

That's it for Junior A hockey: League calls it quits for season

By Brian Lockhart

The Ontario Junior Hockey League has formally announced the cancellation of the 2020/21 season.

It's not like the League had a real season to begin with.

Only six OJHL clubs have played in 58 exhibition games this season. Regional Public Health Unit regulations made it next to impossible to get any real games going around the province.

In August 2020, the OJHL developed a comprehensive "Return to the Rink" procedural plan with strict protocols which were presented and approved by the OHF for Junior hockey to be used in each of the leagues under the OHA.

These protocols have been followed for all of the exhibition play within the association that have taken place this season with the safety of all those who were able to participate taken very seriously.

Although a significant amount of diligent planning, preparation and consultation with relevant medical professionals has taken place to date, the current Stay at Home order, due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation, has resulted in additional operational challenges for the league to undertake a successful season for all of its teams. That includes some municipalities moving to remove ice in their facilities with the announcement of the recent Provincial COVID-19 restrictions.

"Week after week, the OJHL has adjusted the League plan with the goal of getting any type of possible season in for our players," said OJHL Commissioner Marty Savoy. "With Ontario currently in a 28-day stay-at-home order and the end of the Hockey Canada season fast approaching, the League's Board of Governors have made the very difficult decision to officially conclude the 2020/21 OJHL season and turn our attention and planning for the upcoming 2021/22 season. While this past year has been difficult for everyone, our immediate focus is to lean in to our 2021/22 planning with a continued focus on health and safety, along with exciting operation enhancements we have been working towards for our League, which we will have details on soon."

While the season is being concluded, the league also announced that once the current "Stay at Home" orders are lifted, teams which are permitted to play and able to do so within their respective Regional Health Unit, will be allowed to conduct exhibition play together with the continued approval process the league has implemented along with its strict COVID-19 operating protocols.

"The OJHL has studied every possible scenario to get our players back on the ice and unfortunately with the current state of the pandemic and provincial guidelines, we are unable to conduct the 2020/21 season," stated OJHL Chairman Marc Mercier. "As a Governor of a team within the League, I realize the disappointment and impact this decision has on our players. The League will continue to look at other possible programming for our teams and players, however the official 2020/21 season has been concluded and all of our attention has been set upon a safe and exciting upcoming season."