

Features

Violence creeps into inter-college play

Jonathan Mann

When Vince Cicchelli started playing Inter-college hockey earlier this year, he never dreamt that he'd be quitting after just two games.

But quitting is Cicchelli's only way of dealing with a problem that the league as a whole has only begun to face: excessive violence has become widespread in 'B' hockey, to the point where according to one athlete, "it's no longer safe for the people going out on the ice."

The player is Stong's Al Armstrong, one of a dozen, who, along with coaches and organizers, have expressed strong concern over the current state of 'B' play.

The 'B' league was started, ironically enough, to avoid just the sort of problem it's now running into.

With the competition for inter-college's York Torch so strong, students at Osgoode hall decided to create a second league to accommodate all those who wanted to play hockey, but just couldn't muster the necessary skills.

'B' was born in the 1976-77 school year as a second, non-competitive league. It has since grown steadily, and now includes, in addition to Osgoode, teams representing 6 of York's colleges and faculties.

But the good intentions which begat 'B' hockey are all but gone. Instead, poor officiating and the desire among some teams to win at any cost have brought the level of play to the stage where, according to Calumet Athletic Representative Anthony Mercuri, "just for fun doesn't exist anymore."

While not everyone agrees that dirty play has gotten out of hand, a number of players are finding out that it's not as rare as they might hope.



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Vince Cicchelli learned this lesson the hard way. Last Thursday, in a match pitting his college (Calumet) against the Administra-

tive Studies M.B.A. team, Cicchelli got involved in a brawl which eventually cleared the benches. He's quick to admit that he

threw the first punch, but he feels that he was driven to it by the endless abuse which he found his team was taking; abuse which he thinks adequate refereeing would have made impossible.

The excuse, whatever its merit, is not a new one. Player after player has blamed game referees for letting violent play get out of hand. Their stories vary, but a consistent theme emerges: when a tough competitor finds himself or his teammate the victim of a dirty hit which goes unpunished, he's likely to turn vigilante.

Cicchelli puts it best. "When I see one of my players down on the ground, and the guy keeps on hitting him, it looks like intent to injure...Let's see how he likes it."

Inter-college co-ordinator Arvo Tiidus is a warm man who shrugs his shoulders sheepishly when asked about dirty play. In charge of the league (which he has done his

best to leave in student hands), he denies that there is a big problem. At a loss to explain what he maintains are "isolated incidents", he says simply, "well, I think hockey is animal."

Like many others, Tiidus maintains that officiating has a lot to do with hazardous play. But with his current budget, he simply cannot afford better officials. The cheapest referees in the city charge \$36 per game, while Tiidus has only \$14 per game to spend.

As a result, the officiating has been done, up till now, by 'B' players themselves, with each team required to send men out to take charge of other teams' games. Under the circumstances, Tiidus explains apologetically, "you can't expect better."

In theory at least, league rules seem more than capable of dealing with unsportsmanlike play. Referees are empowered to kick players out of the game for fighting, as well as cite them in Game Reports and bring them before the league's Protest Committee for bad conduct.

Unfortunately, the machinery for policing games works better on paper than on ice. All too often, the referees assigned to games lack the skill and experience which would enable them to take control. As a result, players quickly learn that they can get away with much more than the rules allow.

Graduate student Bill Langley remembers being called upon to referee a game with absolutely no officiating experience behind him. Not surprisingly, he found himself unable to take charge of the play. Although he knew about the protest procedure, he was reluctant to use it. Because "you don't really know who the people are", it's hard to name them in Game Reports.

Not only are the participants difficult to keep track of; so are the infractions. Langley found the whole task rather confusing. "You don't know what to call or how to call it. I'm sure that a lot of penalties went by without my seeing them."

Happily, all of this may change. Because there have been no serious injuries so far this year, league organizers have been reluctant to take action. But mounting complaints have convinced them that new measures are necessary to stop the problem before it's too late.

Players' hopes are now pinned to a reorganization of officiating being undertaken by Stong's Frank Ellis, a carded referee in the Metro Toronto Hockey League. Higher pay (subsidized by the players themselves) for more selectively chosen referees is one of the steps being taken. As well, a clinic was held yesterday, to better verse aspiring referees in the fundamentals of the art.

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