

Import Question Hot OJHL Issue

Future Of Junior Vees Discussed At League Meet

Importation, a touchy subject in amateur hockey circles at the best of times, proved highly volatile fuel for heated debate at the annual general meeting of the Okanagan-Mainline Junior "A" Hockey League executive held here Monday.

Questions and answers, accusations and opinions were flung freely about the conference table as members of the league executive sought to find common ground on which to shape a definite policy for the future re the importing of junior hockey players.

Such was not the case. No happy medium was reached nor no ready solution discovered so the question was tabled for a clear-cut decision to a special meeting of the OJHL to be held here June 9. In the interim each team in the league, Vernon, Kamloops, Kelowna and Penticton will focus individual attention on the matter.

Another unresolved problem that came up at the league meeting Monday was the future status of Penticton, the weak link in the four-team junior chain. Saddled with a \$589 debt of which \$168 is owed to the league, the Junior Vee club is faced with extinction unless something is done to revive junior hockey interest in the South Okanagan city.

To complicate matters a request by wire was received at the meeting from Quesnel and Williams Lake junior clubs to join the OJHL on a full time or interlocking basis. Like importation these requests, along with Penticton's future, await the June 9 showdown.

New President

The meeting Monday saw a switch of executive heads



LEN MILLER
... new OJHL president

with Len Miller of Vernon succeeding Donald White of Kelowna as president of the junior hockey loop. Bill Schall of Kamloops was named first vice-president and Blair Peters of Kelowna, last season's referee-in-chief, second vice-president.

It was retiring president White's parting words to the league that sparked the hot controversy over importation. Embodied in a list of recommendations he put forth was one urging the introduction of importation by the OJHL in order to raise the calibre of hockey here.

"We'll never be able to ice competitive teams in the Memorial Cup playoffs unless we improve the calibre of

hockey here," he said. "And the only feasible answer is importation. I don't think we can build it up on our own. We must be realistic."

Reaction was mixed but in the main strongly against his proposal as these quotes reveal:

Ken Stewart, coach of the Kamloops Rockets: "If we start importing players the league will be finished in two years."

Bill Brown, Vernon delegate and OJHL past president: "Importing will ruin the league. I'd like to see it forgotten about entirely. What is more important, competing for the Memorial Cup or giving local boys a chance to play junior hockey?"

Tom Wilson, Penticton delegate: "Penticton is strictly out to develop its own hockey players."

Carl Sorensen, Vernon delegate: "If importing is allowed how will the weaker clubs be able to survive. The practice would eliminate one and possibly two teams from the league."

Bob Giordano, manager of the Kelowna Buckaroos: "The only adequate way it could work was if sponsor clubs supported the imports."

What Is Import?

With the consensus indicating no importation under any circumstances the next and obvious question arising was: What is an import?

Here the discussion bogged down in a mire of conflicting opinions plus accusations and counter-accusations concerning a number of "questionable" players in the league last season. It was then that elected president Len Miller exercised his new authority by reprimanding members of the executive for their petty bickering.

"Forget about what happened in the league last year and start thinking about the future. Let's put the league platform on a higher level than we have. If you don't have a good league how are you going to get good teams for it?"

The debate ended with each club agreeing to consider the matter of imports and table their recommendations to the special June 9 meeting.

Earlier in the meeting Penticton's plight was examined and possible solutions to it offered.

The Junior Vee club came to the meeting, delegate Roy Blanchard admitted, with "nothing but its liabilities" and no ways and means of eliminating them.

Sponsorship Answer

Sponsorship was the most concrete answer suggested to relieve their seemingly hopeless position. Bob Giordano told the Vee delegates to contact San Francisco Seals of the Western Hockey League and see about setting up a liaison similar to those between Portland and Kelowna, Los Angeles and Vernon, Seattle and Kamloops.

Wilson and Blanchard agreed to look into the matter before the June 9 meeting which was called for the specific view of clarifying Penticton's position and its progress. President Miller had originally suggested a date in August but Bob Giordano claimed the executive had to know the Vees' position before then and act right away.

Other recommendations made by White in his retiring report to the league were: the raising of OJHL entrance fees from \$100 to \$250; all back fees owing to be paid before each forthcoming season; hockey players be placed under stricter discipline off the ice and enforced by the league.

The junior all-star team, the league's most valuable player, and the top goaltender will be released shortly, it was announced at the meeting.

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