

Why allow hockey fighting?; We don't condone violence in other parts of our lives. On this Hockey Day in Canada, let's get rid of it.

BYLINE: BY **PETER JAFFE**

SECTION: EDITORIAL/OPINION; Pg. A11

LENGTH: 604 words

Millions of Canadian hockey fans cheered on our national team in the recent world junior championship in Sweden. We didn't need fighting to be entertained.

Why then do we need hockey fighting the rest of the year?

A lifelong hockey fan, I played as a kid and re-enacted Stanley Cup-winning goals in my backyard on a regular basis. I have a son who plays hockey. I believe fighting and violence have no place in the sport.

A good starting place is Major Junior A Hockey. As a Thames Valley District school board trustee, it struck me as hypocritical to have teenage players beat up on each other for the enjoyment of some fans. We don't condone such violence in any other part of our lives.

I attended a London Knights game with children and parents from our elementary school to watch our choir sing the national anthem. It seemed strange to have the Knights (many of them students in our high schools) fight in front of our children for the pleasure of a minority of the 9,000 in attendance. Some parents were shocked and some children frightened.

At our Dec. 19 board meeting, Thames Valley trustees passed a motion urging OHL commissioner David Branch to ban fighting, and to have our principals include a notice to parents preparing them for the violence when we sold Knights tickets as part of school fundraisers or to watch our choirs sing at the games.

Branch has been quoted as indicating he'd like fighting eliminated, but it wasn't a priority.

Our board wrote the Knights' owners asking for their support. We are also seeking the Ontario Public School Trustees Association's backing, and other education groups have endorsed the motion.

Since this motion was publicized, I've received both angry and supportive e-mails and calls from across Ontario. Some questioned my manhood. Some fans were glad to see the issue raised and debated. Many hockey parents complained of a culture that condones violence among players and even parents.

There is resistance to change. Here are the most common concerns I have received from other people and my brief response:

- Violence is inevitable in a high-speed contact sport such as hockey and players need this outlet. (Violence is banned in every other major sport and in Olympic, university or high school play.)
- If we ban fighting, there will be more stick infractions. (Referees can clamp down on them, just as they've done on clutch-and-grab infractions.)
- Fighting is part of the strategy. (Fighting shouldn't be part of the strategy of any sport except boxing, karate and the WWE.)
- Junior players have to fight to get ready for the NHL. (An increasing number of players come from Europe and U.S. colleges, where there is no fighting.)
- Some fans say fighting has always been part of hockey. (Rules change in hockey regularly, from penalty calls to the size of the goal crease.)
- The violence does no harm to children. (It is impossible to research the unique impact of different kinds of sports and media violence on children, since there are many influences on their development.)
- Fans love the violence and we need it to sell the game in the U.S. (Maybe more fans would come for the family entertainment if there was no violence.)

Some fans said if you don't like fights, don't go to games. This made me wonder who owns the game. I feel that fans such as me, who love the game but not fighting, have the right to enjoy the game, too.

Years ago, we minimized bullying in schools and accepted it as inevitable. We no longer tolerate it and have policies and prevention programs in schools across Canada.

Similarly, we should no longer accept violence as part of our national pastime.

January 21, 2007 Sunday
FINAL EDITION

Then don't watch

BYLINE: BY KURT HILL, LONDON

SECTION: EDITORIAL/OPINION; Letters to the Editor; Pg. A19

LENGTH: 113 words

Regarding **Peter Jaffe's** column, Why allow hockey fighting? (Jan. 13).

I believe that those who go to hockey games realize what happens there. And it comes down to this: If you don't like what you see, choose not to watch. It is not the responsibility of the OHL to cater to our needs. I think it is great to see the youngsters singing the national anthem and watch the "Timbits" having their fun, but it is up to the parents to decide what they allow their children to watch.

And to the point of, "we don't see this sort of fighting anywhere else in life," I challenge Jaffe to watch the six o'clock news to see if what he notices there is better or worse than what he sees at the game