

MID-SEASON UP-DATE – 02 December 2011

It seems like tryouts were only yesterday but the seven North Central Predator teams are at the midway point in our season in the Eastern AAA League. This is often a challenging time for our coaches and teams as they begin to reflect on their performance in the first half of the season and determine what they can do to increase their competitive edge against the other teams of our league. It can also be a tough time for our younger players as they become acclimatized to AAA hockey and all that it has to offer. Many see only the positive: The speed of the game, the elevation of play, the highly ranked competitors and the pride of knowing that they are competing against the very best. Others seem overcome by challenges: Decreased points per game, greater obstacles to winning, less time and less space, a transition to special teams or a recognition that it can be very difficult to succeed (individually and collectively) at this level. Truly, AAA hockey poses different challenges than hometown hockey! For our veteran parents and players, as well as the new Predators, I would like to take this mid-point of the season to reflect on the progression of our teams.

Within the ETA, the NCOHA Predators are a relatively small organization in that they recruit from a comparatively small population base. So too, the organization faces challenges of geography and infrastructure that other centres do not. However, it has been our goal to move the organization forward over the past couple years and, while there are several measurements of this progression, I thought I would focus on the measurement most discussed rink-side: Our collective wins and losses. While in our striving to improve, we (coaches, parents, fans, and players) often pass over the achievements and focus on the pitfalls, our teams have improved in the last couple years and have been producing very well in 2011-12. At midway through the season, the seven teams from Major Atom to Minor Midget have produced 30 points more than at this point last year. Also, the organization has increased its Goals For and decreased its Goals Against dramatically. This is another indicator that the organization, and its individual teams, are becoming much more competitive in the ETA.

Until this year, Major Atom was our entry year and this has been a tough one for coaches, players and parents alike, as hometown players attempt to jump into the AAA game. This year Head Coach Kevin Russell and his team currently sit in a play-off spot with a .500 record. Great team-building exercises and aggressive and all-round good play have led to success.

In Minor Peewee, Head Coach Ed Smith has his team competing hard and currently sits in second place with 22 points, with a huge win streak under their belt. This is a dramatic achievement for a team that Ed took on last year. In Minor Bantam, the team got off to a slow start before turning it around and battled back to .500. As the Head Coach, I am specifically happy with the increase in GF and a decrease in GA. In Minor Midget the (organization's flagship team due to the draft year), Head Coach Murray Clark is headed into the Midget Showcase coming off a big tie against Barrie and a record just below .500 – a dramatic improvement on last year. And no, not all teams are doing as well as they would like. Some have been fraught with injuries (and a few suspensions) which have hampered the team in the first half. That is a reality of highly competitive sport but with realistic goal-setting and hard work all our teams can advance toward the objectives set at the start of the year.

As hockey fans we must also recognize that success is not always measured in wins and losses. The Predators offer our young players a chance to compete at the highest level that Hockey Canada and the Ontario Hockey Federation provide. While skating in these practices and playing in these games our young players have already made huge advances in the mental and physical aspects of the game we love.

Thanks to our players, coaches, parents, and volunteers who make this a reality for these young players. Enjoy the holiday season and the second half of the hockey year.

Yours in hockey,

Pat Morris

Vice-President

NCOHA Predators