

Annual Report: President's Message

2020-21 Annual General Meeting

In the Spring of 2020, Covid 19 forced our 2019-2020 season to end abruptly and put a pause on all hockey activities. The global pandemic also forced changes on all aspects of life and hockey was no exception. Never in the history of our organization have we had to deal with something of this magnitude. I am proud to say that your BWA Executive accepted the challenges and worked tirelessly, to ensure our members could return to hockey in the 2020-2021 season safely. For complete transparency, there were times when we collectively questioned ourselves, our direction and whether our efforts were worth it. Our motto for the 2020-2021 season was "we will figure it out" and that we did. I am extremely proud of our Executive for their diligence and respectful approach to each and every facet of this past season.

The BWA Executive also worked with our community partners – the City of Barrie, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit and other minor sports associations to develop, implement and adapt COVID-19 protocols, allowing our members to participate in on and off ice activities in a safe manner. I would also like to thank our Provincial Sports Organization – the Ontario Women's Hockey Association for their leadership and direction through this difficult time. The OWHA, along with the Ontario Hockey Federation and Hockey Canada, were adaptive and communicative in their requirements for a safe return to play this past season.

The support and trust that was shown to the BWA Executive by our membership, allowed us to guide the BWA through this far from normal season. The "Return to Play" protocols and procedures that the BWA developed for our FUNdamentals, Youth HL, Women's HL and Competitive programs have been recognized by the OWHA, as one of the best program offerings in Ontario, not only amongst Female Hockey programs but also Minor Hockey programs. Along with that, the BWA assisted various OWHA member associations with protocols and program offerings, which allowed their members to return to hockey activities this past season. This collaboration provided our Board of Directors with a gratifying sense of accomplishment, for the countless hours of work collectively put in.

While the BWA Executive put a plan in place to return safely to hockey in the 2020-2021 season, the season would not have been able to function without the selfless efforts of our volunteers. From our coaches and assistant coaches, to our managers and trainers, to our dressing room volunteers and game streamers, we extend a huge thank you to you all. Never has there been a time in our association have we asked more of you and you delivered! We can't thank you enough for your organization, resilience, communication and steadfastness during the ups and downs of this past season. Your efforts have not gone unnoticed by the Executive and especially the players and parents you interacted with.

The BWA Executive would also like to recognize the efforts of our on and off ice officials. This past season was extremely difficult for our officials. They had to manage a completely different set of on ice rules and also deal with off ice protocols, which certainly added layers of complexity to their jobs. They did all of this, while keeping the integrity of the games they officiated to the highest level. Without our on and off ice officials, no game play of any fashion would have been offered this past season and this was all accomplished with a reduced group of officials, due to pandemic protocols and health concerns. We recognize your efforts every season, but especially this past one, under trying and unusual circumstances.

Certainly, not to be forgotten, the BWA Executive would like to thank all of our players and families, who participated in the programming that was offered this past year. A lot was asked of you. The season was very different from any other season. Team formations were different, your social experience both off and on the ice was different and the way you practiced and played the game was completely new. Our players are what makes the game great. They bring energy and enthusiasm both on and off the ice, which spills over to the volunteers, trainers, coaches and our Executive. Even though you were masked, we could see your excitement and pure joy of playing the game you love through your eyes and through the countless emails we received, in which you talked about your experiences, commitment, and support for programming that was offered.

Although there are those who may look at the 2020-2021 BWA season as a disappointment, I believe there are many things that the association and our members should be proud of. Some of those items are:

- The BWA was able to deliver quality programming to all members of our association – right from FUNDamentals to our Recreational HL programming and through our competitive programming.
- The BWA assisted in keeping mental health and physical exercise at a high level through participation in sport and through social connectivity
- The BWA provided a platform for skill development at all levels of hockey
- The BWA Jr. Sharks & Midget 1 bubble had 8 players receive commitments from NCAA / U Sport programs in 2020-2021, while only engaging in Barrie specific competition and development
- Through fiscal review and program costing, the BWA was able to maintain financial stability through the past 14 months, while maintaining our office administrator and physical office location.
- The BWA launched a successful “Game Streaming” initiative within our HL, Competitive and Jr. Sharks programs. This initiative allowed families and friends from across the globe to watch their favorite Sharks player in a game play environment. Family members from Europe, USA and across Canada linked in weekly and cheered on the Sharks, from the safety and comfort of their own home. While it is not the same experience as sitting in the rink, this initiative will be one that we can carry forward and offer even post pandemic.

The BWA Executive knows first-hand how working together advances the cause for all of our members and the Female game. We will build on the many obstacles that we overcame this past season, along with the momentum that the association had, prior to Covid 19, to move us forward. Our goal is to continue to invest in our membership and provide an opportunity for any Female player in Simcoe County that wishes to play the sport of hockey, has a place to play. This will not only benefit our association but it will add positively to our local community, long term.

I am both grateful and humbled to have had the support of the BWA Executive and membership over the past number of years. I am excited about what the 2021-2022 season will bring and I am hopeful that we are able to return to a more normal looking season. However, if we cannot yet move in that direction, I know that the programs we put in place this past season can be expanded upon to continue to offer a great Sharks experience, until such time that we can return to normal hockey.

I look forward to seeing all of you, back in the rinks, when it is safe to do so. In the meantime, take care of each other and be kind to one another. We are all part of a great Sharks family. We will all get through this unprecedented time soon. Stay well and we look forward to seeing you all return for the 2021-2022 season.

Rob Whitehead
President – BWA