

Something Stinks in Kanata



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Something stinks in Kanata and for once it is not the Carp dump. Last Thursday (Nov 13th), Earl of March (EOM) played AY Jackson (AY) in a high school hockey game that would decide which team made the playoffs. These high school teams are cross town rivals with many of the players playing together on competitive and house league teams within KMHA for many years.

Most have respect for the abilities of the others, and everyone knew it would be an exciting game. Many of these players had turned down the chance to play competitive hockey at higher levels so they could play high school hockey with and against their friends during their last year of high school. The fans were out in full force, including a human sized mascot representing each team. It is most unfortunate that the rival match did not get resolved on the hockey rink as it should have. Instead, the National Capital Secondary School Athletic Association (NCSSAA) chose to protect a referee's poor decision made because of an overreaction in a heated discussion.

The role of the referee in a hockey game is to supervise the action on the ice, not to control the outcome of a game. The referee in question made several calls that the EOM coach repeatedly requested clarification of. The official would not approach the EOM bench, but was quick to go to the AY bench to clarify any questions they had. When AY scored to tie the game at 1 goal each, the referee finally approached the EOM

bench. This was after the referee had placed the wrong EOM player in the penalty box, but would not allow the assistant captain on the ice at the time to tell him so, had not blown his whistle when a pile up (in a non-contact game) occurred at the EOM net (although he did many times at the opposing net) resulting in the tying goal. Upon approaching the EOM bench, the referee and coach exchanged words and the ref indicated that he was assigning a gross misconduct to the coach. From the many written reports from the boys on the bench, their coach did not use foul language or did not threaten the referee in any way. He certainly did not commit a "travesty of the game" as should be necessary for a gross misconduct call. The coach explained that he could not leave the game as he was the only coach on the bench. His understanding at that point was that he worked out the difference of opinion with the referee, promising to keep quiet if the game was to continue.

Continue it did, resulting in a 4-1 victory for EOM. This score was evident on the scoreboard and on the game sheet that was signed off by both officials as being accurate. All fans agreed it was a hard fought, well deserved victory for EOM. The coach apologized to the referee once again at the end of the game, receiving no warning or indication of a forfeit. As a matter of fact, the gross misconduct was never recorded on the game sheet. However, after the game, the referee filed an independent report including the gross misconduct for the EOM coach and calling the game a forfeit.

There are many parts of this fiasco that should have been considered in the decision to forfeit the game:

-Why did the game continue if the referee felt so threatened or insulted? Instead he told the coach they were "good to go" and the game continued. He continued to report goals and penalties to the score/time keeper for recording on the game sheet. He did not mention the fact that he was planning to recommend a forfeit on a separate form to any of the coaches

or players, during or after the game when all of the coaches, officials and players shook hands.

-Why were the coaches and players of both teams as well as the convenor not informed of this decision until much later when a 2-0 score for AY (probably should have read 2-0 for the referee) was questioned and assumed to be a typo on a website that displays results? Even then, there was no indication of a forfeit! Was the high and mighty NCSAA athletic coordinator sitting waiting for the "shit to hit the fan" instead of notifying the coaches and convenor? When was he planning on telling the teams involved?

-What is the function of the game sheet if not to record details of the game including penalties and score? It is understandable that a separate report be filed if there is insufficient room on the game sheet for penalties incurred, or if an incident occurs after the game sheet has been signed off and separated for disposition to both teams. Why bother having a game sheet or scoreboard if their recordings are not to be considered accurate reflections of the game? A separate report should never overrule the statistics reported on the game sheet.

That is exactly what happened. The separate report was filed by the referee and the game forfeited by EOM, although no one thought to notify the EOM team. EOM players did not know they "lost" until the next morning. I'm sure AY players finding out they won was a much happier scene; they certainly had no reason to believe that they won before that. Obviously the EOM boys were and continue to be heartbroken. I hope the "powers that be" involved in this mess slept well these past few nights, comfortable in the fact that their cowardly and unjust actions had the potential to rock the world of the innocent EOM players.

Five days later an appeal was finally heard by the NCSAA board, although I had the sick feeling in my stomach that was

telling me it was simply a formality and no justice would be served. The decision that EOM forfeited the game due to a gross misconduct incurred by their coach was upheld. I guess I was hoping in my heart that the wrong would be righted, even though I had warned my son that it probably would not happen.

I think the saddest part of this story is the fact that a bigger person, either the referee or the NCSAA athletic coordinator, could have and should have acknowledged that many mistakes were made, all based on an overreaction to an innocent request for an explanation of a penalty call.

There are those that may argue that referees decisions must be upheld. I understand the predicament of the officials. They do get yelled at a lot, but if they want to be a hockey official at this level of the game, they should develop thicker skins. Again, their role is to supervise the action on the ice, not to control the outcome of the game, especially such an important game. Perhaps the money saved on printing game sheets and running the score boards could be used on training the officials to handle these situations more effectively.

Another argument raised was that the AY boys would be upset if the ruling was overturned. At the risk of repeating myself, at no time could the AY boys have felt that they had won the game Thursday. In fact, I hear many of them do not even want to play in the playoffs due to such a hollow victory over many of their friends.

Then there is the argument of the ugly history involved between AY and EOM fans and players. Why should the players and coaches this year be tarred with the same brush? Just because of a brawl years ago, that none of these players or coaches participated in, the referee should feel intimidated and throw a coach out for requesting an explanation? I think not.

As parents we teach our children to face up to our mistakes so they can be rectified as soon as possible. In this case, the mistakes could have been easily rectified by reversing the forfeit before the playoffs begin. There were two chances for this to happen; you failed twice Mr NCSSAA athletic coordinator.

The only travesty committed was one of justice. Everyone that attended the game knew who won, well maybe except for the referee and the NCSSAA athletic coordinator.