

Before You Decide to Become a Referee

Officiating ice hockey can be a very rewarding experience, but it is far more than acquiring the necessary equipment, attending a seminar, and taking a test. It is a physically, mentally, and emotionally challenging activity. Officiating requires an intense focus on the tiniest of details, a tenacious work ethic, and most importantly, a willingness to learn and an outstanding attitude. A good official learns to be a good manager of people, of emotions, of expectations, and of behavior. They are open to giving and receiving criticism, and they become effective communicators of fact. They are not arbitrary evaluators of subjective situations; they apply the rules of the game after they have carefully studied the appropriate manuals, rulebook(s) and casebook(s).

Most good officials will tell you they learn a tremendous amount every time they take to the ice, and that they have become a stronger official through decades of hard work (not weeks or months). They will tell you they had to work for many years to “stand out” from the crowd, they had to “work their way up”, and they spent many years working the 5:00am mini-mite games on Saturday and Sunday mornings. No one starts out working at the highest (or even the moderate) levels of hockey in any area and it can take years to achieve one’s first higher level assignment.

Anyone can become a certified USA Hockey referee, but no one is entitled to a certain number of game assignments. There is competition for game assignments. Before you invest in the registration and equipment necessary to work games, understand GIHOA typically sees an influx of more than fifty new first year officials all at the same time. Because two new officials will not be scheduled to work a game together, and because there is a finite number of games that are appropriate for new or newer officials to work, it might be some time before you see your first game assignment. You might work 6 to 8 games your first season, and it might take you a couple seasons to recover your initial investment in registration, equipment and uniforms. GIHOA recommends that potential officials not purchase any gear or register with USA Hockey until after they have attended a seminar.

Your social, family, professional, and playing schedules are to effect when GIHOA is able to assign you. Unless your schedule allows you to make yourself completely available for the opportunities that might come your way, it is likely it may take a while to be assigned once you are fully registered.

For example, most officials who play travel hockey find their schedule and commitment to playing makes it difficult to get scheduled. We encourage young players (18 & under) to focus their energies on playing as for most there is a small window of opportunity to play competitively while officiating opportunities will be there for years after their playing “career” has ended.

Be mindful it is GIHOA’s scheduling policy to assign the best possible officials to games and provide the highest caliber officiating to GIHOA’s customers (the players, parents and leagues) and not to “fit everyone in”. Understand playoff time is no time to “break in” a new official. Just because it has become possible, based on your schedule, or convenient for a new official to be assigned games, mid to late February see few opportunities for new or newer officials. Mid to late season and playoff time is “crunch time” for players and officials, with our performance “under the microscope” it does not lend itself to be a time to break in, coach and mentor new officials.

Most importantly, it is not in anyone’s best interest to place an official into an assignment that is above his or her skill level. Doing so would not be fair to our great game, GIHOA’s customers, the players and its officials. Advancement comes with years of assignments, evaluations, opportunities to improve and seasons of experience.

GIHOA and its members truly welcome new talent into its ranks, but want everyone to understand these new officials undertake the obligations of officiating with an understanding that working a set number of games or getting game assignments is not a guarantee. It is a privilege to be assigned the opportunity to learn and to perfect your skills, not an entitlement.

For the Board

Richard Kuerston
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