

# DIVERSITY DOES MATTER



## A Sport Is A Terrible Thing To Waste

In recent years the sport of grassroots inline hockey has seen a concerning decline in participation. Some may say that the cause is due to the current recession, or a lack of sustainable growth initiatives to maintain interest in the sport. Either way, there are fewer kids playing inline hockey at local parks & recreation and community centers throughout Colorado. And, although inline hockey is still popular and growing globally, in America, we've seemed to have lose sight to the importance of growth in diversity.

On October 1, 2012, the Colorado Elite Inline Hockey Federation (CEIHF) launched its PSA campaign called "A sport is a terrible thing to waste". The CEIHF growth initiative was designed to promote recreational inline hockey while providing education to the beneficial fitness and personal development opportunities the sport brings to Denver's economically challenged and at-risk kids.

## Why Inline Hockey?

For many decades, hockey has been alleged to be an elitist, all white and cost preventive sport; perceived to be beyond the reach of inner-city kids of color. And although inline hockey still carries a moderate to high price tag for equipment, rink-time, and league fees, it is still considerably less expensive in

comparison to its ice hockey counterpart. However in contrast, inline hockey is among those grassroots sports that can be enjoyed on the sidewalks of Denver city blocks, empty tennis courts, and suburban home driveways. This is not unlike when kids played grassroots stickball, and football between parked cars on neighborhood inner-city streets.

Because of inline hockey's minimal [no ice] surface requirements, and its ability to reach more kids from more diverse communities, it lends itself to ideal opportunities for encouraging more kids from all cultures while creating an all-inclusive environment much needed within the hockey community.

Currently, many of our parks & recreation programs have seen diminishing participation due to the current economic climate. The middle class communities, that was once hockey's largest financial supporters have been economically decimated causing participation numbers to decrease by as much as 60% since the sport's hay day of the mid 1990's when inline hockey saw its overwhelming surge in popularity.

Of course, the success of the Colorado Avalanche and their Stanley Cup wins in 1998 and 2001 brought hundreds of kids to the indoor and outdoor rinks with expectations of one day

## The CEIHF Believes It Can Help

becoming an the next NHL superstar. But unfortunately, those days came to an end in recent years leaving the sport of hockey hanging with all its eggs in one cultural basket, and with little to no plans toward recovering its membership loses.

### It's Economics Stupid!

For the CEIHF, the issue of diversity has always been at the forefront of the Federation's hockey development program and growth model. "If NHL franchises wish to expand their fan base, and increase revenue, they'll have to address a number of public concerns. Among them are the public's frustration of past and current lockouts, public visibility, lack of effective community civic engagement in our economically disadvantaged communities, and the ongoing criticism regarding a lackluster attempt toward diversity. The NHL can become more instrumental in reversing the current trend of decline by proactively supporting a number of programs like Hockey without

Boundaries which reaches out to an untapped resource of prospective participants and fans." says Eddie Delgado, Founder and President of the Colorado Elite Inline Hockey Federation.

For the past three years the CEIHF and its Hockey without Boundaries program has distributed hundreds of hockey sticks, balls, nets and goalie equipment to such outreach programs as Colorado UpLift, a "stay in school", and educational support program for inner-city at-risk children from Denver Metro communities. In recent years, the CEIHF has provided "Learn to Play" clinics and distributed additional floor hockey equipment to the Town of Parker, Parks & Recreation youth sports programs while also reaching out to the Challenge to Excellence Charter School in Parker, Colorado with hockey clinics and floor hockey equipment

In all, the CEIHF with the help of the Colorado Avalanche have distributed enough grassroots hockey equipment to affect over 600 kids from several communities throughout the Denver Metro area. "If the hockey industry are waiting for the community to come to us, we'll be waiting a long time before any change will come toward diversifying the sport of hockey." says Eddie Delgado.

"Those that depend on the hockey community for its revenue should seriously consider a growth model that can reach out to communities outside of the traditional middle class suburban

neighborhoods; and that can advance the sport of hockey while progressively affecting the lives of kids within our metropolitan and suburban communities throughout the United States. In addition, we can also work to improve our efforts toward encouraging and educating the local business and corporate community to the benefits of supporting grassroots civic engagement that will affect the lives of children living in socioeconomically challenged communities." adds Eddie Delgado.

### Moving Forward

The CEIHF recognizes that has it has its work cut out for them. And that the slow economic recovery certainly makes their challenge of fundraising even more difficult. "We are challenged every day to solicit enough funding to sustain our ability to continue our philanthropic and youth development programs." Says Mike Delgado, CEIHF Director of Training and Skills Development. "Our kids rely on us to continue our programs from one year to the next.

A black and white photograph of a hockey rink seen through a chain-link fence. The rink is empty, with a goal visible in the background. The text is overlaid on the image.

grassroots inline hockey has been hit hard by a declining economy. The sport has lost 60% of its fan base in the last 10 years. The only way to reverse this trend is to reach out to the communities that have been left behind. We must start together to help these kids and families who are hard to reach. Adults can no longer rule the day. Our children's future and their love for hockey is at stake.

**A SPORT IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE.**  
IF THEY'RE NOT PLAYING HERE, WHAT KIND OF GAMES ARE THEY PLAYING?

WHICH SIDE OF THE SPORTS FENCE WOULD YOU WANT YOUR CHILD TO BE ON?  
AFFORDABILITY SHOULD NOT BE A REASON ANY CHILD CAN'T PARTICIPATE IN HOCKEY. YOU CAN HELP.

Support the CEIHF Hockey without Boundaries a Youth Sports Growth and Diversity Initiative • Talk to your employer to adopt and sponsor a team today.

**CEIHF Growth Initiative PSA Campaign**

PLATE ELITE HOCKEY

www.ceihf.org

And, I have yet to meet a child that completes our program and can't wait for the next upcoming season of inline hockey.

However, our program requires consistent funding for equipment, rink time and organizational expenses, and there lies the challenge for the sustainability of our programs."

The CEIHF and its volunteers feel that their work toward making hockey all-inclusive is a part of the essential formula necessary to growing their sport.

"It's the right thing to do." says Eddie.

The CEIHF sees an enormous opportunity to advance inline hockey by culturally integrating their programs, while providing important life experiences that expose their youth members to events that are helping the less fortunate through civic-engagement. The Federation believes that the major hockey organizations like the NHL, and USA Hockey have a moral obligation to aggressively support all-inclusiveness throughout professional and amateur hockey in America.

### A Bit of Unknown Hockey History

According to the NHL, the first Afro-American to break the color barrier was Canadian, Willie O'Ree in 1957; but it wasn't until 1974 when Canadian, Mike Marson, of the joined the NHL's Washington Capitals as the second Afro-American in the League. As other mainstream sports were moving ahead toward integrating their sports franchises throughout the 1940's, [if for only economic reasons] the NHL seemed to be locked in a bubble for decades failing to follow the trend toward integration. And, although the existence of qualified and talented hockey athletes existed in the CHL (Colored Hockey League



**Learning the Basics and Hockey without Boundaries**

## *The CEIHF Believes It Can Help*

have contacted the NHL and presented their findings to the NHL Diversity Task Force, the NHL listened and is currently in discussions with the Fosty's in regards to their research... However, there is still no recognition of the Colored Hockey League." So far, there has been no public follow up from the NHL or ESPN since the 2007 reporting.

"Needless to say, there are many questions that surround the NHL's lack of real and appreciative diversity progress." says Eddie Delgado. "Especially, when one considers that other major mainstream sports have been successfully integrated for decades. The NHL [to date], can only boast around 30 players of color out of almost 800 active players in the League."

### **Can Inline Hockey Save Hockey?**

**The CEIHF aims to make a difference.** The CEIHF believes that we must adopt a sense of urgency to work toward creating a hockey community that is representative of the current American cultural makeup. "All-inclusiveness and diversity in hockey must become an imperative initiative to save the sport from becoming a "niche" sport in the U.S." says Eddie.

The Federation wants to share its vision for affecting the lives of many more kids that will benefit from its athletic and personal development programs and activities, while growing the sport. "Our plan for the future is to reach out to three inner-city schools and youth outreach programs each year throughout 2012 and 2017. This we hope, will produce at least three teams each season to add into our developing Urban Youth Inline Hockey League and development programs." says Mike Delgado.

of the Maritimes, 1895-1925), recruitment to the all-white hockey leagues of the time was nonexistent.

Remarkably, very few hockey fans have ever heard of the CHL (Colored Hockey League). The CHL is described in detail within the book *Black Ice: The Lost History of the Colored Hockey League of the Maritimes, 1895-1925* written by Canadian historians George and Darril Fosty (Stryker-Indigo, 2004); intended to serve as a lasting tribute to the role played by minorities in hockey.

For almost forty years, the CHL existed much like baseball's Negro Leagues, except for one major difference...CHL players were never acknowledged or recognized as pioneers and innovators of the sport by the NHL or current "Hockey History" literature. To this day, the great players of the CHL are not mentioned in the NHL Hall of Fame, or ever acknowledged as innovators of the "slap shot" or the "butterfly" position now commonly used by goalies across amateur and professional hockey.

In 2007 Fosty's reached out to ESPN to make them aware of their published book and research findings. The ESPN covered the story and ended their report with this comment, "The Fosty's

The organization is also hopeful that the NHL will take a proactive approach to improving the visibility of such talented NHL players of color like Jarome Iginla, Wayne Simmonds, Bryce Salvador and Ray Emery, to name a few, whom can serve as role models to encourage minority children to take up hockey as a daily fitness and health education resource.

However, more needs to be done to lift a number of outdated hockey traditions that create barriers and continue to obstruct efforts for dramatic changes that can impact the current face of American hockey.

### **A Proactive Solution**

Many will suggest that the cost of participating in hockey is a deterrent to change and growth. But, there was a time in sports history when football was seen [and still is] as an expensive proposition for kids within impoverished metropolitan neighborhoods. In 1930 an organization called Pop Warner Football made the effort to reach



**Excellence is Hard Work**



Changing lives one goal at a time.

out to the corporate and local business community for funding, and the rest is history. Hockey more than ever, needs a “Pop Warner” model that will reach out to all communities as part of the process to increase awareness and grow the sport. The CEIHF’s mission is to adopt the “Pop Warner” model, with grassroots floor hockey and inline hockey to grow its local youth programs.

*CEIHF youth programs now include:*

**Colorado Elite & Amateur Athlete Team Systems**

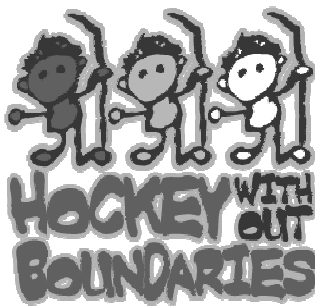
Developing and preparing young amateur inline hockey athletes for the next level of local, national and international competition with:

Performance Training and Personal Development

- Team USA and World Team Prep Training
- Conditioning, Fitness and Health Education
- Grassroots Recreational Athletic Development

**Rocky Mountain Talons Kid's Day Event**

This is an event designed for fun and exercise while introducing floor hockey to kids within the Town of Parker community. Kids are exposed to the fundamentals of passing, puck handling, shooting and teamwork.



**Mentoring with "Buddy Up With Hockey"**

An initiative that provides donated hockey equipment and introductory hockey clinics to enhance the elementary and middle school physical fitness education curriculum.

The goal is to increase fitness awareness and encourage administrators to adopt “Hockey Tuesdays” as part of their physical fitness education curriculum.

**Community Outreach "Hockey Without Boundaries"**

The Hockey without Boundaries program goes a step further with its “Learn to Play Hockey” clinic programs designed toward providing much needed financial assistance for equipment to inner city and at-risk youth.

The program reaches out to new participants in the Denver Metro area whilst introducing diversity to the sport of inline hockey.

There is no doubt that with community and corporate support, the CEIHF can continue to improve the lives of children throughout the Colorado Front Range with inline hockey programs.

