

Dear David

This is a very interesting set of questions, and I am happy to answer them. Please note that the EIHA web site at: www.eiha.co.uk often contains the answers people are looking for, and we encourage people interested in English ice hockey at all levels to visit that site regularly. I would appreciate it if you do not edit my answers below but let them stand on their own. These will also be posted on the EIHA web site.

1. Some people think that this could be the Elite League's last season given the turmoil within their ranks at the end of the season and the subsequent reduction to 8 members. Were the EL to fold at the end of this coming season what would your views be on allowing the arena teams to compete at EPL level?

A. At present, the arena teams' large financial resources and reliance upon players from overseas mean that they could not fit comfortably into a development league such as EPIHL. The EPIHL teams could not compete on an even basis with the arena teams as presently constituted; and the real question would be whether the arena teams could or would fit into the EPIHL rules of competition. However, the EPIHL teams do have the right to accept other teams into the league, if appropriate, and there is a possibility that with the right re-organisation such ideas could be accepted. But be aware that there are absolutely no plans for that at this time. The EPIHL is not at risk and remains viable.

2. Why do the EPL play-offs always clash with GB's participation in the World Championship, and what is being done to address this?

A. This is not an issue for EPIHL. The play-off dates are dictated by the length of the season and by the availability of weekends at Coventry. The dates of the World Championships are decided by agreement at IIHF level among the nations taking part in the World Championships. GB could ask for a change of date from the organisers, but it would need all the other five nations to agree.

3. What are your views on the most appropriate level of imports in order to have a sustainable league structure and do you think promotion and relegation should be an intrinsic part of British ice hockey?

A. We regard the appropriate level of imports to be the Dress 4, Play 3 rule. The financial position of teams within the EIHA does not make promotion or relegation something that can occur organically. It would make no sense to bankrupt an EPIHL team by insisting that they take promotion to Elite League. At present, teams are able to review, season by season, which league they can afford to belong to.

4. Do you think it is compatible with your position as chairman of English Ice Hockey, that you live overseas and are the associated costs justifiable in the current economic climate?

A. Even though I have lived with my family for many years in Denver, I have been consistently re-elected for the last 26 years, unopposed, by our member clubs to the Executive Committee/ Board of Directors; then elected Chairman by my fellow Directors, including 2009. Any expenses incurred are commensurate with expenses when I lived in the UK, given cost of living rises, and should I live in the UK again, I am sure I could greatly exceed current expense rates with the demands for meetings, games and other commitments that the position often demands. Please note that many of my trips back are often compensated (fairly) at a loss to myself depending on exchange rates and additional personal costs, much to the dismay of my wife! Please do not forget that this position is voluntary, unpaid, and I do it because this sport as is important to me as it is to you.

5. Why are the actions of the EIHA so seemingly shrouded in secrecy?

A: This seems to be your perception, not that of the EIHA members. All EIHA clubs (more than 300 of them) have the right to send representatives to the EIHA AGM, where the Board of Directors is elected; and regular meetings are held for all the clubs in the various sections – EPIHL, ENIHL, Women, Recreational, Universities, Juniors. Minutes of meetings and of the Board of Directors are posted on the EIHA website. This is transparency.

6. What relationship, if any, does the EIHA have with the IIHF?

A: The EIHA is not directly linked to IIHF – that is the function of IHUK. However, EIHA works closely with officials at IIHF dealing with referees, coaching, child protection, etc. It is fair to say that the IIHF knows what EIHA is, and who the officers are.

7. What relationship, if any, does the EIHA have with IHUK?

A: The EIHA, like Elite League and SIH, is one of the partner organisations which come together to make up IHUK. You need to realise that IHUK's function is to act as an umbrella body for ice hockey in the UK, with certain specific responsibilities, in particular the GB teams and relations with national and international bodies such as IIHF and UK Sport. Day to day management of ice hockey is the responsibility of the partner organisations.

8. What relationship, if any, does the EIHA have with SIH?

A. A: The EIHA enjoys an open relationship and communication with SIH

9. What steps are being taken to attract new main sponsorships within British Hockey?

A. The EIHA manages development of the sport (Players) and support programs. (i.e. Coaching, refereeing, leagues, equal opportunities, child protection, CCPR). Sponsorships are pursued for development of the sport in England, including players and the support programs, not Britain. We are always open to suggestions.

10. How do you feel the standard of refereeing has changed within the EPL since the inception of the EIHL?

A. The EIHA is proud to develop referees that are consistently promoted to the EIHL.

11. Does the EIHA have a good relationship with the media in the UK , and where are regular announcements distributed too?

A. All interested media receive an email update of game results at the end of every weekend during the season from the EIHA's statistician. Accredited journalists have easy and open access to the EIHA Board as they need.

12. For the sport to succeed and be viable in the UK , we need a high standard at grass routes (roots) level. In your opinion, what steps can the EIHA take to ensure that there are sufficient facilities and rinks for junior players to train and play in?

A. High levels of grass roots development is one of our key goals. However, it can be fraught with problems: Ice hockey in England is controlled by the amount of ice time available and what the teams are able to purchase from the rink managements. When we are given some government funding or grant aid, this becomes an easier equation. The EIHA's efforts to gaining that kind of funding is serious and ongoing as a role for many members of the Board. The support by members of the public both as fans, and participants, in the sport is key and all I can say is that increased participation and support would make it easier to get the funding needed. The EIHA regularly lobbies bodies such as UK Sport, Sport England and the DCMS to try to get new facilities built and old ones preserved.

13. Is the new ENL becoming the old EPL and will it be sustainable for all teams?

A. yes, but the fans need to support their teams

14. Each season the EPL is losing teams. Is this a concern for the league and what needs to be done to ensure its sustainability?

A. EPIHL is a very financially viable league and there is no concern for its sustainability, but teams are now 'cutting their cloth' to what they can afford. However, that is dependent on continued support for local teams from their fans.

15. You've been the Chair of the EIHA for some time, what is your medium/long term plans in terms of the role?

A. I have been in the position for 26 years. My mission is, and always has been, the development and progression of young players to the GB teams and financial stability of the teams and leagues involved.

16. In your opinion in what direction would you like to see both IHUK and EIHA progress?

A. Financial stability in all leagues

17. Is British Ice Hockey democratic?

A. Absolutely. Yes

18. In your opinion, is British Ice Hockey united and does it have a shared vision/direction for the sport?

A. Seriously, there will always be a difference of mission between the commercial and development aspects of the sport. EIHA stands for the growth and development of English Ice Hockey Players, leagues, teams, support staff etc.

19. Why has British Ice Hockey not been more successful in securing public funding?

A. Britain is not within the EIHA mandate and speculation on British matters is inappropriate.

20. What would you say are your biggest achievements in British Ice Hockey?

A. Let's clarify this down to England. We started 26 years ago with 60 teams in the EIHA. Now we have more than 300. That is one hell of an achievement.

21. In your opinion what do you see as the biggest threats to the success of British Ice Hockey?

A. For English Ice Hockey the threat of rink closures and team's financial failures due to lack of fan support remain the biggest threats.

22. What would be your recommended league structure for all teams in British Ice Hockey?

A. The present one

23. What is the EIHA doing to help retain clubs like the Telford Tigers and create new teams/bring back old teams like the Durham Wasps?

A. The EIHA is highly supportive of teams that have appropriate financial support and stability, and the facilities to support them. The EIHA would support the revival of Durham Wasps, were a new rink to be built in the Durham area. When a new rink is built, the EIHA works closely with the rink management to set up an ice hockey club, and then supports the new club until it is on its feet.

David, let me editorialize a little here. The EIHA is focused solely on the development of the sport of ice hockey across England, including players, teams, officials, support staff and the leagues and fans to support that. Our Board members, who are all volunteers, devote their time and energies to build on that focus in many ways. Our admiration and respect of people who constantly volunteer their time, effort, and money, to the sport is second-to-none whether they are coaches, parents, statisticians, referees, goal judges, organizers or fans. Without all of these people, in whatever role, the sport would not exist in England. Now, we have to continue to collaborate with all participants, and make it better. Can you and your readers help us do that?

With kind regards

Ken Taggart
Chairman, EIHA.