



## Newsletter – September 2009

### Hello Again!

Hi folks, and a very warm welcome to our latest newsletter.

Firstly BIHFA would like to pass on our sincere thanks to the chairman of the English Ice Hockey Association, Ken Taggart. You will, of course, be aware that all members were given the opportunity to submit questions to Ken recently and we were delighted with both your response, and the positive reaction from Ken in relation to the quality and relevance of your questions. Dave will cover in the chairman's report below what Ken's responses mean for English Ice Hockey, and indeed what impact these have on BIHFA itself. To review the complete list of questions, and Ken's responses, please visit our website at [www.bihfa.co.uk](http://www.bihfa.co.uk). This initiative has been very well received both internally and externally, and as such we have recently sent your questions to the chairman of Scottish Ice Hockey, Jim Anderson. We look forward to sharing Jim's responses with you shortly.

Secondly, we are pleased to announce that the inaugural AGM of BIHFA is now in the planning stage. Our membership secretary recently sent out a survey to the membership with a list of key questions to assist us in planning the AGM, and we are collating your responses now. We would expect to release the date, and format of the AGM in the next few weeks.

And finally, we will shortly be publishing a survey that we hope you will all take the time to complete. The questions will be based on an original survey conducted by Claire Jeffries in 2006 in which several thousand Hockey fans nationwide took part. We believe it is now time to put these key questions and others to Ice Hockey fans around the country to assist us in gaining a better understanding of what the key issues and concerns are today. The results of this survey will be shared not only with the members of BIHFA, but also the wider fan community and all key stakeholders in British Ice Hockey.

As always, we just want to take a few moments to pass on our sincerest thanks to you all for your continued support. Representing you all remains a privilege, and as a committee we are very excited to watch the organisation continue to grow and develop, and look forward to the inaugural AGM. Once again, responses and comments relating to our last newsletter were gratefully received and we saw hits to the website increase dramatically in the days shortly after distribution. Following on from some feedback recently, you will notice that this issue of our newsletter has been published in pdf format, and we hope this will make the newsletter accessible to more readers.

In this issue we have the latest status from the Chairperson and some thoughts on the coming season. There is also a great article from Greg Owen giving us a review of his time in France last season, and we are sure you will enjoy reading it as much as we did, and we would just like to pass on our thanks to Greg for his contribution.

Remember, we really do need your input, it is your organisation so whether it's ideas on what we should be putting our focus onto, offers of help or indeed articles to include in future newsletters, keep your comments coming via the 'Contact Us' button on the website or email your Chairperson Dave Cunningham directly at [chair@bihfa.co.uk](mailto:chair@bihfa.co.uk)

Until next time, enjoy the Hockey!



## News Update By Dave Cunningham, Chairman

Well can you believe it, the 2009-2010 season has begun, and I don't know if it is just me, but the off-season seems to be getting shorter with every passing year! As always during the summer, rumours abound, and we see a new line up in several of the leagues for the new campaign. The Elite Ice Hockey League has bidden farewell to both the Manchester Phoenix and Basingstoke Bison, with both opting to join the, seemingly, more financially viable surroundings of the English Premier League leaving the remaining 8 teams competing for the Elite crown this season. The inclusion in the EPL of these clubs makes for a very exciting season in England's second tier of hockey, and it is certainly going to be a tough call to identify at this early stage who will be victorious and claim the EPL Championship next April. Of course those were not the only changes to the EPL this season, they also bid a sad farewell to Wight Link Raiders and the Telford Tigers. The Raiders have opted to compete in the English National League South and we are hopeful that we will see the Tigers back on the ice for the 2010-2011 season after the sale of the club fell through. Further information can be found at [www.telfordtigers.co.uk](http://www.telfordtigers.co.uk). There are no real changes this season within Scottish Ice Hockey, despite continued rumours during the summer of a potential national league returning, and it was interesting to read from Ken Taggart that whilst the EIHA and SIH organisation have a good working relationship, it does

appear that within the current economic climate the status quo appears to be the way forward in the short term at least.

It was fantastic to have the opportunity to put questions to Ken, and we were delighted with the quality and variety of questions that we received. The responses really put things into perspective about how Ice Hockey in this country is governed, and I would encourage you all to take some time to read what Ken had to say. There are always so many misconceptions about who is responsible for what in the UK, and hopefully by holding these Q&A sessions with the key organisations, we can paint a clearer understanding of the structure today, and perhaps highlight the key areas we believe we need to add some focus too. Ken made a very salient and interesting comment in his closing paragraph about how Ice Hockey simply cannot function in this country without the continued help and support of the many hundreds, or potentially thousands of volunteers, and whilst we are all maybe very quick to pick fault with the various bodies, perhaps there is more we can do as fans, or members of BIHFA. I would love to hear your thoughts on this, so please drop me a note via my email address below. As we take the Q&A theory one step further, our membership secretary recently sent out some correspondence to you confirming we were accepting question for Ken's Scottish equivalent Jim Anderson. Again, Thanks you once again for your contributions, and I can confirm that these questions have been distributed to Jim. We look forward to sharing his responses with you. The next

Q&A session we have planned will be with Dave Simms, so watch out for the email from the membership secretary seeking your input and questions. We would also appreciate your suggestions for future sessions. Who would you like to hear from?

We will shortly be sending out, via e-mail, a link to a new survey that we hope you will take the time to complete. This will not be something that is limited to our membership however, and will be open to the entire ice hockey community and will be an updated version of the survey that Claire Jeffries originally published in 2006. This was very well received and attracted significant attention from many key stakeholders. Our intention is to compare the answers we receive this time with those from the original and share our findings with the wider ice hockey community. We very much look forward to seeing how responses have changed since 2006, and will share the results with you as quickly as we can.

Anyway that's it for this time, if you do want to get in touch, please just drop me an email to [chair@bihfa.co.uk](mailto:chair@bihfa.co.uk).

Here's to a successful 2009-2010 season wherever you are!

**Dave Cunningham**



## **French hockey vs. British hockey** **Greg Owen of the Coventry blaze on his season in France**

To be honest I didn't really know what to expect from the hockey when I arrived in France last August. We had 3 Canadians, 1 American, 2 Fins, 1 Swede, 3 Hungarians, 2 Slovenians, 8 French, & a Brit. With so many different influences I was pretty sure that the game would be played slightly differently than the N.American style I am used to and at a faster pace. These both turned out to be true but it wasn't faster hockey all of the time. The fast games were only to be reserved for the top 4 or 5 teams (Rouen, Grenoble, Anger, Amiens & Briançon).

The Ligue Magnus (French Elite league) is made up of 14 teams but the difference from the top to the bottom is a lot greater than that of the EIHL, so when you are playing teams at the top of the table the games are faster and a lot more intense, however with a 26 game regular season the games don't come around too often! On the other hand when playing teams from the middle to the bottom of the table the games are played at a much lower tempo and you're struggling not to get drawn into your opponents slower pace.

I guess the biggest thing I noticed about the hockey in France is that teams play with more depth running 3 lines and sometimes 4. In Briançon we consistently ran 4 lines, which turned out to be our strength, but it was a very different style to get used to. We had many players quite capable of playing on a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> line but playing on a 4<sup>th</sup>

line. That gives you idea of the depth we had on our team probably unmatched by any team in the league. I would say however that we didn't necessarily have more quality. We traded quality for quantity, which bode us well in the regular season, but not in the play-offs.

Coming from playing in the EIHL you get used to playing in all situations, and playing a regular shift. You get used to being in the game all the time not having to spend any prolonged time on the bench. Going from that, to playing 4 line hockey and at times spending 5 or 6 minutes on the bench really effects how you play and how emotionally involved you get in the game. It leaves no room for getting a 'feel' for the game and getting into a rhythm. You have to be able to switch it on at any time and it makes it harder to stay focused and play your best. It's just a matter of getting used to I think. Some Europeans grow up playing this way so it's normal for them but it was quite an adjustment for me.

Having said all this I've really enjoyed the experience. Having to constantly fight to advance my position in the line-up has made me analyse my game a lot more and identify my weaknesses and also my strengths. If it's one thing that I've learnt it's good to be an all rounder and a complete player but it's also a real benefit to have a facet to your game that makes you a specialist in an area, such as a goal scorer, a playmaker, a great penalty killer, strong on face-offs, or even a good checker and strong defensively. At the end of the day it's good to have no weaknesses in your game, but everybody needs a specialist in something. You just

have to look at the NHL to see this. Every team has their superstars and then their roll players.

So the big question I've asked myself after spending a year playing in France is am I a better hockey player for it? Well, in all honesty I don't think so. To improve you have to play, and that hasn't been the case this past season. With only 26 league games, and four lines I just haven't played enough to reap the benefits. Am I a worse player? I hope not! But, if there's one thing that I have improved in myself, it's that I have a new motivation to become a better hockey player, work on my weaknesses but to also forge and affirm the identity that makes me the complete hockey player I strive to be.

Greg Owen

## **Coming Next Time?**



Remember, this is your newsletter! What would you like to read? If you have any articles or thoughts for consideration, please get in touch with our newsletter team at [newsletter@bihfa.co.uk](mailto:newsletter@bihfa.co.uk)

## **Newsletter Editorial Team**



## **BIHFA would like to thank.....**

Dave Simms, Sheffield Steelers  
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Steve Moria, Basingstoke  
Steve Clarke, Powerplay  
Todd Kelman, Belfast Giants  
Phil Wing, Peterborough Phantoms  
Brent Pope, Cardiff Devils  
Paul Thomson, Coventry Blaze & GB Team Coach  
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Andy Smith, GBSC Fifth Line  
Kirk Humphries, Guildford Flames  
Stewart Roberts, Ice Hockey Annual  
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Jon Kynaston, Peterborough Phantoms  
Simon Hopkins, University Hockey  
Jo Collins, The Players Association  
Scott Neil, Edinburgh Capitals  
Ken Taggart, EIHA

Stuart Robinson, Bracknell Bees  
Jim Anderson, Scottish Ice Hockey

## **From the archives A Month in British Ice Hockey. December 1994.**

The month of December would start off in spectacular style for the Nottingham Panthers who would see off the Cardiff devils 7-2 with coach Mike Blaisdell grabbing a hat trick in the Benson and Hedges cup final at the Sheffield Arena. Up until this point the season had been going great for Nottingham as they would play twenty-one games in the league before they tasted defeat. Cardiff on the other hand had also had success as they progressed from their European Cup Group in Holland in early October defeating the champions of the Ukraine and Kazakhstan to progress over the three games. They would only

taste defeat in the middle game to the Tilburg Trappers. In Division One the Slough Jets would have a similar start to the season as the Panthers. Led by coach Scott Rex they were looking to make up for the disappointment of the previous two seasons where they had failed to get promoted in the end of season promotion/relegation playoffs. On 26<sup>th</sup> December ex Pittsburgh Penguin and Stanley cup winner Ken Preistlay made his Debut for the Sheffield Steelers and contributes with a goal and four assists in a 9-5 win over the Peterborough Pirates. The signing of this player would have a major impact on the outcome of the title race and break one team's hearts in the months ahead.