

Ontario Junior Hockey League pushes start date further back

By Robert Belardi

The Ontario Junior Hockey League has set back their potential start date to January. The OJHL, announced back in September that hockey would be back on the ice by this time however that doesn't seem to be the case. With the increased numbers of COVID-19 in the province, these new start-dates and regulations have been distinguished by the current state of the pandemic. Written in the Nov. 5 press release, the league has been working diligently with Public Health Units and hockey's governing bodies to ensure a safe return. The OJHL is now fully prepared, once approval from our governing authorities has been granted, to move forward with a 30-36 game schedule with a potential start in early-January, wrote Commissioner Marty Savoy. With an uncertain few months teams have been cleared with some positive news as club's have been given the go-ahead for exhibition games. Teams, who have been practicing in some capacity for the past few months or so, have begun to cohort their bubbling process and have done so efficiently. All teams must confirm their 25-man rosters in order to begin playing non-contact scrimmages. This year, unlike in years past has forced the league to alter their schedule. With a 30-36 game projected season, a normal seven-game playoff series will inevitably be reduced to a best-of-three. All teams will be provided with PPE equipment such as reusable masks with washable filters and surgical masks. All cleaning products will be provided for players and staff on each team. Most importantly, each team is also receiving a disinfectant fogger machine in partnership with CleanQuip Systems Inc., which will be used to disinfect and sanitize team dressing rooms and other team areas within each facility, the release wrote. Subsequently on Nov. 6, the OJHL released another statement, confirming their modified five-on-five playing rules have been approved by the Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF). Some of the new rules include, no body contact, the number of players allowed to dress as well as bench seating requirements will depend on the facility structure and Public Health Unit, team benches must be disinfected at the end of each period, elimination of post-whistle scrums or altercations. Approaching the start of the new year comes with lots of excitement as all the hard work has finally paid off to get the OJHL up and running. None of this would be possible without the incredible support and very responsive involvement of the many public health units which are responsible for the locales where we play. In conjunction with PHU co-operation, our Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Karen Chrobak, has done a remarkable job assisting us along the way and we want to acknowledge her contributions, Savoy said. More information is to come as well as specific start dates.