

## **WMHA JOINT VENTURE WITH KMHA AND OHL KITCHENER RANGERS**

### **Table of Contents**

- History and Rationale
  - Residency Rules
- The Joint Venture
  - Key objectives
  - WMHA's position during negotiations
  - Other considerations
  - Terms of Agreement...
  - Advantages of the Joint Venture
  - Answers to objections to the Joint Venture
- Frequently Asked Questions

### ***History and Rationale***

#### **Residency Rules**

Unlike many minor sports, hockey in Canada is governed by residency rules. Essentially, a minor hockey player is required to play where he lives, although there are some exceptions in each provincial jurisdiction. In much of Ontario that is governed by the Ontario Hockey Federation which has about 200,000 playing members, there are AAA zones. What this really means is that every player has an opportunity to play the AAA minor hockey not too far from where he lives.

In areas like Waterloo where there is a sizeable urban population, the geographical size of the zone is small. Our zone includes several outlying communities including Woolwich Township, Elora, Fergus, Wellesley, St. Clements, Drayton, New Hamburg and Tavistock. Even with all of those centres involved, of the 2,100 players in our system, this year there are 38 players from the zone. This system has worked well. Waterloo has operated the zone since 1993. Without it, our better players would have to travel elsewhere for AAA hockey, as we would be classified as a AA centre.

More recently, Hockey Canada has received many complaints that the residency rules restrict player movement. This is true, however, there is a benefit: even the best minor-aged players can still play arguably good hockey without having to move away from home.

But, the pressure to open up boundaries and free player movement has increased. It is likely that within the next few years, we will see far less restrictions. If that happens, the best players – and this is only about the elite level participant – will have more options as to where he plays. If that happens, zones and centres that have been able to survive solely because the players were "captive" will have a

far more difficult time keeping their better players at home. While WMHA is proud of its accomplishments and (we believe) has very few players who may want to leave, it is highly unlikely that we will be completely immune to the cache of Toronto teams that will make all sorts of promises that we will not be able to compete with.

**What we will need to offer is high quality hockey programs so that our local players and those from our zone will want to stay at home and not leave.**

If the better players leave, our teams will be weakened. If the player drain continues, the spiral will continue. And the Waterloo players will have to be replaced with more players from beyond our zone. Regardless, our teams will become less competitive over time. The net result would ultimately lead to the survival of only the fittest and Waterloo and Kitchener could quite possibly be casualties given our close proximity to the GTA.

**And this is why WMHA wants to do whatever it can to stay ahead of what is coming so that it can keep the best local players at home in a strong and viable hockey program. We need a strong program or the best players will leave.** And that will result in the loss of Waterloo's heritage and identity at the Rep level of play.

### ***The Joint Venture***

This past June, we were approached by the OHL Kitchener Rangers, and were asked to consider the possibility of the Rangers providing coaching expertise and mentorship to the community, which would require joining forces with KMHA to put together four local, K-W AAA teams. While the idea was very intriguing in light of the above, we were very concerned about a loss of control, but even more about a loss of the Waterloo Wolves identity that we have worked hard to develop and sustain since 2002.

The original plan would have had 13 to 17 year-old Waterloo players wearing Rangers colours but under a K-W banner. While we don't necessarily all bleed black and gold, the loss of identity was too much for us to take. After further discussions, we were able to convince the Rangers and KMHA of the benefits of having two Rangers teams in Kitchener and two Wolves teams in Waterloo. And that brings us to today.

The joint venture is fairly simple. The 13 year-old and 15 year-old divisions will play out of Kitchener wearing Rangers colours and insignia with complimentary Wolves crests on the shoulders. The 14 year-old and 16 / 17 year-old teams will play out of Waterloo wearing Wolves colours and insignia with complimentary Rangers crests on the shoulders. The OHL Rangers will provide considerable support both on and off the ice and will be involved in coach recruiting, selection

and mentorship, something that we need assistance with. There will be no change at all to the divisions of Peewee (12 year-old players) and younger and there is no interest in changing anything for those divisions.

### **Key objectives**

The joint venture's key objectives are:

1. Raise the level of talent and competitiveness of the players at the AAA level for Minor Bantam and older, thereby inviting opportunities to excel with like-talented peers
2. Provide a consistent player development program at the senior AAA level
3. Provide a consistent coaching methodology for our senior rep program

### **WMHA's position during initial discussions**

There were three key requirements that we needed to be satisfied before we would participate in any discussions:

1. Waterloo Wolves heritage would have be respected
  - Wolves jerseys and Waterloo colours would be used at Bantam and Midget
2. Strong program administration in which Waterloo would be fairly represented
  - 'Management Committee' to include two WMHA, two KMHA, and two Rangers representatives plus a chairperson
  - Coach selection would be vetted through this group
  - 'Closed Zone'
3. Minor Hockey principles would apply
  - All HC, OHF, ALLIANCE goals should be upheld

### **Other considerations**

1. Maintain participation during coach selection
2. Try to maintain the total number of players at rep levels of hockey

### **Terms of Agreement...**

1. Teams
  - Minor Bantam 'K-W AAA Rangers'
  - Major Bantam 'K-W AAA Wolves'
  - Minor Midget 'K-W AAA Rangers'
  - Major Midget 'K-W AAA Wolves'

Rangers play in Blue, Red, White w/Wolves shoulder crest  
Wolves play in Black, Gold w/Rangers shoulder crest  
Closed Zone status – no waived players from outside of Kitchener AAA  
centre or Waterloo AAA zone

2. Management, Oversight
  - Management Committee
    - 2 from WMHA
    - 2 from KMHA
    - 2 from OHL Rangers, plus
    - 1 'AAA General Manager' reporting to the K-W AAA Management Committee
    - Alternate representatives to be named as well
  - Will operate under similar manner as WMHA Rep Committee
  - Integrated 'K-W AAA Manual of Operations' to be jointly developed, based on existing documents and philosophies
3. Coach Selection & Approval
  - Rangers name short-list
  - WMHA, KMHA provide input, approval
  - Recommendations for all four coaching staffs will be brought to WMHA (and KMHA) board for approval
  - Coaches register/roster with the appropriate organization
4. Player Selection
  - Coaches select the teams from eligible players in the Waterloo AAA Zone and Kitchener
  - Players from outside of the Waterloo AAA Zone and Kitchener are not eligible
  - No minimum quota from Waterloo AAA Zone or Kitchener
  - Players roster with the appropriate association
  - Local advertising policies for tryouts TBD
5. Player / Parent Concerns
  - Handled through the coaching staff then to the KW AAA General Manager then to the KW AAA Management Committee and then to the respective Association's Rep Committee, based on Integrated Rep Manual
6. Player movement (by age)
  - To be determined within the development of the Integrated Rep Manual
  - Note: Current KMHA policy similar to WMHA

7. Player affiliation (AP)
  - Details will be outlined within Integrated Rep Manual
  - ALLIANCE policy required to permit affiliation across centres
  - Note: ALLIANCE has already started this review and created a draft
8. Player fees
  - WMHA, KMHA Treasurers to meet to arrive at an integrated rep fee schedule that is fair to both organizations
  - OHL Rangers will provide additional sponsorship funding (total \$80,000 per year), which may be used to allay team expenses
9. Team Management, Budgets
  - Teams to organize as they do now (Midget Operating Committee is a great example, and could be used as template for Minor Midget)
  - Teams to develop budgets, and approved by KW AAA Management Committee
  - Budget surpluses (if any) to remain with team for future use
  - Signing authority for team expenditures TBD
10. Length of Agreement
  - Nine years
  - During first 5 years, agreement may be terminated upon unanimous vote by K-W AAA Management Committee,
  - Subsequent 4 years, agreement may be terminated upon majority vote within K-W AAA Management Committee
11. Other items
  - Tournaments – limit to 5, including mandatory participation in home tournaments
  - Tryouts to be held according to OHF directives
  - WMHA to assist KMHA with zone player tryout logistics
  - Spring tryouts (as mandated by OHF)
  - Tryout fees to be discussed by Association Treasurers
  - Junior development fees to be split by associations
  - Coach remuneration to be limited to expenses only
12. Items to be considered outside of this agreement
  - 'Trickle-down' effect
    - Considering reclassification of MD teams to A at Minor Bantam, Bantam and Minor Midget
    - Considering additional MD team at Minor Bantam, Bantam and Minor Midget in conjunction with reclassification
    - Additional teams may risk 'dilution of talent', resulting in weakened MD teams

## **Advantages of the Joint Venture**

### **1) Keeping local kids, local**

- The main goal is to design an elite hockey program that, as new regulations come about that might attract local players to more distant programs, will act as an superior alternative for our players in Kitchener and the Waterloo Zone.

### **2) Advanced coach mentorship and development**

- In addition to the existing Rep Teams Coach Mentorship program, the Kitchener Rangers will be heavily involved in the development and mentorship of the coaches within this joint venture. By developing and teaching a consistent, progressive program, coaches will be able to learn and implement more advanced systems and tactics for their personal arsenal.

### **3) Potential for recruitment of a more talented coaching pool**

- Given the above, more accomplished coaches who may not have applied in the past may now apply. This will only help with the quality of player development.

### **4) Increased access to elite players**

- This joint venture will allow us to increase the number of higher-level players attending tryouts by adding Kitchener players to the pool. Of course, Kitchener can say the same thing (and that's what makes this joint venture mutually beneficial).

### **5) Increased sponsorship for senior AAA teams**

- The Rangers sponsorship funds will allow the teams to produce a more comprehensive program for the team and its players. This should provide for a more rounded player experience during the season.

## ***Frequently Asked Questions***

The general topics of this document are:

[The agreement – general](#)

[Coach Selection](#)

[Player Selection](#)

[‘Trickle-down effect’](#)

[Rep teams and leagues](#)

[Rangers Sponsorship](#)

### **The agreement - general**

#### **Q - The purpose of this joint venture?**

A – WMHA, in collaboration with Kitchener Minor Hockey and the Kitchener Rangers is building a program for the elite hockey players of our community in order to provide competitive teams when compared with other provincial and national hockey programs. The key objectives of the joint venture are:

- raise the level of individual player ability and local team competitiveness at the AAA divisions from Minor Bantam to Midget, thereby inviting opportunities to excel with like-talented peers
- provide a consistent player development program at the senior AAA divisions
- provide a consistent coaching methodology for our senior AAA program
- control the destiny of local teams for local players should the Hockey Canada residency rules be relaxed

#### **Q - What are the expected benefits of this AAA change to WMHA?**

A – The benefits to WMHA include:

- Advanced coach mentorship and development
- Potential for recruitment of higher level coaches
- Increased access to elite players (but only from Kitchener)
- Increased sponsorship funding for senior AAA teams
- Overall, a first-class coach and player development program

#### **Q - Is this the start of an overall blended K-W MHA for all AAA divisions?**

A – No.

#### **Q - Have joint ventures with any other minor hockey associations or the extension to other divisions and categories been considered?**

A – No. No other minor associations were considered, nor were any other parts of our programs considered for integration.

#### **Q - Are there any plans to pursue a non-contact competitive league as part of these changes?**

A – This joint venture’s scope was specific to senior AAA.

#### **Q - How long has this been under consideration?**

A – WMHA has been monitoring Hockey Canada and OHF’s pursuit of higher level competition and residency for quite some time. We have been considering this joint venture since early 2010.

**Q - Why was their no information sessions held for interested parents and players prior to the press release?**

A – We have always planned to provide information to our membership, but the normal order of information release is to provide a single general release of information (the press release), and then details follow. If this were to be reversed, then the first bit of information becomes the press release.

**Q - Would we not be better off to provide funding to allow more children who are not able to afford equipment to enjoy the game?**

A – WMHA and the City of Waterloo already provide for funding for those who cannot afford the base registration fees for minor hockey. Further, WMHA also has separate plans and funding for further aid to those needing it.

**Q – Does WMHA’s constitution support such a joint venture? Does Alliance Hockey’s constitution allow for such an agreement?**

A –There is nothing in the Constitution that prevents it. And arguably, we have not lived up to our Constitution’s objectives to provide our best players access to the best hockey.

There is nothing in the WMHA constitution that prevents us from entering into a joint venture or arranging partnerships especially if such joint ventures or partnerships jibe with our mission statement. The link to our constitution is below.

<http://waterloominorhockey.com/Public/Documents/Constitutional%20By-Law.pdf>

**Article 3(a)(2) refers to the development of teams with a high level of competency. That is what the joint venture will do. And given our past history of not competing at the highest level of competitive minor hockey in Ontario, the time is now to work harder to succeed provincially.**

Thinking critically, we have for some time dropped the ball with this part of our objectives, but we can do only so much with a limited supply of high level coaches and players. Waterloo has not won a provincial championship other than at Midget since 2003. Our neighbours from Kitchener have not done any better.

Alliance Hockey’s constitution does not have specifics to deal with Association programming, amalgamation of centres, teams, etc.

**Q - Are the Kitchener Rangers taking over AAA Hockey?**

A – No. The Rangers have simply offered to provide coaching expertise and mentorship, and sponsorship funding for AAA hockey at the senior divisions for teams in the Waterloo zone and Kitchener.

## **Coach Selection**

**Q - Will the Rangers really pick the coaches and the players?**

A – The Rangers will direct coach selection, but WMHA will still need to approve the selections. It is then the coaches’ responsibility to select the players.

**Q - How will the coaches for these AAA teams be selected?**

A – The process for selecting coaches will be:  
- Applications will be submitted by potential coaches



- Rangers will review the applications, and present their 'short-list' of applicants to the K-W AAA Management Committee (which is equally comprised of WMHA, KMHA, and Rangers representatives)
- Rangers will then recommend the successful applicants
- As per the respective constitutions, WMHA and KMHA Boards of Directors will need to approve of the selections.

**Q - Will these AAA coaches be paid positions? If yes, where will this money come from?**

A – Coaches will continue to be unpaid, volunteer positions. They will be reimbursed for reasonable travel costs and expenses to run their teams.

## **Player Selection**

**Q – Who is eligible to try out for the four teams?**

A – Only players from Kitchener and the existing Waterloo Zone are eligible to try out.

**Q - How will players be selected?**

A – Players will continue to be selected by coaches and their staffs during regular tryouts in April (Major Midget tryouts will take place in September as usual). The timing has changed due to OHF directives.

**Q – How will tryouts be run for player selection? One camp, multiple camps, draft, etc?**

A – Since the timing of tryouts has moved to April (except for Major Midget), there is no time or need for 'mini-camps'. We will schedule time for five tryout sessions in April. Tryouts cannot begin until OHF championships have been completed.

Those released during these tryouts will have the option to try out for other AAA centres, and/or wait for Seeded (AA/A) tryouts in September.

**Q - Is there a planned distribution of players based on a quota?**

A – There will be no minimum/maximum player distribution from any centre. K-W AAA will pick the best 17 – 20 players available.

**Q - Will the same selection process be used at all Rep levels?**

A – As per OHF directive, WMHA will hold AAA tryouts for Minor Atom to Major Peewee in the same manner and timing. Tryouts at Seeded (AA/A) and MD will be held in September in the normal manner.

**Q – How will this system allow for the opportunity for 'late-bloomers' to make these squads.**

A - A coach picks the best players that are available at that time. In fact, in many cases at the Major Midget age, the 'late-bloomer' makes a team because other spots are vacant for other reasons. A late-bloomer will still make a team when they earn it.

**Q - Can the Rangers place their draft picks on our AAA teams?**

A – No. These players must return to their home AAA centres or junior teams, unless the player is local.

## **'Trickle-down effect'**

### **Q - What is the thinking around the number of present AAA individuals who will now be pushed down into the AA/A system?**

A – There is no doubt that the joint venture will lead to a loss of roster positions for some Waterloo and Waterloo Zone players at the AAA level. The Waterloo AAA zone is about 60% larger than the Kitchener zone. Using averages, it is likely that there will be about seven less positions per team available to Waterloo players than in the past. However, some of the released players will be able to play elsewhere and/or will return to their home centres (i.e. Woolwich, St. Clements, etc. as noted above). By the time the four senior AAA teams are selected, on average, five players per division who played AAA last year could be playing AA in Waterloo. It might be less, but not likely much more.

Without adding new teams, there will be some "trickle-down" and some players, separate from the usual annual turnover, will leave our rep system and enter our Rec program. There has been no guarantee, and there still is no guarantee of 'once a rep player, always a rep player'. That is sad but that is the reality. If possible, it is our goal to reduce the impact of the "trickle-down", but if only five players per division are involved, it will be difficult.

### **Q - Can a long-time AA/A player who does not make the team at their home centre, be released to play somewhere else?**

A – No. This is not allowed based on the current regulations.

### **Q – How does a player being released to a lower level of hockey aid in his development?**

A – Players will develop better when they play at the level most suited to their ability.

## **Rep Teams and Leagues**

### **Q - Will there be additional A/AA or MD teams created in Kitchener or Waterloo to accommodate the players who did not make the AAA level?**

A – The WMHA Rep Committee is researching this option. This will be based on the numbers at each respective age group who will be trying out at the Seeded and MD level.

### **Q - What decision criteria will be used to identify when it is time to change the number of teams at the A/AA or MD levels?**

A – Similar to what has been done in the past at some senior MD levels, the WMHA Rep Committee will consider the following:

- The historic level of registrations for that age group
- The number of Waterloo players released from AAA
- The number of zone players released from AAA
- The number of Waterloo and zone players who are waived and do not return for Seeded tryouts
- The estimated number of players who will try out at Seeded and MD.

### **Q - What changes will be made to the zones?**

A – There are no planned changes to the size of AAA Zones at this time.

**Q - Why replace two teams, why not have it be an elite team that the players must apply for? Waterloo Regional team?**

A – Players can be registered for only one team. Further, there is no league for a regional team made up of ‘all-stars’ from different centres.

**Q - How does the WMHA plan on replacing the revenue lost from two AAA teams no longer playing in Waterloo?**

A – WMHA Rep fees are collected, in part, to offset the cost of the extra ice and officiating that those teams utilize. If this ice is not used by our other teams, extra, un-utilized ice can be returned to the city.

**Q – Will WMHA subsidize AAA base and rep fees?**

A – No.

### **Rangers’ sponsorship**

**Q – What is the Kitchener Rangers’ role in this joint venture?**

A – The Rangers will provide coaching mentorship and expertise, as well as sponsorship funding for senior AAA teams in Kitchener-Waterloo.

**Q – How much will the Kitchener Rangers provide in sponsorship to this joint venture?**

A – The Rangers will provide approximately \$80,000 annually to help fund the teams.

**Q – Will the sponsorship funds be split equally between the four teams?**

A – Not necessarily. The K-W AAA Management Committee will determine allocations to each team. Teams will need to provide budgets and explanations as to how they will use the funding provided by the Rangers and outside fundraising.

**Q – What happens to funds that are left over after the end of the season?**

A – Any surpluses attributable to the Rangers’ and other forms of sponsorship will be held for the next season. All other surpluses will be returned to the parents.