

Abuse leads to shortage of hockey refs

MONTREAL — Instead of shouting “kill the ref” at the next minor hockey game, Canadian hockey authorities would rather you give the zebbras a pat on the back.

If not, Canada will continue to lose 10,000 referees and linesmen per year to what Toronto Maple Leafs president Ken Dryden called constant harassment.

“What makes people decide not to become referees is the abuse,” Dryden said at a news conference Thursday to launch a Canadian Hockey Association campaign against abuse of officials.

“It’s not the assaults — that happens occasionally — it’s the game after game, low-key abuse from parents, coaches and players that gets inside everyone.

“If I’m the ref, I think: ‘I’ve been involved in the game longer and proba-

bly played it at a higher level than anyone in the arena and now I have an 11-year-old telling me I’m dishonest, incompetent and even stupid.’

“If I’m that ref, I don’t know if I’d be willing to put up with that.”

The association plans to put up posters in Canada’s 3,500 arenas urging fair treatment of officials as part of its Shared Respect program, which emerged from last summer’s Open Ice summit on the state of Canadian hockey.

Dryden, Montreal Canadiens president Pierre Boivin and NHL director of officiating Bryan Lewis joined CHA president Bob Nicholson in launching the program.

It was awkward timing for Dryden, whose own coach and general manager, Pat Quinn, is being investigated by the NHL for verbal abuse directed at linesman Scott Driscoll after game

last Saturday night against Calgary.

“It could have been a week ago or a week from now, but the story would still be the same,” Dryden said. “And while it’s not the way it should be in the NHL, it’s a lot worse in minor hockey.”



Dryden

And Dryden, who once was appointed to investigate the beating of a referee by university players in New Brunswick, said stopping coaches from jawing at officials should not have “the same priority as the injury situation” in

the NHL.

Lewis was more concerned that officials were dropping out of minor hockey just as his league is in hiring mode.

The NHL began using two referees in some games last season. There will be two refs in about 700 NHL games this year and in all 1,200 games next season.

“So every time someone walks away who we think has potential, it ultimately impacts on our recruiting,” said Lewis, who added that it is taunts and threats from parents at children’s games that drives most officials away.

The association said most officials who quit do so in their first two years.

“I think if you taped how some parents behave at games and showed it back to them later, they’d be embarrassed,” Lewis added.

CANADIAN PRESS

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