

Recreation Final Report 2023-24

This was a big year in recreational hockey with the Hawks! We welcomed many new coaches and players onto the ice and saw great growth from all levels. Recreational hockey is a great way for kids to be a part of something. They work out who they are on their teams, make core memories, develop strong character, achieve milestones, and experience some of the best-feeling days of their childhoods. The smiles, community pride, families that bond through the season, the social structure, and benefit to youth health, sport, and entertainment are not to be overlooked as elements that make C hockey so special.

We were able to host a C-level staff get-together early in the season to go over policies, structure, practice tips, and common struggles together across all age levels. This was well-attended and encouraged to continue and grow in frequency next year. I would like to request more coaching instruction be offered for rec hockey, as most coaches are rec parents with little experience.

Rebranding the arena and the cross-ice dividers were welcome and appreciated additions to our program this year.

Opportunities for growth

I'd like to remind the board of the opportunity we have prior to school letting out for the summer, to approach our local schools to include a flier about joining hockey with report cards. In the past, this has been very effective in reaching families (45% new registrations in soccer club). We'd put the most essential details onto a slip of paper (8-10 per sheet), and have schools distribute them along with other end-of-year documents at the end of June.

Other ideas at association level:

- Continue to use our print & media campaign to boost awareness during summer months — clips from games and practices, words from players, parents or bench staff, mic'd up player snippets
- Offer an early registration discount for a better handle on numbers (ideal goal eventually 25-30%)
- Streamline the online registration process - can we make it more accessible for newcomers, folks with disabilities, etc.?
- Find ways to reduce ice fees and lower registration fees
- Ensure ice slots are working parent-friendly
- Write grants for more opportunities — charitable organization status?

Community level:

- Attend community events to increase visibility & build our network
- Possible program partnership with Queer Hockey NS / The Youth Project
- Continued partnership with the Mosque
- Host a C-level tournament in divisions where one is lacking

Questions and concerns raised this season:

- Addressing smell of cannabis at some games
- Noting use of AP players/inaccurate rosters
- Parents whose fees and certifications were past due
- When travel permits are required
- Parent conduct at games/practices
- No dressing room supervision for camps

Below are the end-of-year summaries brought forward from each C division director, whose unique insight has been instrumental in carrying us successfully through the year. I'd like to thank each of them personally for their hard work in the program: Frank Denis for U18C, Jen McKeane for U15C, Troy DesBarres for U13C, and Steve MacLeod for U11C.

(Note: no report brought forward for U11C)

U13C

The U13 Recreation hockey program has been very successful in 2023 – 2024. We had three teams this year and for the first time in a long time we had zero teams in the bronze division. One was in the gold division and two were in the silver division. All three teams were very competitive. These teams always went into a game feeling as though they could win and each got better and better skill wise as the season went on.

So why this year over other years? The Halifax Hawks made the wise decision to only have one competitive B team this year. This meant that our recreation teams all had players of varying skill levels. This resulted in wins, team bonding and building, happy players learning from one another and happy parents. I will say that the decision to only have one B team came way too late in the process and as a result I had to deal with some very unhappy parents because their player did not remain in competitive even though they were in the competitive stream the previous year.

This year volunteers of the U13 Recreation division left the season with some very well-deserved hardware and new placements within the Hawks family. Matt is now our new President, Barry an award winner is now the new U15C Director, Pat Perks won coach of the year in the Recreation division and our own Tracy Doyle won for her role as an amazing team manager, a job well done.

Suggestions, after holding this seat for two years I have learnt a lot about hockey and have had the privilege of volunteering with a lot of great people. Below are a few suggestions that I would like to put forward as I feel that these changes would make life a lot easier for the next U13C Director.

- Halifax Hawks continue to have only one competitive B team.
- As a two-year trial, discontinue friend requests unless there is a real need.
- Open goalie registration 1 week early so that the Hawks can determine the number of teams based on the goalie pool.

- Communicate the number of teams for each AAA, AA, A and B for all levels on the registration page of the website so that parents can make informed decisions when registering their player especially now with fees increasing.
- Encourage all coaches to include players from higher divisions as on ice mentors for practices.
- Encourage our recreation teams to have on ice practices with higher division teams so that the players can learn what is needed in order to progress to these higher levels.

U15C

The Halifax Hawks U15 Recreation program had two teams in 2023-24 – the U15C Halifax Red Hawks and U15C Halifax White Hawks.

Teams: There were 13 players and 2 goalies = 15 on both the Halifax Red Hawks and Halifax White Hawks. Teams were formed through a two-session balancing process. 13 players were 1st year U15, and 13 were 2nd year (born 2009), so we expect half of the U15s to move to U18 next season.

Goaltenders: Goalies were all 1st year U15C, so we anticipate that we should have at least two goalies (pending results of tryouts) in 2024-25. Goalies from the previous year either made it to a competitive level or moved to U18, and one goalie (2009) took a year off the sport. I am not sure how many goalies are moving up from U13. I recommend analyzing registration numbers early and communicating with the U15 Competitive Director to ensure that there is sufficient goalie coverage for U15C.

Coaches and Team Staff: Thank you to all the amazing coaches this year. My recommendation for 2024-25 is to identify Head Coaches early, and get their assistance to recruit assistant coaches and communicate early and often to get volunteers for Team Manager, Safety and Dressing Room Monitor positions.

· U15C Halifax Red Hawks Head Coach for was Robert (Robb) Apold, who was awesomely assisted by BJ Murphy, and Andrew Sawecko, all experienced parent coaches. Manager Breena Dorey did a great job keeping this team organized and the coaches looked after the safety/dressing room monitor aspects.

· U15C Halifax White Hawks Head Coach for was Brant Kelly, who had strong assistance from Sarah Roberge, Simon Giguere, and Peter Downing, all experienced parent coaches and special thanks to Mya Sareen, a Dal student who was goalie coach. Manager Katherine Orlik contributed the right mix of organization and fun and was assisted by Alison Casey as Safety/Dressing Room Monitor and Kim Gerrior for Dressing Room duties.

Friend Requests: I recognize that one of the attractive aspects of recreational hockey is the ability to play with friends. I also recognize the value of meeting new friends through the sport of hockey and that having different friends in sport from your neighborhood friends can be very

beneficial to personal development, so I recommend that this be emphasized with player families. Families were able to submit two friend requests and the reason (e.g. carpooling need, previous teammates). We were able to configure the teams with at least one friend request per player for those who submitted by the first balancing session. The result, after considering balancing scores, a mix of 1st and 2nd-year U15 players, coaches players and friend requests, was that the Red Hawks had more 2nd year players than the White Hawks but also stepped up to integrate two new hockey players. Each had a mixture of players at each skill level.

Practices: Each team had one team full-ice practice, which seemed to work well for team development (Monday or Tuesday at 8pm) at Civic. Home game times were either 6 or 7pm at Centennial, with away games being played generally from Friday to Tuesday evenings and weekend days. I recommend as early as possible to set the practice times for teams and to communicate this to player families so that they can prioritize these times for hockey when scheduling other activities.

Games: I was unavailable to attend most of the games this season due to not having a player in the sport and conflicting activities, but the VP Recreation was able to go to several games (thank you!) to follow the season. I monitored the season more through game-day stats. There were some teams in our league who had a very different culture and approach to the Halifax Hawks, but I commend our coaches for encouraging the Hawks players to focus on fair play.

Results: The Halifax Red Hawks finished 1st in league play in the standings of the MMHL U15C Bronze Division and went on to win the championship game. The White Hawks developed well throughout the season, and finished 5th in the standings of the Bronze Division.

Other successes: The teams attended the following tournaments and had a good experience at each:

- U15C Red Hawks were successful at the Jan 19-21 Bridgetown Area U15 Tournament, run by the Western Valley MHA, taking home Silver medal for the U15C-Division.
- U15C Red Hawks were successful at the March 25 to April 7 Eastern Shore 26th Annual Invitational Tournament taking home the U15C Gold medal for the Hawks.
- U15C White Hawks participated in the Hockey Dieppe Memramcook tournament, Friday Feb 23-Sun Feb 25. They had a great time and recommended the Wingate by Wyndham Dieppe Moncton as it is near the Uniplex and an outdoor municipal skating rink is next to the hotel.

Wishing the new U15 Recreation Director all the best for 2024-25 and will make myself available to hand over the role in June.

U18C

We had 68 skaters and 5 goalies register with the Hawks to play U18C hockey this year.

We decided to split the players into 4 teams and that left a concern of what to do with the extra goalie. In the end we decided on the fairest approach for all and that was to have the 5th goalie play every team's 5th game. We developed his schedule very early on and it ran very smoothly. Thank you to the coaches for accepting this proposal and making it work.

Once again, we offered players the opportunity to "scrimmage" before the evaluation sessions. It was well received and the 20 players that attended enjoyed it. 2 coaches refereed the game.

Then we were able to hold four evaluation sessions which consisted of a 50 minute scrimmage. No drills, just drop the puck and play. This was very well received by the players.

Following the evaluations the 4 coaches and myself held a meeting to select teams based on friend requests and evaluation scores.

After the first round of 20 games 5 points separated the 4 Halifax teams in the standings.

2 Hawks teams made the final round with both losing in the semis.

Challenges

There were a number of instances across the whole U18C league of trash talking opponents and disrespecting referees. We tried on a number of occasions to address this, but with limited luck. Going forward I feel the coaches need to address this early and take action so it does not get out of hand.

The schedule was posted very late by the MMHL. Some teams only had a couple of days notice at the start of the regular season and playoffs.

Recommendations

It is recommended that U18C players have access to ice times at the same time or very shortly after competitive tryouts start.

Friend requests, regardless of how it affects balancing, needs to be taken seriously or kids will drop out. Too much time was spent addressing the balancing issue, when in the end it all worked out.

Several teams asked for some practice ice early in the season. I recommend 2 hours for each team be considered.

I heard that there were many hours where ice was not used, yet paid for by the Hawks. Perhaps a system or not can be circulated with free available ice.

I will be stepping down from this role in 2024. Thank you to the coaches, Halifax Hawks and the players for their support throughout.

