

## **OMHA announces non-body checking option for players]**

**By Brian Lockhart**

The Ontario Minor Hockey Association has announced plans to revise its body-checking policy and will offer non-contact hockey to players U14 and older at the rep level.

?The OMHA continues to review, assess, and implement programming and programming models in order to meet he ongoing needs of our hockey families,? the OMHA said in a statement.

There has been an increase in interest for leagues that provide a non-body checking type of play. Currently, body checking is not permitted at any age division of recreation hockey, including house league, local league and minor development.

Body checking is introduced at the U14 rep level.

The demand to provide a non-body checking style of play at the rep level allows a player to continue to play in a non-body checking environment and still have access to rep hockey and to continue to play at a level according to their ability.

The size difference in players, previous injuries, and personal preference have all been raised as reasons to have this option available. In addition, this supports players at the recreational level, where players returning from rep hockey may create a skill gap that results in a lack of enjoyment for players.

The OMHA Representative Committee brought forward the recommendation that was presented and approved by the OMHA board of directors to implement non-body checking hockey for U14 and above, classified as BB, beginning in the 2023-2024 season.

?The priorities of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association remain dedicated to player safety, providing young athletes with the opportunity to best develop and acquire skills, and keeping as many players playing the game as possible. We believe this new opportunity will satisfy all of the elements,? the OMHA said.

To support the implementation of the initiative, BB will be the only rep category with no body checking permitted. Associations are not required to provide a base category team to be able to offer BB non-body checking entry. Player movement to access non-body checking hockey is not permitted.

Current BB teams will have several options to proceed.

They can recategorize to the C category, including body checking at U14 and older. Enter as a second A team. Maintain BB designations without body checking. Associations must provide a second entry according to regulations.

Education on the skill of checking will remain a priority focusing on the four-step checking progression, which begins the first time a young player steps on the ice.

This progression emphasizes the practice of positioning, angling, and stick checks, followed by contact confidence and body contact, which are taught at the later stages of player development.