

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOVEMBER 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022**

Apart from the COVID-related disruptions early in 2022 that delayed and compressed some winter playing schedules, it's a pleasure to say—for the first time in three years—that ice hockey players around the country were able to enjoy a relatively “regular” season this year.

In this report I'll touch on some 2022 CIHA season highlights by league, describe progress against our 2022 objectives, and present some key challenges and areas of focus for 2023.

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, and especially thanks to our Interim Treasurer Pip Scotter, who graciously continued in the role while CIHA has been unable to find a replacement.
- Team managers, game officials, score benchers, first aiders, and those who update our web site with league schedules and game results.
- The many volunteer coaches and managers who helped organise and operate all our representative teams: U15s, U18s, U21s, Inferno, and Red Devils.
- 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.
- Donors and sponsors who gave generously to fund our activities, including the Mainland Foundation, the Aotearoa Gaming Trust, the NZ Community Trust, the Lion Foundation, the Kiwi Gaming Foundation, Spark Business, Maugers Contracting, Cedra Express, Luminare Festival, Mediterranean Foods, Christchurch Orthodontics, Brendan Hart Real Estate, the New Zealand Ice Hockey Federation (NZIHF), and more. 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.

- Thanks again to the NZIHF for helping CIHA further grow our membership and improve ice hockey for our members in 2022, and especially for the support in introducing our Canterbury Ice Hockey League Premier Division. Thanks to Mike Tobin, our Senior League Director, for spending countless hours producing new team names and jersey designs (satisfying dozens of chefs in the kitchen) and donating the Premier Cup.
- Coach and gear manager Sarah Redmayne who worked tirelessly overseeing a massive amount of gear and who kitted up scores of children who tried ice hockey for the first time. CIHA hired out around 100 kits this year, and it all ran great.
- Alpine Ice management and staff for their professionalism during yet another difficult year marked by COVID disruptions—and hopefully our last.
- And thanks to the many others who contributed over the year.

Now on to discuss some season highlights, show progress against our 2022 strategy, and describe objectives for 2023.

## League Highlights

### Learn To Play (All Ages)

- We continued to use targeted Facebook ads featuring a promotional video that channelled visitors to our web site to book a free give-it-a-go session—and so far over 90 children tried a free session this year, with a high conversion rate into paid registrations using a concession card system that provides busy families with convenience and flexibility.
- To keep pace with growing demand, we purchased a substantial amount of new hire gear, paid for by ongoing hire gear revenue and NZIHF contributions.
- We again offered 3 Youth Learn to Play sessions per week and the rate of progress of players has been excellent, with good advancement into our U15s and other leagues.

### Youth Leagues

- U9/U12s: Our Under-9 / Under-12 Super League operated well, and modestly increased player numbers enabled expansion from 4 to 5 teams. We continued efforts to better connect these young players and their families to the Red Devils at home games and intend to do the same with the Inferno going forward. A highlight for this age group and CIHA was hosting the National U12 Tournament in mid-October, which featured 19 teams from around the country, 140 players, and 200 games in one weekend! Feedback was extremely positive, and CIHA has already been awarded hosting duties for the tournament again in 2023.
- U15/U18s: Increased enrolment in our club Under-15 and Under-18 program enabled us to split them into 2 separate leagues. We refreshed the league jerseys, offered dedicated weekly goalie training, and offered Battle Camp and Power Skating clinics. The rate of player development has been great to see, and if Term 4 enrolment is any indication, these leagues should have another good year in 2023.
- High Schools: Our High School league ran well with 4 very full teams, including a new multi-school “Alliance” team who sported brand new CIHA-designed team jerseys. These proved to be so popular that it’s been challenging to get them returned!

## Adult Leagues

- Women's: CIHA organised a Global Girls' Game event in March, which saw around 40 players participating in 2 games. It was a great way to kick off a full winter season of Women's League, which was bolstered by many younger players new to the league.
- Masters: Masters again had a fine year and aged well...
- Senior League Grade 4: Winter Grade 4 moved to a format that combined coached trainings and refereed games, which helped newer players enter our club. This format will likely be offered again in winter 2023.
- Senior League Grades 2-3: There was little change to Grades 2-3 and, overall, they operated well.
- Senior League Grade 1: CIHA replaced winter Grade 1 with a new and highly successful Canterbury Ice Hockey League Premier Division—more on this later.

## Youth Representative Teams (U15, U18)

- CIHA introduced a new, simple, bold youth representative team logo and a new jersey design that closely aligns with the Red Devils.
- From new training jerseys to a good mix of shared- and full-ice practice sessions to effective leadership by the appointed coaches and managers, the rep U15s and U18s operated very well, with high satisfaction rates, according to survey responses.
- The rep U15 team had its best showing in 6 years, finishing just a point out of first place during the round robin competition and taking home silver.
- The rep U18s had a challenging year but finished strong with an exciting shootout win to take home the bronze.

## Adult Representative Teams (U21s, Inferno, Red Devils)

- U21s: Due to COVID disruptions, the U21s had only one weekend of competition, but it was an exciting one: cross-regional teams were formed and competed in a long weekend of shorter 4v4 games in Dunedin, with excellent feedback from the players who participated.
- Inferno: It was fantastic to see the Inferno play two home game weekends in front of many fans. Effective promotional efforts helped raise league awareness, and the livestreams were very well received—thanks to Howard Whitman, Matt Chavez, and others who did a fantastic job. The team had another strong season, taking home silver, with solid contributions from several junior players who no doubt will have a major impact for years to come.
- Red Devils: The Red Devils again had excellent home game attendance, and strong merchandise sales, especially jerseys, which helped keep player costs down while enabling the many enthusiastic fans to show their support during the season. And what a season it was, with the best showing in 6 years and a bronze finish. The team also relieved the Skycity Stampede of possession of the TKRT trophy, which the home team defends during the second game of weekend play. Importantly, the Red Devils built great team chemistry, which bodes well for next year.

Congratulations to all the players, coaches, and managers selected to represent New Zealand in the 2023 worlds. Well done, and best of luck.

## **Progress Against 2022 Objectives**

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

### **(1) Grow CIHA Membership**

This isn't a new objective, but it's one that I'll emphasize in each AGM report while I'm President: 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. The best way to manage this risk is to ensure the success of our most important partner, Alpine Ice. We need to have good, affordable products so current members stay in CIHA, and we additionally need marketing and grass roots efforts to raise awareness of our sport and grow our numbers. More members mean that we support Alpine more, our current members bear less of the fixed costs of running CIHA (since we have more people paying membership fees), we build the pipeline of youth players entering our representative teams, we can field more teams in our various leagues to make competitions more enjoyable, and we make progress toward justifying construction of a second ice rink.

CIHA membership was largely unchanged over the decade ending 2019, apart from yearly fluctuations, while other regions grew very significantly. This contributed to increased member cost, poor CIHA representative team performance, and overall club stagnation.

But we've made good progress in recent years, including 2022, with player numbers (as at 1<sup>st</sup> October) increasing from 465 in 2021 to 548 in 2022.

While some of this difference is attributable to CIHA's move to advanced registration using the online esportsdesk system and efforts to ensure players are properly registered and paid before playing, much of the growth came from new players to our organisation, including a sizable number of youth and adults trying ice hockey for the first time.

In fact, while CIHA experienced very strong growth in youth playing numbers from 2020 to 2021, nearly all the increase from 2021 to 2022 was due to Senior playing numbers. Prior investment in our new web site, which makes it easier for those new to our region or sport to contact us seems to have paid off, as evidenced by the large number of inquiries we fielded from adults in 2022 requesting information on how to get started.

### **(2) Launch a CIHL Premier Division**

2021 survey results suggested that some of our most experienced players (Senior League Grade 1) had far and away the lowest satisfaction ratings. So, in early 2022 CIHA introduced a new Canterbury Ice Hockey League with a winter Premier Division—with the key objective of offering a better product and playing experience. Another objective was to provide highly competitive weekly game time for our adult rep team players. And, finally (and longer-term), the objective is to build toward cross-regional Premier Division events and competitions.

CIHA created 4 new team names and jersey designs, identified the team managers, and facilitated a process where the managers and their assistants drafted their own teams. The

season was fully subscribed, enjoyable, and exciting, with the Wizards prevailing in the championship series—and those players will be the first to have their names engraved on the new CIHA Premier Cup.

A big thank you to the NZIHF for all the support in launching Premiers, to Mike Tobin for donating the Premier Cup and leading the jersey design effort, and especially to all the managers and players for making it such a great inaugural season.

### (3) Improve Member Satisfaction

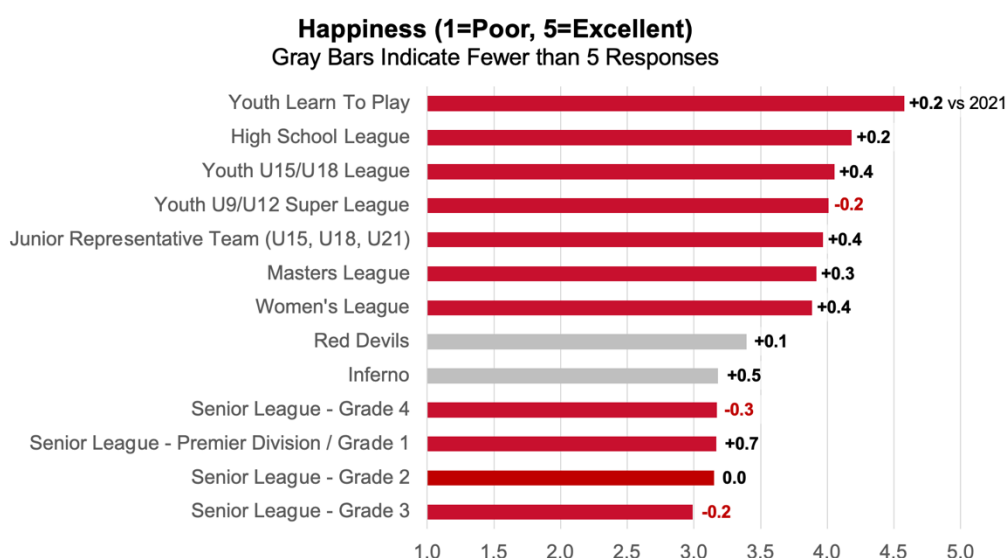
CIHA conducted its third annual member survey in October 2022, collecting 212 responses, to try to better understand member satisfaction. The anonymous survey asked members to rate their feeling toward various aspects of ice hockey in Canterbury. High-level results are shown below, including an “Overall Happiness” measure, which is the average of all scores. While satisfaction increased significantly from 2020 to 2021, overall satisfaction in 2022 is about the same as it was in 2021.

(1=Poor, 5=Excellent)

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

\* = Game Officials question was added in 2021

The survey also asked respondents to select their primary league of participation in 2022 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 2021 to 2022 is shown to the right of each bar.



The general pattern is akin to 2021, with Learn to Play and Youth leagues having the highest ratings. There was noticeable improvement in CIHA's club U15/U18 league and junior representative team satisfaction, with a modest decline in the U9/U12 Super League. The starkest difference was in Premier Division/Grade 1, which saw a significant +0.7 year-over-year increase, while Grade 4 declined. Players in Grade 2, and especially Grade 3, appear to be the least happy.

Overall, CIHA made good progress against 2022 objectives:

- Membership grew significantly
- Premier Division was launched
- Member satisfaction increased in Learn to Play, Youth Leagues, Inferno, Red Devils, Masters, and Women's, but progress in CIHA Senior Leagues was mixed, with a good improvement in Grade 1 but similar or less satisfaction in the other grades.

I'll now turn to some of the key challenges we're facing and lay out our 2023 objectives.

## **Challenges**

### **(1) Increasing Ice Cost**

Unfortunately, CIHA's cost of renting ice from Alpine Ice will increase again in 2023, bringing the 2-year cost increase to nearly 17%. Inflation is impacting all New Zealand, and like many New Zealand businesses, Alpine Ice is facing significant cost increases, including above-average inflation, rising labour costs, and an increase in energy costs.

### **(2) Financial Risks**

Historically the CIHA senior leagues have 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 is fraught with risk. The managers have risk that they may not be able to collect sufficient funds from players, the CIHA has risk that team managers may not pay, there is manual work and operational risk involved, and an overall lack of transparency regarding how much individual players pay versus others. And what happens if a manager simply decides at the last minute not to field a team? It leaves CIHA (and ultimately our members) stuck with a lot of unpaid ice.

While most of our club leagues are now using advanced registration and payment on the esportsdesk system, Senior League Grades 2 and 3 still operate using this highly risky model.

### **(3) Waning Volunteer Interest in Key Roles**

CIHA can only operate through the generous donation of time and expertise from scores of volunteers. Yet our club is growing fast and times are changing, with individuals leading increasingly busy lives with less free time, while also facing higher costs of living.

As such, it is increasingly difficult for a small, charitable organisation like CIHA to fill certain volunteer roles, such as the CIHA Treasurer. A very sincere thank you to Pip Scotter who has continued as Interim Treasurer while CIHA has been unable to fill the position this year! Other vital roles, such as Directors in our Senior and Youth leagues, also require large amounts of time. CIHA has begun work on this looming issue, but we need to do more.

#### (4) Game Officials

There is a dwindling number of overworked game officials in Canterbury. To make matter worse, there's been little recent effort to train and motivate the next generation of officials.

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. Abuse of officials by players (and yes, sometimes abuse of players by officials) has no place in our sport.

These issues have been made worse by poor communication and lack of cooperation and cohesion between CIHA and the Canterbury Ice Hockey Referees Association (CIHRA), which is a separate entity.

So, what can we do?

### **2023 Objectives**

In addition to working to continue to grow our membership and improve member satisfaction, managing the key challenges above will form our objectives for 2023.

**Increasing Ice Cost:** Higher ice costs will be a headwind against our objective of membership growth in 2023. Although CIHA received over \$42k in funding and sponsorship in the past year that helped blunt the costs for youth leagues and rep teams, there are scant opportunities to similarly subsidise adult recreational play. There's no magic bullet: while CIHA could adjust game formats and roster sizes to offer a lower price point, that also typically means less ice time per player. CIHA might explore these types of alternatives, but we first and foremost need to manage the existing financial risks to better protect our members.

**Financial Risks:** CIHA will move all club leagues to individual player advanced registration and payment on the esportsdesk system for the Winter 2023 season, bringing Senior League Grades 2 and 3 in line with all other leagues. We fully expect some members to be unhappy with this, but it should be comforting news to the vast majority of members who commit to playing and responsibly paying their fees on time.

Waning Volunteerism: Simply put, there is little alternative but to recognise that times are changing, and in order for our organisation to function well, we may need to offer compensation for certain vital roles. CIHA has already begun this out of necessity: after a prolonged and unsuccessful search for a new volunteer Treasurer this year, we introduced a paid Accounts Administrator role responsible for our weekly payment processing cycle. And in 2023 we will explore adding a paid General Manager role (like the position the Auckland Ice Hockey Association has had in place successfully for several years) to ensure our club is well managed and can serve CIHA members effectively for many years to come.

Game Officials: Canterbury is an outlier in New Zealand in that it operates a regional ice hockey association (CIHA) separately from a regional ice hockey referees' association (CIHRA). With a dwindling number of officials, abuse, "us vs them" mentality, and lack of communication, change is necessary—and the two "sides" need to come together to properly address the issues. We therefore intend to rebuild the officials' program within CIHA and add a Director of Officiating role. The Director will be a voting member of the CIHA Committee and chair a CIHA Referees Subcommittee responsible for improving all aspects of officiating in Canterbury, including CIHA referee recruitment, development, and advancement. Improvements will take time, but this change is likely long overdue.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We've made good progress in 2022, and we have an ambitious set of objectives for 2023. Thanks again to the many, many volunteers who make it all possible. I'm excited for the potential of our club next year and beyond. Onwards and upwards, and see you at the rink.

Kind Regards,

Tom Fontaine  
President, Canterbury Ice Hockey Association