

Caledon a hockey hotbed

The Caledon Minor Hockey Association continued to soar in the 2017-18 season, remaining one of the most popular locales in Ontario for kid's hockey.

The community is one of just over a dozen communities across Ontario to have reached the 1,000 registered minor hockey player mark last season, according to a release from the Ontario Minor Hockey Association last week.

Topping out at a registered number of 1,073, Caledon landed thirteenth in the province. There are a total of 223 member associations across Ontario.

Among those numbers, Caledon saw some of its most exponential growth at the introductory levels of the game: Initiation (5-6 years old), Tyke (7-years old) and Novice (8-years old) saw a combined growth of one-percent in the province, with Caledon coming closer to the 2-percent mark, while the Initiation stage saw a whopping 35-percent increase in registration.

"We are already seeing the benefits of scaling the game at the introductory age groups of our sport, which allows young players the opportunity for more puck-touches, promotes greater skill development and increased engagement," said OMHA Executive Director Ian Taylor in the release.

"With more options today than ever before, we hope to continue to make hockey the sport of choice for families in Ontario and ensure kids get the most out of the game, both on and off the ice."

In March, the OMHA, in partnership with Hockey Canada and the Ontario Hockey Federation, formally announced a transformation in programming, which includes the implementation of a cross/half-ice game rollout through to the 2019-20 season for Novice and below players.

"We want to give the right start to our beginner or introductory hockey players in terms of the ability to enjoy the game," said Taylor. "If they learn skills, if they have some success, if they improve, they're going to be engaged, they're going to enjoy the sport and they're going to keep playing the sport. I think that's really the foundation of all other hockey. This is our starting point."

As of last season, only the Initiation group saw half-ice play. This season the program will be rolled out to also include the Tyke Level, while in 2019-20 Novice players will play with a half-ice, full-ice hybrid.

The OMHA also launched its first-ever marketing campaign across the province in the spring, focusing on building character for young players through its Long-Term People Development campaign.

Playing on an acronym common to many amateur sports "Long-Term Player Development" the campaign accentuated the fact that there are "enduring life values to be learned through Canada's game."

Brampton's registration total remained close to the top of the leaderboard in 2017-18, landing fourth in Ontario at just a hair under 2,000 registrations, while Oakville's total of just over 3,500 meant it remained the busiest in the province.

The Caledon Minor Hockey Association is still looking for head coaches in a number of house league divisions for the 2018-19 season, including Hockey School, Mite, Tyke, Novice, Atom, PeeWee, Bantam, and Midget.

Interested candidates can contact the VP of House League, Doug Bennett, at vphl@caledonminorhockey.ca.