

As USA Hockey announced it would adhere to a new standard of play and rule emphasis, usahockey.com caught up with USA Hockey President Ron DeGregorio, who addressed the changes, their implications and their ultimate importance.

Q: What were the factors leading to the new standard of play and rules emphasis?

The factors include recognition that the game has been improved at the highest levels with a higher standard of enforcement. Hockey is a game of speed, skill and contact. Hooking, holding, slashing, interference and other illegal impediments to players with skill, speed and strength should not be and will not be tolerated. This standard is now the most prevalent standard used in the hockey world. From the NHL, the IIHF, Hockey Canada and the NCAA, this type of standard is now the norm.

Q: And what are the tenets of these new standards?

There should be no shortcut in defending offensive skills. Holding, hooking, slashing, interference and other illegal impediments to players will be called as penalties. Defending skilled players will take skill, speed and strength. Previously accepted actions improperly prevented some offensive skills to dominate. Offensive skills should be rewarded and encouraged. Defensive skills should require speed, skill and strength without degrees of holding, hooking, slashing, interference or other illegal impediments to the offensive player. A cornerstone for the success of these new standards is a concerted effort on the part of not only referees but also coaches, administrators and players to support and encourage the standards. The adjustments in training and teaching will take time, but will produce more enjoyment for players and spectators as well.

Q: In your opinion, is the move to call the game more strictly an overdue one?

Change takes time. Even the recognition that change is needed takes time. I can say I am happy with the changes I see being adopted at all levels of hockey. The game is better for it. The players who play it will be better, and it will be more fun to play and watch.

Q: How important to your tenure as President of USA Hockey are these standards?

The game is more important than any group or person. It is gratifying to see the positives that have come from the enforcement of stricter standards in the NHL and the IIHF. USA Hockey is the leader in youth hockey. It makes sense for us to provide a strict standard of enforcement of rules that cause impediments to skills. My hope is that the enforcement standard will make the game even more enjoyable and rewarding for players of all ages and abilities.

Q: Honestly, with so many officials, this seems like a weighty initiative. How hopeful are you?

There is a learning curve that will need to take place. Although our officials will be on the front lines making the calls, they will need to be supported by everyone involved with the game. The support needs to be more than vocal. Our coaches must teach the new standards and train players to the new standards.

Our administrators need to support the effort and recognize that the game is changing to allow the skill, speed and strength to dominate. The implementation of these standards will require great effort and resolve by so many from the referees, coaches, players and administrators working together to make the game better. I am confident that the team will pull together and, over time, the standard will have a positive effect on the game. I am hopeful that parents will become educated on the benefits of this new standard as well.

Q: To what degree will this also affect players and coaches and parents?

Coaches will need to reinforce the standard and encourage players to improve their skill, speed and strength to become better hockey players. The shortcut approach with illegal actions will be more strictly called. Parents

should appreciate that the game will be safer and better to play, and more fun to watch. Players with skill, speed and strength will have more space to succeed.

Q: What are the anticipated results of this monumental, and are you comfortable with that word, adherence?

I anticipate that there will be some bumpy roads early on and that everyone should expect that the standard will continue throughout any bumpy period. But this is being done at the highest level. The benefit of that reality is that the standard shown at the highest level has been consistent and continuous despite bumpy periods of many calls and stoppages of play. There will be some uncomfortable times in this transition from acceptance of degrees of holding, hooking, slashing, interference and other illegal impediments to play. However, let the transition begin for youth hockey and all that support it. The final result will be a better game to play and watch, and it will produce better and more skillful players enjoying the process.