

Wednesday March 16, 2016 7:00 PM Conference Call

Attendees:

Randy Mak, President 1660

Kevin Gallaway, NEAHL Midget Governor, also HA Zone 7 Discipline Committee

Dody Kluttig, Treasurer & Administrator 1660

Karen Gabel, Secretary 1660

Marie Forcade, Vice-Scheduler 1660

Nick Taylor, League Tiering Coordinator 1660 also Scheduler for NCMHA

Randy Martin, Commissioner NEAHL

Ryan Koehli, Vice-President NCMHA, also HA Zone 7 Operations Advisory Committee

Steven Holt, President NCMHA

Arlene Busat, Secretary NCMHA

Jim Wood, Vice-President 1660

Geoff Dowson, Discipline Coordinator Peewee, Midget, 1660

Paul Elun, Discipline Coordinator Novice, Atom, Bantam 1660

Brad Sakowich, President SPHL

Introductions made by each participant. Randy Mak then called the meeting to order outlining the purpose of the call tonight was to have a group discussion in regard to an interlock playing possibility for the 2016/17 Hockey Season between the four minor hockey leagues - Sturgeon Pembina Minor Hockey League, 1660 Hockey League, North East Alberta Hockey League and North Central Minor Hockey Association. The rationale for entering into an interlock partnership amongst our leagues is to address and improve travel times and increase competition levels amongst teams thereby keeping more people involved in minor hockey. There is also the potential for forming a more viable "no hitting" minor hockey level.

Nick Taylor then took over the conversation explaining his role and the handouts he provided to us in email. (The map with associations highlighted, the distance charts, the proposed way scheduling will be figured out.) Nick mentioned Jesse Reid who is the current 1660 scheduler has agreed to be on board and to help him build the schedule for this year. Because Nick has experience with both 1660 and North Central, he has an understanding of the need for an interlock system & a pretty good idea of the caliber of teams playing in these leagues. Nick & Jesse have worked together building schedules for 1660 and the SPHL Interlock that was done this 2015/16 season trial.

Nick explained the increased numbers of teams to play will ultimately create less travel time for teams that typically this year have had to travel from one end of their borders to another and it will align more competitive hockey by having more teams of equal caliber playing against each other. There will not be as many games played against the same opponent over and over again, where we all know, means increased penalty minutes and suspensions. Nick figured a good portion of teams will travel possibly 65 km less one way, some teams on the outskirts may benefit by saving 100-200 km less one way. The proposal suggests that teams make the

interlock play weekend trip two games. Teams should not have to travel outside of their comfort zone as often - you go there one weekend, they come in one weekend & that's it because there are more teams & the same number of games to get through in a season.

Discussion and questions were then asked by participants. Key questions and answers were:

How do you figure the distance being saved?

If you look at the map of the league boundaries, there are many associations that are closer to each other in a different league than in the same league. More teams = less travel.

How are we going to sell it to our teams?

Mainly because the majority of teams will be within 65 km of each other, so less travel with the occasional exception. Plus there should be less animosity between teams because they will play against each other less often.

How will interlock system work?

If you agree to play in the interlock system, you will be expected to play interlock teams during the tiering process. Interlock will have blackout dates (weekend where there will be no interlock games) to allow for tournaments & league / association commitments. Schedules will be made so that interlock teams play each other hopefully twice - one home & one away.

When will interlock start?

Should start after two weeks of preseason, or until teams have had a chance to play a few games within their own leagues to get a sense of their tier placement. Once interlock has had a time to have a couple games, there will be one weekend free - available for time to make schedules and to allow for extra games (tiering appeals) to ensure teams are tiered properly.

Will there be geographic separations?

Depends on the number of teams and where they are from. SPHL is quite spread out with fewer associations & they found the pilot this year with 1660 to be very successful, so much so that they are willing to say they are "all in". The selling point to their parents was not so much about travel, but about having more teams at your caliber to play against. The things that parents were reluctant about ironed out once the schedules were made. Don't forget how much travel was done with Provincials and how sometimes it was closer to play Provincial games than games within our own league. We can enforce a radius of travel area that is agreed upon by affected leagues / associations at the start of the interlock agreement.

How will the schedules be made? How is the timing of the season going to run? The leagues have different start and end dates...

We will have to standardize this. Nick & Jesse will handle the scheduling. Again, there will likely need to be interlock free times during the season to allow for tournaments & schedule shuffles in cases of weather interference and other factors. We will still say these games need to be played by a certain date, but we can build in a cushion during scheduling if we need to. All

interlock games will count in the standings. Interlock will not constitute more than 40% of a team's regular schedule & playoffs will be held within each league unless otherwise agreed. If ice times are sent, the schedules can be built. The times can be settled, the opponent filled in later. Interlock teams will need to be settled before the building of the rest of the regular schedule. We can work on this once we know how many and who we are dealing with.

Comment from Ryan Koehli who is Zone 7 Hockey Alberta Operations Advisory Committee:

There is talk in HA that they would like to have all leagues operate with standard regulations including regulations around travel. What we are proposing here is like we are one step ahead of HA and they are very interested in what we are doing. He cautioned we need to do it right the first time & HA is in support of it. HA is discussing getting rid of their zones.

Why have we not heard of this before? - Question to Ryan in regard to HA zones & regulations

In fact he thinks it has been ongoing conversation, but note he is pretty low on the totem pole of authority at HA and it is just what he has heard. He has no idea when it will be required or enforced, but in discussions at different meetings, this has come up so he thought he'd share this with us as it pertains to what we are attempting. At HA there are several different initiatives they are working on and looking at. This is something that keeps surfacing every time - that boundaries need to start becoming less prevalent and tiering and regulations need to start being better aligned across the board. We would like more information from HA on suggested improvements and alignment to better support our interlock system.

How will we deal with discipline?

Again, this will need to be standardized. 1660 does not use governors to issue suspensions, they have discipline coordinators to do that (Geoff & Paul). Discipline is a big one that will need some working on but it can be done.

We are still unsure how tiering will be managed.

Nick has a pretty good idea of where most teams should lie within their own leagues. It appears as though NE & NC tier 2 is comparable to 1660 Tier 3 at the Midget level. 1660 did not have a tier 1 or 2 per say, however there were some definite stronger teams that would suit that level of play - thinks it will work nicely. The tiering process will not be rushed. Comment from Dody was that don't forget to take into account all the Provincial play that was happening - many teams were playing outside of their designated tiers and ended up fairly competitive. We can also consider that when we look at tiering. The other thing about tiering is we have to be mindful of the fact that a lot of the associations we see on the map are quite small and do not have teams at every tier or level, so they might only have bottom tier teams and the top tier teams will belong to the larger centres...another argument for considering interlock at more levels than just the tier 1 & 2.

We need facts to support this interlock system in order to sell it to our members. Can we get something substantial to present?

Nick said he could come up with something very soon. Dody would help come up with figures as well. They can also share the maps & samples that Nick has worked on. Brad said he would be willing to attend meetings and present what SPHL experience has been. Randy Mak has been working on this for quite some time and believes we can pull together something to present as well based on our discussion tonight and the SPHL experience from this season now ending.

What does this look like long term? A super league?

No. One big league with 400 plus teams in it would be too difficult to manage and operate efficiently. We need to still remain our own leagues, but we can cooperate and play games with each other using an interlock system. Everyone will belong to their own league as directed by the boundaries already established. The teams will pay fees to their associations who pay to their leagues. The leagues will get together to support the interlock.

When is everyone's AGM?

NC April 9

SP end of April

NE April 9

1660 May 7

Final comments / thoughts:

SPHL is in full support and is "all in" - every level they can get into interlock they want. They were very pleased with the way it worked and are excited to expand it next year. It worked well for them because they didn't have enough teams in their own league to play against. They were playing against each other too often & it was not fun.

NC - would like to try it

NE - Bantam & Midgets upper tiers - wants one year trial and then can prove to the others if it works and there actually is less travel and more competitive games

1660 - full support - we want this to happen & we can.

We didn't discuss the no hitting level at Bantam & Midget. There is potential there if we have more teams and once they see how interlock works, will be an easier sell. NC already has a no hitting pilot with HA and we will table this to discuss further at another meeting.

Next meeting:

We will try to arrange another conference call through the HA conferencing call centre again. We want to meet on the first Wednesday of each month for the next three months to work things out & get this thing off and running. If you cannot attend personally, have an informed representative from your league step in. Next meeting will be Wednesday April 6th at 7 pm.

Adjourned at 8:57 PM