

Introduction

Clubs invest a lot in the development of junior players, through a huge number of voluntary contributions and also paid support (coaches) - principally to create a pool of players for their club to sustain and grow. Without this development of new players, the game will wither and die. It is a fundamental strength of the game we play. If we fail to protect this investment from clubs we are failing to support the game as a whole and that is the most important consideration, not just of a governing body, but of the whole community of clubs - to sustain the game as a whole for the benefit of everyone, and we must look forward and see that bigger picture.

It is also worth noting that players are developed across many facets, not just their playing skill, but across a broader range of more subtle attributes that develop a hockey player - including fair play, team work, resilience, respect. All these subtle facets take significant time and effort to develop. To plagiarize a well known phrase (It takes a village to develop a child) - "It takes a club to develop a player".

This great work, by many clubs, is being undermined as their best players are being targeted and poached by other clubs. We have to ask ourselves a simple question - why? Are clubs creating (un)written policies to target the juniors from other clubs? Are some clubs simply removing all the effort in running a junior club but attempting to take the spoils from others hard work? Is all that hard work simply being stolen? Would we promote stealing as ethical? Or maybe it is ambitious coaches seeking to improve their status, to show how they can improve their team/club? Or perhaps it is a mix of both, ambitious coaches seeking to improve their talent pool, while their Club officials (employers) conveniently look the other way?

Ultimately the club that invests in the development of a player then finds this investment lost, and this may cause them to reduce future investment in young player development - why spend all that effort and money if I can't have the reward?

We also have to remember that we play in an open game with open leagues. This is a frequently mis-understood concept. This means that clubs are free to have ambition and grow, to rise up the leagues, or play in leagues where competition (and achievement) is highest. However if we fail to allow this "open" system and fall into the "feeder club" model, where a club is limited in its ambition by its status - we end up with the only path through for players to progress is for them to move to the next club in the ladder (think of football without promotion or relegation) - we will end up with a stagnated game, one that is dominated by a few larger clubs (and we could quote the Scottish football system here). This fundamentally undermines the system that we have. So clubs have the right to be ambitious and attempt to develop and keep their best players.

None of the clubs that I have spoken to expect to keep all their players, and they understand that they may move on, if that is the right thing to do. So we must not prevent the movement of players or the opposite happens and clubs become lazy with their junior development and take the players for granted. If a player feels that they are not being given the time, improvement, care, support or a hundred other things they have the right to move. We run an open system. They have the right of choice.

Good junior sections will ask themselves - "why do players play here" not "why don't players play here"? If a player wishes to move clubs - they can.

So what do we do about this? The intention is to establish some ground rules for the game in Kent. It will however, only work, if all the clubs agree to the protocol - but this will need to be backed by action. Non-compliance has to come at a cost. All I ask is that all clubs follow the right path, be honest, responsible and be fair. If you choose not to - there are consequences, but we must all agree to this.

Principles:

1. The choice of where a junior plays is the decision of the child and their parent/guardian

Of course this is in consultation, and hopefully the clubs/schools - but ultimately this is a parental choice

2. Clubs have a right to protect the investment that they have made in a young player

We want active junior sections in our clubs in order to produce the next generation of players and sustain and grow the game. If we don't do this - junior clubs will not seek to create players, it is too expensive and the whole game will suffer as junior clubs produce fewer, less able players and/or stop altogether.

3. We are centred on the child - not the player

There is more to a decision than just what is the highest standard of hockey that a young player can access. Social facets such as friendship, environment and culture; logistics such as travel times, and training times also need to be taken into account. Young players achieve the best results in environments that work, not just the highest playing standard.

4. We strive to remove inappropriate influence from the system

We seek to be equitable, transparent and honest. The single biggest challenge in the system is coach influence, at both school and club. We find ways to ensure that influence is for the benefit of the game and the player, not the coach.

Rules

- 1. Clubs are accountable for the behaviour of their coaches/managers/players/umpires/officers and parents (both paid and voluntary)**
- 2. No coaches/parents/players/clubs or umpires may approach or entice a player who is already at a club without informing the players parents and the players current club before making an approach to the player's parents (i.e. not the player directly)**
- 3. No coach can advise or recommend that a player (at another club) joins their club. If the player requires a greater challenge they should be advised to join "a club of standing x", and they should be referred to the County Association for help in that selection.**
- 4. It is reasonable for a club to promote themselves and seek to recruit players who are not affiliated to a club. But not when coaching or officiating within the player pathway. Any unaffiliated player will be advised centrally by the county guidelines.**
- 5. Players play for one club only - no shared clubs (it is too complex) - unless it is agreed by all three parties.**
- 6. These rules apply to players from U13 to U18 (as defined by the player pathway definitions). Under that age - this policy does not apply, but the principles should still be followed.**

Process

The process for moving clubs shall be the following:

- (i) If a player wants to move from one club to another the player's parent(s) must notify an officer of the child's current club before approaching the new club using a standard form*.
 - a. The current club will then notify the potential future club of the proposed transfer, giving them the green light to have discussions with the player.
 - b. If (a) above does not happen within 14 days, the player's parent may forward a copy of the completed form as evidence they have notified their current club.
 - c. Where the present club does not feel that the move is in the player's best interests, it may recommend that the player seeks advice from the County Association before making a final decision, and may notify the County Association of its concerns
- (ii) If a player approaches a club without having notified their current club, the new club will advise the player's parents to notify their current club as stated in (i) above. They will have no further discussions about choice of club with the player or the player's parents until they have received such notification.
- (iii) If a player or parent approaches a coach, or a teacher who is a member of a club, or a coach for a club about choice of clubs, the coach must point the parents to a county approved document – "Advice to Parents on Selecting a Club". For further advice they can also contact juniors@kenthockey.org.uk.
- (iv) If a club identifies a player they believe would benefit from the development opportunities offered at their club, an officer of the club must approach the player's current club stating its intentions before it approaches the player's parents*. No approach may be made directly to a junior player.
- (v) If an email is not replied to within the time allocated, the club that the player is looking to

- join is required to inform the county association in writing for full transparency (juniors@kenthockey.org.uk).
- (vi) Any approach directly to a junior player will be treated as a violation of safeguarding guidelines.

Movements of players between clubs need to be agreed between the two clubs and the parents. The intention here is not to prevent the move. But it enables two things:

1. It is clear who is making the request - whether it is coming from the player or the club. All approaches must come from a club officer. In this way it is clear that the current club knows what is happening, and everything is in the open. This helps to avoid conflict.
2. The club that has developed and invested in that player has the opportunity to understand the reasons for a move, and has a chance to put it's case together and see if it is something that they can rectify/address

Any clubs putting undue or emotional pressure on players or parents to remain at their club will be deemed to have broken the rules.

*see Appendix

Complaints

If there is a debate - the club that is losing the player may make a formal complaint to the County Junior committee who will speak with all the parties, and decide if the approach breaks the rules.

The appeal must be logged, in writing (email is sufficient), within 30 days of the approach being known. The committee will investigate and make a ruling within 30 days following receipt of the appeal.

Appeals

Should there be any disagreement with the verdict of the Junior committee, either party may appeal to the Kent Senior Committee. Their ruling will be final and binding.

Tariff

There will be different levels of offence which carry different sanctions. All of the definition of levels and sanctions are at the sole discretion of the Junior Committee.

Level	Definition	Sanction
Level 1	A coach/club may have broken the rules. It is not something that can be proven with written evidence (as many approaches to players are verbal or passed through intermediaries/other parents or players)	The offending club and individual (coach, official, manager, player or parent) will be warned as to their future behaviour and reminded of the potential future sanctions.
Level 2	A coach/club have clearly broken the rules, and it has written or verbal evidence (testimony from a parent) that supports this	The club may be subject to a fine of up to £500 payable to the club from which the player was poached.**

	Or A club or an individual receives 3 written Level 1 offences within a 2 year period.	The individual (coach, manager, umpire, official, player or parent) may be suspended from participation in all county hockey activity (playing, coaching, umpiring or supporting) for a period of up to 14 days*.
Level 3	It is a repeat of a level 2 offence within a 2 year period.	The club may be subject to a fine of up to £1500 payable to the club from which the player was poached.** The individual (coach, manager, umpire, official, player or parent) may be suspended from participation in all county hockey activity (playing, coaching, umpiring or supporting) for a period of 3 months*.

*County hockey applies to all activity which is undertaken by clubs affiliated to Kent Hockey Association and the Player Pathway. Additionally if the approach took place under the guise of the Player Pathway (PP) the coach will be removed from the Kent PP system and not allowed to coach again within the pathway. Any outstanding payment for services will not be paid. The behaviour logged with EH ethics committee. A request for South/East to remove them from any PC structure.

** 25% of all fines will be paid to the county hockey association to support the development of junior hockey within the county. All monies are payable within 30 days or subject to interest payments at the prevailing rate of inflation.

So what should coaches do if they are approached?

Point the parents at a county approved document - "Advice to Parents on Selecting a Club". For further advice they can reach out to juniors@kenthockey.org.uk.

The final choice of which club a player plays at - belongs to the parent and the child.

For and on behalf of Kent Hockey Association

Tom Hamilton

Kent Hockey Vice-President - Juniors

Date: 8/11/2020

Appendix

Standard Form for movement from one club to another as requested by a parent

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please be informed that I am currently looking at alternative hockey clubs where my child (insert name) may play. If you wish to discuss this please drop me a line within 7 days.

thank you,

xxx

Standard Form for request to approach a child from another club as requested by a different club

Dear Sir/Madam,

Please be informed that I would like to approach the parents of (insert name) with a view to them playing at my hockey club. I feel that their overall development would be enhanced by a change of club. If you wish to discuss this please drop me a line within 7 days.

thank you,

xxx

Club

Role