team regrouped post-season to host an exciting weekend of games against visiting Toronto Leaside, drawing hundreds of enthusiastic fans.
- 2025 was another challenging year on the ice for the Red Devils, following significant senior-level player departures over the past two seasons. Despite the addition of two dynamic, highly skilled imports and promising young talent, the team missed the playoffs. Off the ice, sponsorship remained strong—a sincere thank you to all the generous Red Devils supporters.
- Both teams opened their preseasons with a shared “game of two halves,” with each team playing a Red vs White squad in their respective half. Fan support and attendance for this event—and for all home games—were excellent, contributing to strong ticket and merchandise sales throughout the season.
- Sincere thanks to the coaches, managers, and the many volunteers who make it possible for these teams to compete. Thanks also to Alpine Ice for their support and excellent game-day collaboration. And a special thank you to Ash Hart of Hartland Images for excellent photography, and to Matt Chavez and the livestream volunteers for their continued dedication and high-quality content.

Youth Representative Teams (U14, U16, U18)

- Ice Hockey NZ introduced a new league tier, expanding the structure to U14/U16/U18 (from U15/U18).
- A key benefit of this expansion is that roughly 50% more kids can experience representative hockey, training and competing at a higher level. However, it also created new demands on ice time, volunteers, and family time and budgets. In preparing for this change, the CIHA set a goal at the 2024 AGM to reassess all youth programs, with a particular focus on the High School program—more on that later.
- 2025 also saw the return of rep games played outside of Dunedin, with CIHA hosting Queenstown’s U18 rep team for a weekend of games, and the CIHA U18s traveling to Auckland for an away weekend. Although this increases season costs, these additional games provide life-long memories for these young athletes and their families.
- On-ice results were mixed, with mid-table finishes for U14 and U18 and a more challenging year for U16. The U14 team finished 3rd in round-robin play and 4th overall (of 6 teams); the U16 team finished 6th in both round-robin and overall (of 6 teams); and the U18 team finished 3rd in round-robin play and 3rd overall (of 4 teams). Post-season surveys indicated good satisfaction across all teams.

Learn To Play (All Ages)

- We continued offering a free LTP trial for children and maintained the concession-card payment system, which remains very popular with families. Youth LTP ran twice per

week throughout 2025, and U12 Super League players also played weekly winter games, giving them three skating opportunities each week.

- Adult Learn to Play was offered weekly throughout the year during school terms.
- More than 60 new players participated in LTP this year, with many progressing into refereed leagues. Average ice utilisation remained good at 33 participants per session, though down from 2024's peak average of 37.

Youth Club Leagues

- U12 Super League: The Under-12 Super League ran successfully, with six winter teams which were tiered into U12 (four teams) and U9 (two teams) for games. We continued strengthening connections between these young players, their families, and our Red Devils and Inferno teams, including Super League exhibition games during the first intermission of home Red Devils and Inferno games. A major highlight for this age group—and for CIHA as a whole—was hosting the National U12 Jamboree in October, featuring more than 20 teams, over 150 players, and more than 200 games packed into one exciting weekend.
- U15/U18: The U15 and U18 leagues continued to grow steadily. In 2021, just over 40 players required us to combine age groups into three mixed U15/U18 teams. With a new team added each year since then, registrations grew to 110 in 2025 across the two leagues, resulting in four U15 teams and three U18 teams—an encouraging indication of sustained youth development.
- High Schools: In 2025, CIHA made the difficult decision to reorient the High School program toward training and development for newer-to-intermediate high school-aged players. Refereed games were removed in favour of skill development and coach-led scrimmages, with a focus on player retention and progression into the U18 league. A major driver of this change—among other considerations—was the introduction of a new national youth league tier by Ice Hockey NZ, which provided a couple dozen more CIHA youth players with the opportunity to participate at the rep team level, as outlined in the Youth Representative Teams section above.

Adult Leagues

- Women's: CIHA organised a Global Girls' Game event in February, which saw 57 players participate in two games, with results reported to the IIHF as part of the global game tally. In an exciting development, the Women's League is scheduled to run a full summer season from October through March, featuring four full squads with new team names, jerseys, and player-of-the-game mascots. Thanks to Ice Hockey NZ for supporting CIHA, and to all the volunteers who make it such an enjoyable league.
- Masters: Masters ran successfully on Wednesday nights, using a fixed \$25 per game charge. Summer participation this year has been quite good, improving on somewhat sparser numbers in winter.
- Senior League: Senior Leagues ran well overall. Participation in G1/Premiers and G2 remained solid, while G3 and G4 numbers were somewhat lower, with players citing higher costs, challenging ice times, and the availability of pickup games organised outside of CIHA for new-to-intermediate players. Previous survey feedback indicated this group wanted more structured training. In response, CIHA offered power skating clinics for G3–G4 players as well as weekly coached skills sessions, though attendance

was lower than expected, highlighting the need to better understand and adapt offerings for this cohort in 2026.

- Premier Division: CIHA held its second social Premier draft night in 2025, announcing draft picks for four full teams and awarding players their team jerseys. In an exciting development, Ice Hockey NZ is planning a national Premier tournament next fall in Queenstown, intending to invite each regional champion to compete over a weekend.

Finally, congratulations to all the players, coaches, and managers selected to represent New Zealand in the 2026 worlds. Well done, and best of luck next year.

Progress Against 2025 Objectives

Last year around this time, I laid out primary objectives for 2025:

- 1) Grow Membership and Improve Member Satisfaction (our “evergreen” goals intended to remain in place each year)
- 2) Review Youth Programs for Improvements, Adjust for New U14/U16/U18 Rep Tiers
- 3) Establish Closer Event and Program Collaborations with Alpine Ice
- 4) Hire a General Manager

1) Grow CIHA Membership and Improve Member Satisfaction

After very strong growth from 2019 to 2022, overall membership numbers have plateaued in recent years. Around this time last year, CIHA had 549 members; membership dipped slightly to 539 in 2025. While this is somewhat disappointing, it serves as a reminder that the Learn to Play program must remain a priority in 2026 to continue developing a pipeline of new players for the club, and the club needs to ensure our programs remain attractive to current members.

On that score, CIHA conducted its 6th annual member survey in November, receiving 164 responses to gauge member satisfaction and identify areas for improvement. The anonymous survey asked members to rate their experiences across various aspects of ice hockey in Canterbury. High-level results are shown below, including an “Overall Happiness” score, calculated as the average of all ratings.

(1=Poor, 5=Excellent)

What Is Your Feeling Toward...	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Ice Times	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.4
Value for Money	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.0
Game Officials*	-	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6
Your League**	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.5
Your Team**	3.5	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.0
Alpine Ice	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.9	3.3	3.1
Ice Hockey NZ (formerly NZIHF)	3.1	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.6	3.5
CIHA	2.9	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.5
Overall Happiness (Avg of Scores)	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.4

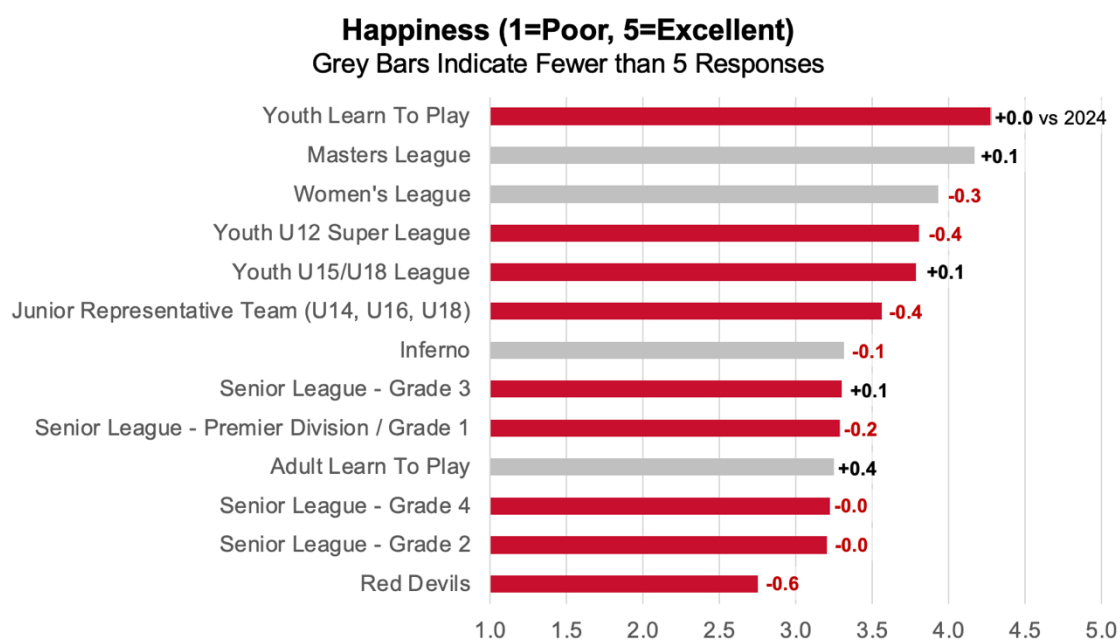
* = Game Officials question was added in 2021

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

Several metrics declined modestly in 2025 compared with 2024, led by “Value for Money,” which dropped from 3.3 to 3.0.

CIHA’s ice costs increased again in 2025—up 4.7% from the previous year and now 33% higher than just four years ago. This rise largely reflects Alpine Ice’s growing operational expenses, particularly energy costs. Because ice hire represents by far the largest share of CIHA’s game-related costs, members are increasingly feeling the cost burden, as the survey results show. While there is no easy fix, CIHA will need to intensify efforts in 2026 to secure external funding and find ways to deliver greater value for players—especially given that reducing core costs may be difficult amid sustained inflationary pressures.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate their primary league of participation in 2025, providing insight into how members in each league feel. Some leagues had very few responses, so their results have limited statistical significance. However, most leagues had a reasonable sample size, allowing for meaningful comparisons of overall happiness. The change in happiness from 2025 to 2024 is shown to the right of each bar.



The general pattern is similar to previous years, with Youth Learn to Play and Youth Leagues tending toward the highest ratings, and Senior Leagues toward the lower end. The Youth Super League program saw a notable drop, as did the Junior Representative Teams, which experienced some growing pains with the expansion to a third team, increasing pressure on ice time, volunteers, and family budgets. Perhaps the most noticeable change was seen with the Red Devils, who had a very challenging season—and CIHA has already begun focusing on improvements for 2026 based on player feedback.

Overall, member satisfaction declined modestly from 2024 but remains quite strong, all things considered.

2) Review Youth Programs for Improvements, Adjust for New U14/U16/U18 Rep Tiers

This goal was achieved, though it required some difficult decisions, including the reorientation of our High School program, as described earlier in this report.

3) Establish Closer Event and Program Collaborations with Alpine Ice

CIHA and Alpine Ice have taken their partnership to exciting new levels in recent years, particularly following the Alpine Ice ownership change, with event and program collaboration continuing to expand and strengthen—and especially over the past year.

The consistently strong Red Devils attendance during a challenging season—and the sharply growing Inferno crowds, culminating in a packed arena for the post-season Leaside games—demonstrated the tangible benefits of this partnership. These efforts have helped build fan loyalty, enhanced experiences for attendees, and contributed to the wider ice hockey community. Many thanks to Alpine Ice management, as well as CIHA's Marketing Director Kat Tobin, Inferno Manager Jodi Hart, Red Devils Manager Michael Atkinson, and the many other CIHA volunteers and Alpine staff who make these successes possible.

4) Hire a General Manager

As noted in my 2024 AGM report, CIHA stands to benefit significantly from the addition of a General Manager, responsible for overall club operations and enhancing the playing experience for members across all leagues and teams. Other regional associations in New Zealand, as well as Ice Hockey NZ, already have General Managers in place.

CIHA made substantial progress toward hiring a GM this year, including creating a full job description, identifying funding sources, advertising the position, reviewing dozens of applications, conducting in-person interviews, and shortlisting potential candidates. Since this is the first time CIHA is seeking to appoint a GM, and given the importance of the role to both our members and the club's future, the process took longer than expected. As a result, the decision was made to postpone further consideration until the 2025–2026 CIHA Committee is in place to carry it forward.

While I'm a little disappointed that we fell short of this goal, significant progress was made, and I'm confident that the groundwork laid this year will help the incoming Committee achieve it in 2026—benefiting both our members and CIHA's long-term future. Many thanks to the Committee members who generously contributed their time to advance this key goal.

2026 Thoughts

Normally, this would be the point in a President's Report where I outline goals for the year ahead. However, as I am stepping down after this AGM, I'd like to share instead a few suggestions for the incoming committee as they shape CIHA's future.

In addition to growing membership and improving member satisfaction, hiring a General Manager should remain a top priority. While this has proven easier said than done, I'm

hopeful that fresh perspectives and renewed effort from the incoming committee will see an effective GM in place and making a real difference by this time next year.

I'm encouraged by the number of new faces stepping into CIHA leadership, eager to make a positive impact. Based on years of experience, a deep study of the club's history, and countless conversations with our members, I'd like to offer a few guiding principles:

- 1) **Collaborate.** Some of the most difficult periods in CIHA's history occurred when individuals or team/league groups prioritised their own interests over the club's collective good, creating an adversarial "us vs. them" mindset and resulting in detrimental decisions. The club operates best when all parts of the club communicate and work together toward the shared goal of improving the experience for all members.
- 2) **Improve with Care.** Many areas of the club can and should evolve, but underlying considerations or constraints often explain why things operate as they do. Incoming committee members should be thoughtful and informed before making changes—understand the history, ask questions, and weigh benefits against risks. Careful research and collaborative discussion will ensure changes that truly improve the club rather than unintentionally setting it back.
- 3) **Get the Work Done.** Season strategy matters for an ice hockey team, but winning puck battles is what ultimately leads to success. Similarly, CIHA relies on hands-on effort from committee members and volunteers to keep things running smoothly. It can feel overwhelming at times, so communicate openly and recruit help when needed—the club has a wonderful community of members ready and willing to pitch in when asked.

Concluding Remarks

Overall, in 2025 the club saw membership and player satisfaction hold mostly steady, with mixed progress against the goals set last year, which is somewhat disappointing. That said, our members enjoyed another fantastic year of ice hockey, creating great memories both on and off the ice.

Serving as CIHA President over the past six years has been a genuine privilege. I've had the opportunity to work alongside so many dedicated and talented volunteers, whose time, energy, and passion make this club what it is. I'm deeply grateful to everyone who's contributed, from committee members to coaches, managers, on- and off-ice officials, and all the other helpers.

I wish the club every success in the future and am happy to continue sharing thoughts and support wherever it may be useful as CIHA grows and evolves. See you at the rink!

Kind Regards,
Tom Fontaine
President, Canterbury Ice Hockey Association