



Illinois Hockey Officials Association ("IHOA") Newsletter March 2026 | 2025-26 Season | Volume 14

Referee in Chief's End of Season Note

Fellow IHOA Officials,

As the 2025–2026 hockey season comes to a close, I want to take a moment to thank every one of you for the time, energy, and professionalism you brought to the ice this year. Officiating hockey in Illinois continues to require dedication, preparation, and a genuine passion for the game, and our membership consistently demonstrates those qualities night after night in rinks across the state.

This season presented its share of challenges and adjustments. With continued changes in technology, assigning platforms, and administrative processes, our officials once again showed their ability to adapt and move forward together. The rollout and increased use of centralized systems through MCHO, improvements in communication, and updates to our registration and reporting processes all required flexibility from our membership. Your willingness to learn and adjust ensured that games continued to be covered at a high level throughout Northern Illinois.

More importantly, the standard of officiating in our association continues to improve. From our newest Level 1 officials working their first games, to our most experienced officials handling high-level youth, high school, and junior contests, the commitment to player safety, fairness, and consistency was evident all season long. The mentorship provided by veteran officials to younger members remains one of the greatest strengths of our community, and it is critical to building the next generation of officials.

As we move into the spring and summer months, development remains a major focus for our association. Offseason camps, clinics, and informal training opportunities provide an excellent chance to continue improving skating, positioning, rules knowledge, and game management. The officials who take advantage of these opportunities are the ones who continue to grow and move on to higher levels of hockey. I strongly encourage everyone—regardless of experience level—to look for ways to continue developing your craft during the offseason.

The spring and summer seasons also provide a valuable opportunity for our newer officials to gain additional experience in a supportive environment. If you are one of our more experienced officials, please continue to mentor and support those working alongside you. A quick word of advice in the locker room or on the ice can make a lasting impact on a young official's confidence and development.

On behalf of the entire association, thank you again for everything you have done this season. Your commitment ensures that the game of hockey continues to thrive in Illinois. We look forward to building on the progress made this year and continuing to strengthen our officiating community.

Thank you for your continued excellence in officiating.

Brian Fisher

Referee in Chief, IHOA

High School Finals Officiating Crews

The IHOA Board would like to recognize the crews that skated the High School Finals.



High School Boys Red Division Officiating Crew (left to right):

Referee: Anthony Fiorito

Referee: CJ Marshall

Linesperson: Andrew Wilkinson

Linesperson: Luke Franco



High School Boys Combined Division Officiating Crew (left to right):

Linesperson: Matt McManus

Referee: Eric Netzel

Referee: Anthony Faron

Linesperson: Bob MacPherson



High School Girls Division Officiating Crew (left to right):

Linesperson: Katelyn Hayward

Referee: Josh Katsimpalis

Referee: Sam Quiat

Linesperson: Brian Smolicek



High School Boys Junior Varsity Blue Division Officiating Crew (left to right):

Linesperson: Brian Paha

Referee: Sergei Vahmistrovs

Referee: Justin Baugher

Linesperson: Gavin Powels



High School Boys Junior Varsity Combined Division Officiating Crew (left to right):

Linesperson: Doug Hart

Referee: Alexander Crowe

Referee: Dennis MacLennan

Linesperson: Brian Smolicek

2026 Illinois Down State High School Hockey Championship

Sunday, March 15, marked the culmination of the AHA I High School Downstate Finals. IHOA would like to congratulate the officials who were selected to officiate the final game.

Illinois Downstate High School Varsity Crew:

Referees: Gregg Guenther and Keplen Gresham

Linespersons: Logan Shepard and Robert Rescot



Illinois Officials at Central District Championships

The IHOA Board would like to congratulate the following officials on being selected to officiate the Central District Tier I Boys Championships:

Anthony Baffi
Blair Bigwood
David Canon
Luke Franco
Kevin Haller
James Kenny
Alex Lieberman
Sean Pondelicek
Chris Thiess
Kenny Zschach Jr.

The games took place in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, from March 7–9.

Thank you for representing Illinois officiating during these games.



2026 Tier 1 and Tier 2 State Finals Officials

The IHOA Board would like to recognize the following individuals for officiating the Illinois State Tier I Championship Games, held at Mt. Prospect Ice Arena from February 28th to March 4th.

Illinois State Tier 2 state finals were held at Mt. Prospect Ice Arena from March 7–8:

Congratulations on working these series for AHAI.

Tier 1 Officials:

Asher Ali, Ibrahim Arifi, Anthony Baffi, Mark Bialko, Blair Bigwood, Stefan Boll, Samuel Burcal, Colby Byers, David Canon, Luke Captain, Steve Cohen, Chris Czarnik, William Dausman, Gregory Ellwanger, Brian Fabes, Richard Faron, David Foster, Edward Fridman, Scott Gaffney, William Gallwas, David Gora, Thomas Gracey, Erika Greenen, Andrew Guz, Jim Guzzardi, Kevin Haller, Josh Horowitz, Gage Jacobs, Adam Jolcover, Aidan Kachelmuss, Nicholas Katsinis, Brian Kenny, James Kenny, Joe Kerulis, Justin Klonoski, Jessica Krysik, Christian Langlois, Christopher Lermer, Alex Lieberman, Max Lieberman, David Liebman, Marissa Lyons, Bob MacPherson, Daniel Mallott, Timothy Manning, Christopher J Marshall, Colin McGregor, Matthew McManus, John McNicholas, Charles Mega, Jack Mestanas, Carson Metzler, Jeff Milz, Bob Moore, Jakub Moravec, Dan Nelson, Eric

Tier 2 Officials:

Bryce Burrink, Terry McLoughlin, Tim Whiting, Thomas Noto, Katelyn Hayward, Steve Acerbi, Jerry Baldwin, Dan Nelson, Brenden Krzysiak, Jeff Vodnik, Brad Baumruck, Dennis MacLennan, David Ballantyne, Mike Anderson, Dan Wardzala, Brennden Burrink, John Thackray, Myles Whiting, Colin McGregor, Daniel Mallott, David Foster, Justin Klonoski, Owen Davies, Steven Rickard, Bob MacPherson, Eric Sexton, Eric Peterson, Jameson Gronert, Ibrahim Arifi, David Smoller, Thomas Gracey, Bobby MacPherson, Brandon Boies, Matt Neubauer, Blake Edwards, Steven Gapski, Collin Craig, Gavin Powels, Ron Coletta Jr

Netzel, Matt Neubauer, Edward Nieves, Thomas Noto, James Porter, Gary Poteshman, Gavin Powels, Eryk Przywara, Sam Quiat, Terrence Reedy IV, Ian Rosland, Robert Sasaki, Meir Sax, Jonathan Schlender, Josh Searles, Joe Seidel, Eric Sexton, Kenny Shemanske, Scott Smokin Silz, Caleb Sit, Brett Straley, Patrick C Sullivan, John Thackray, Sergei Vahmistrovs, John Van Ermen, Michael Verdonck, Edmund Vogrich, Jackson Wilken, Andrew Wilkinson, Chris Zouras, Constantine Zouras



Men's and Women's NCHA Playoffs

Congratulations to the following IHOA members that worked the NCAA Division 3 NCHA Conference Playoffs

Slaats Cup Playoff Officials(Womens):

Samantha Cebulski

Harris Cup Playoff Officials(Mens):

Chris Thiess
Blair Bigwood
David Vargas
Brett Straley

USPHL Premier and Elite Playoff Officials

Congratulations to the following IHOA members who worked the USPHL Premier and Elite Division Playoffs. Each of these officials worked various rounds of the Midwest Division playoff series.

Asher Ali
Luke Captain
William Dausman
Luke Franco
Steven Gapski
David Gora
Kevin Haller
Joshua Katsimpalis
Joshua Kinney
Pat Lehmann
Matt McManus
Jonathan Schlender
Chris Thiess
Edmund Vogrich
Ryne Wiederer

Thank you for your dedication and professionalism in representing IHOA at a high level and showcasing the standard of excellence our officials bring to every game.



ACHA Regional Playoffs and National Championships

Congratulations to the following IHOA members who worked the ACHA M2 Regional Playoffs held at Kube Sports Complex and Homewood-Flossmoor Ice Arena. The ACHA M2 Regional Playoffs were hosted by Purdue University Northwest during the weekend of February 20–21.

Congratulations to Dave Canon on being selected to officiate at the ACHA National Tournament, hosted in St. Louis from March 12th to March 22nd. This tournament hosts all three levels of the men's divisions and both divisions of women's college club hockey.

ACHA M2 Regional Playoff Officials:

Ed Vogrich
Anthony Baffi
Dave Canon
Steven Gapski
Anthony Faron
Steve Relli
Mike Plesek
Eric Sala
Matt Nee
Tom Callaghan
Stephen Polcyn
John Van Ermen



Dave Canon is second from the left in the above picture. Dave was assigned as the referee in the Men's ACHA D2 Final between an Oklahoma State University and Florida Gulf Coast University on March 17th at Centene Community Ice Center in St.Louis.



CUHL Super Sunday Officials

Congratulations to the following IHOA members who worked the Chicago United Hockey League (CUHL) Super Sunday at Glacier Ice Rink on March 1, 2026:

CUHL Finals Officials:

Steve Acerbi, Leonard Byrne, Christopher Ducasse, Sammy Fasman, Chase Gilmore, Rob Giron, Luke Hayden, Chace Kafka, Roger Lump, Caden Steres, Chris Zouras

Super Sunday is the championship event for every division within the CUHL. The league features divisions from Division 1 through Division 4, with multiple levels within each division to accommodate varying skill levels. The CUHL includes 33 different organizations, with teams from across Illinois and Missouri.

Great job officiating these games and representing IHOA at the grassroots level of hockey!



IHOA Officials on the Hockey World's Biggest Stages

IHOA would like to recognize Samantha Hiller on skating at the 2026 Milano Cortina Winter Olympic Games!

Samantha officiated the following games during the Winter Olympics:

- Czechia vs. Switzerland
- Japan vs. Italy
- Finland vs. Switzerland
- Quarterfinal: Finland vs. Switzerland
-

Congratulations, Samantha, on all your hard work in reaching the Olympics and officiating at the highest level of women's hockey!



IHOA would like to recognize Rocco Stachowiak on skating at the 2026 World Junior Hockey Championships in Minnesota.

Rocco officiated the following games during the World Juniors:

- Denmark vs. Czechia
- Germany vs. Sweden
- Canada vs. Finland
- Quarterfinal: Czechia vs. Switzerland
- Semifinal: Canada vs. Czechia
-

Congratulations, Rocco, on all your hard work in reaching the World Junior Championships!



Briggs & Riley Discount for IHOA Members

Hello IHOA Members,

We have been able to secure the same discount that the NHL Officials Association receives on Briggs & Riley luggage. As an IHOA member, you can receive 45% off the retail price of up to two Briggs &

Riley bags.

Briggs & Riley has also set up the ability to embroider the IHOA logo on any bag purchased. Below is an example of what this will look like.

There is an additional \$12.50 fee to have this done on any 2-wheeled bag and \$6.00 for any soft-sided bag. When entering your "Product Style Number and Color," please indicate that you would like the IHOA logo embroidered in white in that field on the form.

IHOA members are limited to two bags per person for the discount. The discount does not apply to toiletry kits or accessories. Additionally, these bags cannot be monogrammed.

The two most popular bags for officials are the Medium 2-Wheeled Duffel (Product #BLUWD127-4) and the Large 2-Wheeled Duffel (Product #BLUWD129-4).

Please use the attached form to place your Briggs & Riley order. Once you have completed the form, please email it to specialmarkets@briggs-riley.com. If you do not want IHOA embroidered on your bag, please state that in the order form. The subject of your email should be: IHOA Briggs & Riley Order. Once Briggs & Riley enters your order, the Special Markets team will send you an email with a link to complete payment.

Please use the link below to access the Briggs & Riley order form:

[IHOA Briggs & Riley Order Form](#)



IHOA Scholarship for 2026



IHOA

ILLINOIS HOCKEY OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION



The IHOA scholarships are awarded each spring to student officials who exhibit in school, on the ice and in their community the true spirit of USA Hockey, AHAI and IHOA. This scholarship, awarded to student officials annually, is applicable towards college tuition at an accredited college or university.

Important submission dates:

Application period opens: January 1

Application period closes: April 1

IHOA SCHOLARSHIP CRITERIA AND ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- The scholarship is available to both male and female applicants.
- Applicants must be an active member of IHOA.
- Applicants must be applying and planning to attend college as a full-time student in the school year following the award.
- Applicant must graduate from high school no later than June of the award year.
- Academic standing, including but not limited to grades, class rank, standardized tests scores and curriculum.
- Community and Volunteer Service
- Extracurricular activities
- Leadership and Character
- Letters of Recommendation

[IHOA Scholarship Application](#)

2026 IHOA Annual Meeting and Elections

The annual IHOA Boarding meeting will be held on Monday May 11, 2026 at 6:30pm at the All Seasons Ice Rink. More information will be distributed in April. Please see the address to All Seasons Ice Rink in Naperville.

**All Seasons Ice Rink
31W330 N Aurora Rd
Naperville, IL 60563**

The Illinois Hockey Officials Association Board of Directors recognizes IHOA and the officiating community depend on the dedicated efforts of its members and Directors for the orderly and efficient operation of IHOA's mission. As such, the Board encourages each and every eligible IHOA member to participate to their greatest ability, including as a member of the IHOA Board of Directors.

While encouraging officials to become Board Members, the IHOA Board is also cognizant of the need for a set of policies and procedures to guide the Nomination Committee for purposes of fulfilling its functions regarding the election of Board Members at the Annual Meeting.

Therefore, the IHOA Nominating Committee shall heretofore utilize the following policies and procedures for the nomination, acceptance, confirmation and election of eligible IHOA members to the IHOA Board of Directors. As used throughout these Policies and Procedures, the Nominating Committee may be referred to as "Committee", and the Nominating Chairman may be substituted for as "or his/her designate".

1. In accordance with the IHOA By-Laws, at least thirty (30) days prior to the Annual Meeting, a notice shall be published on the IHOA website indicating the date and time of the IHOA Annual Meeting.

2. Pursuant to the IHOA By-Laws, any IHOA member in good standing as of November 30 of the current playing year is eligible to nominate a similarly eligible IHOA member for election to the Board of Directors. The nominator shall provide a written email communication to the Nominating Committee Chairman nominating a member for election to the IHOA Board of Directors. No nominations may be accepted earlier than 30 days preceding the Annual Meeting date.

3. Upon receipt of the nomination, the Nominating Committee shall send the nominee an email outlining these policies and procedures and requesting the nominee provide written email confirmation of his/her acceptance of the nomination.

4. The Nominee shall provide a written communication via email to the Chairman of the Nominating Committee accepting his/her nomination for election to the IHOA Board of Directors.

5. The time for completing the nomination and acceptance procedure outlined above shall be on or before 5:00 p.m. on May 1 of the year in which the Annual Meeting is occurring. Any nomination or acceptance email received after 5:00 p.m. on May 1 shall be determined as not timely and the nominee shall not be certified as a candidate for the current election. The time stamp on any email received by the Nominating Committee Chairman shall be conclusive proof of the time in which the email was received by the Nominating Committee. The Nominating Committee shall send email notice to any nominee determined as ineligible or not timely notifying the nominee of same.

6. At the conclusion of the nomination and acceptance period outlined above, the Nominating Committee shall certify the list of confirmed candidates for placement on the Board of Directors election ballot. Further, the Nominating Committee shall send email notice to all confirmed candidates identifying the list of certified candidates and requesting confirmation from the candidates as to the spelling and appearance of the candidates' name on the election ballot. No candidates name on the ballot may include nicknames or other non-legal names. The Nominating Committee may permit an exception to this restriction and it may be to permit the shortened version of a name, i.e. Michael may be shortened to Mike, William may be shortened to Bill, etc.

7. At the discretion of the Nominating Committee, each candidate may provide a biography to the Nominating Committee for dissemination to the membership during the Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee, in its absolute discretion, may determine whether to provide the biographies of the providing candidates to the membership during the Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee may, in its absolute discretion, decline to provide any biographies of the providing candidates to the membership during the Annual Meeting. The Nominating Committee may consider, among other items, the cost of providing copies of the biographies to the membership. The purpose of this paragraph is to treat each candidate equally. If the Nominating Committee determines it will provide copies of the biographies to the membership for one candidate it shall provide copies of the biographies for all candidates. If the Nominating Committee determines it will not provide copies of the biographies to the membership then it shall provide no biographies of the candidates to the membership. The Nominating Committee, in its absolute discretion, may decline to provide a biography to the membership if the biography contains language or issues which are contrary to the purposes, rules and regulations of IHOA, AHA or USA Hockey.

8. The Nominating Committee shall prepare election ballots and election results forms for the Annual Meeting election. The Nominating Committee may, in its absolute discretion, prepare the election ballots and may use any or all of the following as information on the ballot: a) Candidate Name; b) Candidate's Nominator(s); and Placement of the Candidates' Names in Alphabetical Order or as determined by the Committee.

9. The Nominating Committee shall conduct the Annual Meeting election in accordance with the IHOA By-Laws and the procedures outlined in the Illinois Not for Profit Corporations Act, as amended from time to time. The IHOA Registrar (or the Registrar's designate if the Board Member occupying the Registrar position is up for election) shall present each eligible IHOA member present at the Annual Meeting with an election ballot prepared by the Nominating Committee. The ballot must be completed and returned to the designated Nominating Committee member during the Annual Meeting in order for the member's vote to be tabulated in the election.

To nominate someone for the IHOA Board please contact: mark_bialko@hotmail.com

Cut off for nomination and acceptance is May 1, 2026 5:00pm



Performance, Education and Development Spotlight



This clip highlights a clear example of illegal head contact, something that has no place in our game. USA Hockey emphasizes zero tolerance for these types of plays, reinforcing the importance of knowing the rules and making the right decision in every moment to protect players safety.



From an officiating standpoint, this play is a clear example of a situation that requires immediate recognition and confident enforcement. Officials must identify the infraction in real time, apply the correct rules standard, and ensure the appropriate penalty is assessed. Staying in proper position, maintaining awareness and reacting decisively are key to protecting player safety and keeping control of the game.

IHOA Member Spotlight!



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 an IHOA Member Colby Byers

Colby Byers

Colby Byers is a Level 4 USA Hockey official in his seventh consecutive year of officiating. His hockey career began in Wichita, Kansas, where he played for a very small program—the only one in the state. From a young age, he was interested in officiating and took the opportunity to put on the stripes as soon as he turned 14. He hasn't looked back since. After graduating from his high school team in 2023, Colby decided to pursue officiating as a career.

Coming from a small officials' organization in Kansas, with only 35–40 registered officials per season, Colby quickly learned that the best way to create opportunities to officiate full-time was to attend development camps. His first camp was the 2022 Central District Officiating Experience, and from that point on, he knew officiating was what he wanted to do.

Following that camp, Colby earned an opportunity to attend the 2023 NAHL Officiating Exposure Camp, where he spent four days in St. Louis, Missouri, refining his craft alongside former NHL, NCAA, and Olympic officials turned officiating coaches. His performance there led to an invitation to the 2023 USA Hockey Advanced Officiating Exposure Camp in Amherst, New York. This experience ultimately resulted in his selection for the USA Hockey Advanced Officiating Development Program (AODP), which employs full-time officials for the NA3HL, NAHL, and USHL.

Colby moved to Chicago in August 2024 to live in a more centralized location for the AODP and joined IHOA. Since then, he has officiated an estimated 600 games in Illinois, most notably working the 2025 AHA! State Tournament finals for the 16U division and the semifinals of the Illinois Varsity Red State Tournament.

Within the AODP, Colby currently serves as a linesperson in both the NA3HL and NAHL, and he is aiming to earn a playoff assignment in the NAHL as well as make his USHL debut.



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