



Illinois Hockey Officials Association ("IHOA") Newsletter  
January 2026 | 2025-26 Season | Volume 13

## Referee in Chief's Playoff Notes

**Fellow IHOA Officials,**

As the 2025-2026 season enters the playoffs stretch, I want to thank everyone for their hard work throughout the season. As you all know there have been many changes at both the local level and national level and I believe our membership has done a great job adapting to those changes as they came.

As teams move into the playoffs, please be mindful that everyone is down to their final games and the intensity will undoubtedly rise in these games. Please remember to focus on Player Safety; Fairness and Consistency of rule application; Communication with game participants and Sportsmanship.

Please ensure that game reports and incident reports are submitted as soon as possible, so teams and administrators can verify that only eligible players are participating.

**Thank you for your continued excellence in officiating,**

**Brian Fisher**

**Referee in Chief, IHOA**

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## USA Hockey Winter Meeting Updates

The USA Hockey Winter Meetings took place from January 16–18. This was a non–rule change year, so there will be no rule changes for the upcoming season.

There were no complaints regarding the tag-up/icing interpretation on penalty kills that was implemented this season. Minor verbiage clean-ups were made to the Annual Guide; however, these changes will not impact officials.

USA Hockey also discussed the potential implementation of green-outlined crests for officials under the age of 18. This item did not make it to the floor for a vote on January 18 and will be revisited at the Summer Meetings in Denver in June.

The HECC will be releasing a list of all approved NLP (neck laceration protection) manufacturers. Currently, there are three approved manufacturers, and their products will bear the HECC logo.

USA Hockey registered just over 32,000 officials, with approximately 85% completing all certification requirements. Additionally, 560 virtual seminars were completed by officiating sections across the country.

USA Hockey will also be hosting another Advanced Officiating Symposium (AOS). More details will be shared once the host city is selected.

Lastly, USA Hockey registration fees will increase for the 2026–27 season:

- Level 1: Increase from \$45 to \$55 (+\$10)
- Level 2: Increase from \$55 to \$75 (+\$20)
- Levels 3 & 4: Increase from \$110 to \$135 (+\$25)



## Chicago Steel Referee Appreciation Night

On March 21, 2026, the Chicago Steel USHL junior hockey team will host a Referee Appreciation Night as they take on the Youngstown Phantoms. Puck drop is scheduled for 6:05 PM. Please mark your calendars—ticket information will be provided in next month's IHOA newsletter.



# 2026 State Tournament Dates

## **Tier 1 Youth State Finals**

Tournament dates:

January 30th - March 1st

Championship:

February 28 - March 3

Mount Prospect Ice Arena

## **Tier 1 Girls State Finals**

Tournament dates:

January 30th - March 1st

Championship:

February 28 - March 3

Mount Prospect Ice Arena

## **Tier II Youth and Girls Championships**

Tournament dates:

February 1 - March 8th

Championship:

March 7 - 8

Mount Prospect Ice Arena

## **High School State Championship Finals**

Tournament dates:

February 1st - March 15th

Red/Combined Championship:

March 6th Allstate Arena

JV & JV Combined Championship:

March 13th Rosemont Rink

## **High School Girls State Championship Finals**

Tournament dates:

February 1st - March 15th

Girls Championship:

March 15th Allstate Arena



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## Illinois Official on the Global Stage

Erika Greenen was selected to officiate at the **2026 IIHF U18 Women's World Championships** as a linesperson. The tournament took place from January 10–18, 2026, in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Erika worked multiple games throughout the event, and due to her high level of skill, effort, and performance, she was assigned the gold medal game by the IIHF Officiating Staff.

Congratulations to Erika on her outstanding work and well-deserved assignment!



## DOCUMENTS

[Game Summary](#)

[Line-Ups](#)

[Shot Chart](#)

## GAME DETAILS

### REFEREE(S)



HARRIS Sydney



MARTIN Amy

### LINESPERSON



FISCHER Lara



GREENEN Erika

### ATTENDANCE

5039

2026



U18 WOMEN'S WORLD  
CHAMPIONSHIP

CANADA

Cape Breton

**Performance, Education and Development  
Spotlight: "But I'm Just a Linesmen!"**





In this video the quick reaction of the linesmen prevents what could have been a real difficult situation. Notice how connected to the play these two were - this is what is required throughout the entire game. Great work by these two.



## USA Hockey Rule 603: Boarding

This video is a strong example of what boarding looks like in a live game. Boarding occurs when a player pushes, trips, or body checks an opponent in a manner that causes the opponent to be thrown dangerously into the boards.

This includes:

- Accelerating through a check on a player who is in a vulnerable or defenseless position
- Driving an opponent excessively into the boards with no focus on or intent to play the puck
- Delivering a check for the purpose of punishment or intimidation that causes an opponent to go unnecessarily and excessively into the boards

The onus is always on the player delivering the check to avoid placing a vulnerable or defenseless opponent in danger.

Remember, as a crew, all officials on the ice are referees. If you see something as a linesperson, say something to the referees. Linespeople are not out there to be “JFL” (just a freaking linesman).

Good linespeople make average referees look great. Bad linespeople make the entire crew look bad.

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## Get to Know Us! - Brett Straley



Following the IHOA by-law change voted on at the annual meeting on May 13, 2024, IHOA has established a Communications Committee, led by Scott Gaffney and Matt McManus with valuable contributions from Steven Gapski and Kevin Haller. This month, we'd like to introduce you to IHOA Board Member and MCHO Co-Founder/Assignor Brett Straley.

### Brett Straley

Brett Straley grew up in Muskegon, Michigan and now resides in Chicago's North Center neighborhood with his wife and son; he is also the father of two adult children. With more than 20 years of officiating experience, Brett has worked across the professional, collegiate, international, and elite amateur levels. His résumé includes serving as a referee in the Southern Professional Hockey League from 2022–2026, highlighted by an assignment to the league's President's Cup Final in 2025. Collegiately, he has officiated NCAA Division I Independents, Division II (Northeast-10 Conference), and Division III, including the NCHA and MASCAC. Also earning NCAA tournament assignments at the Division III level.

Brett was selected for the International Hearing-Impaired Series (United States vs. Canada). His amateur experience includes ACHA Divisions I–III, USPHL Premier, and top-tier USA Hockey events, including the Tier I National Championship Tournament and Tier I Boys Central District Tournament. A USA Hockey Level 4 Official, he has also worked multiple AHA high school and youth state championship games, including the High School Combined Division State Semifinal (2022) and State Final (2024).

Off the ice, Brett is a recognized leader in officiating development. He is the 2021 Mike Zyburt Award recipient as IHOA Assistant Seminar Instructor of the Year, serves as an instructor for Southeastern Referee Academy (SERA), California Referee School, and the IHOA Advanced Development Program, and holds the role of IHOA Performance, Education and Development Chairperson. Brett is a Board Member of the Illinois Hockey Officials Association and a Co-Founder/Assignor for Mid Coast Hockey Officials.



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