

## To be 'Stronger' sometimes you have to change

**By Robert Belardi**

If someone asked you what would September 2021 hold, many citizens might have a puzzled reaction and a very unsure response.

But in an ideal world, and especially for families with an interest in hockey, Executive Director of the Ontario Minor Hockey Association Ian Taylor most definitely has an idea.

'We're trying to see some light at the end of the tunnel for September. Kids will be back at school. Kids will be back on the ice. I hope all the summer sports get to have some sort of season because they've been hit twice,' Taylor said.

In a period where many have counted their losses and tried to look forward, OMHA introduced a movement they call 'Stronger.'

Before the pandemic, Taylor said registrations had seen a lot of children sign up and a lot of them drop out. He recognizes there are a lot of options children have now in society and hockey might not be the first choice for everyone.

'Then we go through the year we've had and the kids that did sign up didn't get to play a whole lot. There were restrictions on numbers. There were shutdowns and lockdowns. The second part of this is basically saying we're here and we'll be here. We want you to come back.'

The OMHA have tried to find ways to make it easier for children to get on the ice. They've provided equipment to certain organizations but, above all, the OMHA understands the mental disparity that speaks loudly to the adverse effects the pandemic has had.

'This is a campaign, a registration campaign. For the first time ever, we realize people won't just sign up and [we need to] sell our game a little bit.'

To do so, the OMHA highlights that hockey provides more than just fun on the ice or, in this case, a mental stress-reliever. The benefits of playing the sport stem farther out to also being involved in the community and learning life skills that will remain forever as a young child continues to grow.

Certain organizations are trying to introduce pricing packages to limit the costs incurred with registering your child to play the sport. Taylor is also trying to reach out to new Canadians to enroll their children not just for a chance to play hockey but also for new Canadians to feel welcome in communities and make friends.

'If hockey is part of our culture, then come into our culture. That's the open-door approach that we want to have,' Taylor said.

To learn more information for this upcoming winter, contact your local minor hockey association for more details.