



DARIEN

YOUTH HOCKEY ASSOCIATION



Dear DYHA Family,

Welcome to the 2018-2019 DYHA Hockey season! Yes, it's a bit odd to be saying such in early September but showcases for DYHA and Ice Cat teams started in late August (!) and the first official weekend of CHC play is now behind us! Further confirmation for us all that sports are no longer bounded by seasons. What is true for the players is also true for your DYHA Board, which has been working diligently this past "off-season" to put the pieces together on a number of exciting developments that I am pleased to now share with you. I have tried to be as concise as possible but much has transpired this past off-season and I appreciate you reading the note below in its entirety.

Let me start by saying that I am honored to have recently been elected your new President. I grew up playing hockey in the DYHA and will now start my fifth year on the DYHA Board, having also experienced the DYHA as a parent and House and Travel hockey coach for my three boys. It is hard for me to fathom that I started with the DYHA in its second season and here I am now involved more than ever as we prepare to celebrate the DYHA's 45th year! Its longevity is a testament to the stewardship of past leadership, the volunteer spirit of its membership and in large part to the many friendships developed and memories created for both players and parents as we became part of the greatest game. My fellow Board members and I have the responsibility to ensure that this legacy continues. Let me outline for you why it is our collective belief that the future of the DYHA has never looked brighter.

You have hopefully seen a recent announcement detailing an investment in Twin Rinks of Stamford (Twin Rinks) by a company called TBWave LLC (TBW). For greater clarity, TBW is an entity formed for the sole purpose of purchasing an ownership stake in Twin Rinks, whose members include myself, three current or former Board members (former President Art Flynn, former Treasurer Mary Jo Dyer and current Board member Margot Krotee) and two former or current DYHA parents. The potential transaction was brought to my attention in early March, and it was necessary to move quickly to conduct due diligence and secure financing. Having spent the better part of three years studying numerous sites, and the financial considerations relating to securing ice for the DYHA, we knew this was an opportunity that could not be missed. The TBW group was quickly formed, due diligence completed and the purchase of a minority stake in Twin Rinks was closed in mid May.

As a result of TBW's investment, the DYHA was offered expanded ice hours and an extended term by Twin Rinks that will satisfy the current and future needs of the DYHA for many years to come. Your Board unanimously approved the new Twin Rinks ice contract after appropriate due diligence by Board members not affiliated with TBW, with TBW members recused from discussion and voting. Going forward, TBW will offer the DYHA an opportunity to become a TBW investor after completion of appropriate due diligence and approval by the independent Board members. Former Board members Flynn and Dyer have termed out of service to the DYHA Board, and Ms. Krotee and I will continue to recuse ourselves from Board consideration of transactions that raise potential conflict of interests between TBW and DYHA.

The new ice contract effectively ***makes Twin Rinks the new HOME*** of the DYHA. It solves the nagging, and perhaps existential, problem of ice supply that has bedeviled the DYHA for the past four years since our legacy ice at Darien Ice Rink was drastically reduced by new management. There is no doubt that the ability to concentrate DYHA games and practices at Twin Rinks will be a substantial improvement over the experience of the past few years during which we were compelled to utilize distant rinks (including Greenwich Boys and Girls Club and the rink at Longshore in Westport) and, more recently, the seasonal rink at Veterans Park. Regarding Veterans Park, the DYHA has dissolved its ice contract with that venue and the facility will no longer be operational.

It is important to note that our investment in the Veterans Park facility allowed the DYHA time to bridge to another ice solution while keeping its core Travel and House programs intact, and I express my appreciation to the rink's management and to current and former Board members who worked hard to make that possible. We appreciate our members' patience over the past few years and are extremely gratified to be able to communicate the new Twin Rinks ice solution to you today.

Despite the distraction of securing ice supply over the past few years, the DYHA Board has continued to implement initiatives to improve all facets of the DYHA program. Developments in our Travel Program include:

- A transition to almost 100% paid coaches, a radical departure from a few years ago. Our coaches are a dedicated and experienced group, with the end result being a better and more consistent development environment for all of our players.
- At the A and A1 team levels we have become a member of the Eastern Junior Elite Prospect League (EJEPL), which expands our competitive presence to 17 additional states outside our traditional affiliation with the Connecticut Hockey Conference (CHC). The strong EJEPL competition should better prepare DYHA teams to succeed in CHC state tournaments at all levels, a primary focus of the DYHA.
- Last season we added skills sessions to the Travel curriculum and this season we have expanded on this with the hire of Skills Coach Brett Farson, who will lead bi-weekly sessions for Mites through Bantams.
- You no doubt have already or soon will see our new team uniforms which, along with a mandated player uniform policy, will serve to present the DYHA in a manner consistent with its position as one of the preeminent programs in the Metropolitan area.
- Finally, we are fortunate that former DYHA President Art Flynn has become a member of the CHC Tier One Competition Committee, which ensures that the DYHA will have exceptional visibility into and remain well positioned for a changing Connecticut youth hockey landscape.

For more specifics on the 2018-2019 Travel season stay tuned for a letter from our Travel Directors, Buzz Olson and Dean Bellissimo.

Since 1973 the DYHA House Program has provided an opportunity for players of all levels and interests to enjoy the great game of hockey. The House Program was DYHA in the early days, and it continues to be a TEAM based offering providing season-long competition and camaraderie. Additional development opportunities for our House players have been a focus for the Board and include:

- A transition from parents coaching individual teams to professional instruction at House practices guided by USA Hockey's American Development Model (ADM). The ADM focuses on station based skill development via high repetition and small area games and is proven to quicken skill development. As always, we encourage parent involvement in their player's development as there is an ongoing need for help during practices, to run the bench on game day or manage the team over the season.
- Two years ago, the DYHA founded the WestConn Hockey League which provides a "travel light" experience against local competition for our Squirt and Senior Minor House players. The reception has been enthusiastic and we are eager for its 3rd season.
- For the coming season we have added House pre-season tune-ups for Minis through Squirts, a Squirt supplemental travel team as well as a weekend pond hockey/3v3 ice session for our Mighty, Mite and Squirt players.

There should be no doubt that the House Program remains an important part of the DYHA offering and a focus of this Board. Please stay tuned for a mid-September announcement of more House details and a meeting of interested volunteers as we organize for a mid-October start.

The growth of the DYHA Ice Cats program has been remarkable since its founding less than ten years ago. When the program was initiated, participation was extended to members of New Canaan Winter Club (NCWC) to sufficiently roster travel teams. The Ice Cats programming has now expanded to include Tier One teams at the U12 and U14 levels that are competitive on a regional and national basis. There has been additional coaching expertise hired in the past year and enrollment numbers continue to grow. Now in the second year of a formal three-year arrangement with the NCWC, we are extremely proud of the growth of the program and will evaluate all opportunities to further strengthen the Ice Cats program in the future.

We are also pleased to announce the first season of the Darien Dynamites, a venture with Twin Rinks, that will expand the DYHA offering to the 3-5 year-old beginning hockey player as he or she takes their first strides on the ice. This is a natural extension of our capabilities, and will help develop young players that we hope will then skate for the DYHA and Ice Cats well into their teenage years. Please see our website (www.DYHA.com) for more information and pass the word along to those that may have a budding new hockey player!

Off the ice, we have successfully completed the work required to complete and pass the first independent CPA audit in the history of the DYHA. This was not a small undertaking but an absolute necessity and many thanks to Mary Jo Dyer for her leadership. We have revamped our registration system to accept electronic payment for check-ins and sign-up skates via the website. We have tidied up the website to provide information in a more concise and clear manner. We expect that after this current season we will upgrade the site to provide a more attractive and enhanced user experience. To make sure our program initiatives are understood by our membership and potential new members, a new Board level Marketing officer position has been staffed to professionally and clearly communicate DYHA programming and increase our brand recognition to a broader audience within Fairfield County. Yes, that includes social media (!), please follow us on Instagram or Facebook.

As a reminder, the DYHA remains a non-profit entity the directors and officers of which are **100%** volunteer staffed. That means that 100% of your tuition payments go to pay for program expenses – ice time, coaches, referees and so on. Unlike other programs there is no financial gain to any shareholders, directors or officers from your players' participation. That is the reason our tuition, while still substantial, is able to be priced more competitively than other "independent" programs. We don't use glamorous sounding AAA or Elite acronyms, but rest assured that the DYHA's Travel Program is every bit as competitive, in terms of quality of coaches, players and facilities, as those that do. Our desire is to develop players of all abilities and provide them appropriate competition and a great experience at a fair price. To do this we have always needed the support of our members as volunteers - managers, schedulers, House coaches, committee members, Board members and the list goes on. Thank you to all who have raised your hand to help this season and for the past seasons. Rest assured, we are always looking for new people eager to help make a difference – *whether at the Board level or not*. Currently, our biggest need is a Junior House Director with whom I would like to work closely to continue to strengthen the House offering. If interested, let's start a dialogue!

To sum up, this is an incredibly exciting time to be part of the DYHA and we should all be energized by the enormous opportunities in front of us. We have a rich history and strong culture that have stood the test of time. We have secured ownership in a facility that provides us critical ice supply well into the future in a desirable location and state-of-the-art facility. We have refined our program to enhance both our House and Travel offerings and watched with awe the explosive growth in the girls program. And, perhaps most importantly, we have engaged members who are willing to give their time to ensure that the DYHA's community-based non-profit legacy remains not only relevant but successful in today's for-profit world. Looking forward to early 2019, we hope you will join us as we gather to celebrate another milestone, DYHA's 45th season anniversary!

I hope this letter has given you transparency into and understanding of actions your Board has taken recently and over the past few years to keep the DYHA vibrant and to develop your hockey player to the best of their and our ability. We will strive to continue to foster an environment where life-long friendships are formed, life lessons are learned and hockey memories are created that resonate with players long after they leave the ice. At the end of the day, that is the essence of the game of hockey and the crux of why the DYHA remains as relevant and important today as when founded 45 years ago.

Thank you for your time in reading this as well as your support of the DYHA. If you have any questions about the above please feel free to reach out to me. I look forward to seeing familiar faces as well as saying hello to new members of the DYHA family at the rink shortly!

Best,



Patrick Mullin

President, Darien Youth Hockey Association