



PRESIDENT'S REPORT – ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING NOVEMBER 17th, 2024

In this report I'll touch on some 2024 CIHA season highlights by league, describe progress against our 2024 objectives, and present some areas of focus for 2025.

Before proceeding, I'd like to acknowledge some important contributions made to CIHA over the past year. CIHA is a charitable organisation that runs almost entirely through generous contributions of time and effort by individuals. I'd like to thank the following:

- Committee members and others who make the Seniors, Masters, Women's, and Youth Leagues operate smoothly. Thanks very much to the CIHA Committee members who worked long hours behind the scenes to improve ice hockey in Canterbury.
- Special thanks for Mike Tobin, our Senior League Director who is stepping down after 3 years. With hundreds of players involved in hundreds of games each year, it is no small task to keep Senior League running smoothly. Thanks to Mike and the Grade Managers, and I look forward to Mike's continued involvement in our youth programs.
- Speaking of youth programs, a special thanks to Dave Wallace who has overseen excellent youth membership growth and player skill advancement. As numbers have grown in recent years, Dave has volunteered increasingly large amounts of time for the benefit of these young players and their families, and it's greatly appreciated.
- Thanks to all team managers, game officials, score benchers, first aiders, and those who update our web site with league schedules and game results. And especially to Alison Reid for all her scheduling work that helps keep our leagues ticking along, particularly in sorting game officials for our adult leagues, which is a huge task. And thanks to Sarah Redmayne for scheduling and mentoring our youth referees—it's great to see so many junior members in stripes on the ice.
- Thanks to the many volunteer coaches and managers who helped organise and operate all our representative teams: U15s, U18s, U21s, Inferno, and Red Devils. Thanks to Darren Ward and others who are leading our adult rep team merchandising efforts with great success. A special thanks to Neil Carey who is stepping down from his role as Red Devils Director on the committee. His infectious can-do attitude and outstanding work for the Red Devils is well known and greatly appreciated.
- Everyone who helped with the highly successful National U12 Jamboree hosted by CIHA, and especially to Leana Butler and Kat Tobin for leading CIHA's efforts to organise and execute it.
- All coaches and organisers of the Youth Development Camps, especially Neil Carey.

- Former Treasurer Pip Scotter for stepping in and acting as interim Treasurer when CIHA's Treasurer was sidelined with illness this year. Thanks also to Pip for her incredible work in refurbishing CIHA's goals/netting this year.
- Donors and sponsors who gave generously to fund our activities.
- Thanks to the First Aid Training Company for providing free training to CIHA coaches, managers, and other volunteers, and a discount for all CIHA members.
- Alpine Ice management and staff for their professionalism and close collaboration with CIHA that had a very visible and positive impact on ice hockey this year.
- And thanks to the many others who contributed over the year.

Now on to discuss some season highlights, show progress against our 2024 strategy, and describe objectives for 2025.

League Highlights

Learn To Play (All Ages)

- We continued offering a free LTP trial to children and using a concession card payment system, which has proven popular. Youth LTP was offered twice per week throughout 2024 and U12 Super League players also played weekly games in winter, providing them with three skating opportunities each week.
- We offered Adult Learn to Play weekly throughout winter and into Term 4.
- More than 50 new players participated in LTP this year, many of whom advanced to a refereed league while ice utilisation continued to improve, with an average of 37 players on the ice per session (up from 26 in 2021, 29 in 2022, and 35 in 2023).

Youth Club Leagues

- U12 Super League: Our Under-12 Super League operated very well, with 6 teams playing in winter, up from 5 in 2023. We continued efforts to connect these young players and their families to the Red Devils and Inferno, and exhibition Super League games were played during the first intermission at all Red Devils and Inferno games. A highlight for this age group and CIHA was hosting the National U12 Jamboree in October, which featured 22 teams from around the country, 154 players, and 231 games in one weekend! Feedback was extremely positive, and CIHA is already scheduled to host again in 2025.
- U15/U18s: the number of players in our club Under-15 and Under-18 leagues continued to grow. With just over 40 players in 2021, we had to combine U15s and U18s together to form 3 teams. In 2022 we separated the leagues into 2 teams each, in 2023 we were able to add a 3rd U15 team, and in 2024 we added a 4th U15 team.
- High Schools: Our High School league ran well with 4 teams, with somewhat sparser numbers than in previous years.

Adult Leagues

- Women's: CIHA organised a Global Girls' Game event in February, which saw around 40 players participating in 2 games. Women's League continued to grow, with games scheduled to run from October through December and 4 full teams competing, which is the highest participation in many years. Survey feedback has been excellent.

- Masters: In winter Masters moved back to Wednesday nights from their temporary Tuesday slot and CIHA also instituted a fixed \$25 per game charge, instead of invoicing players a different amount each week based on the number of players present. Playing numbers picked up since then and have remained largely consistent, with the league operating well under this new fee structure.
- Senior League: Senior League also ran well, but a weak 2024 winter team in each of G2 and G3 resulted in some poor-quality games. In both cases, too many members were “playing up” a grade level, with the G2 team being mostly G3-graded players and the G3 team mostly G4-graded players. The issue was corrected for summer, with a G2 team being dissolved (reducing G2 to 6 teams from 7), and an earlier registration announcement for G4 play which resulted in more G4 players playing in their proper grade. CIHA also instituted an online Manager “Team Entry” form in summer to ensure Managers who intend to enter a team understand and agree to the playing rules and state the number of appropriately graded players committed to their team, in addition to other similar questions. We believe this will help avoid problematic situations in the future, and so far, summer play has been far more balanced than winter.
- Senior League Premiers: After only being able to fill 3 teams in winter 2023, CIHA moved Premiers from winter to summer for 2024, resulting in 4 full teams again. CIHA held a very successful social draft night where draft picks were announced, and players awarded their team jerseys. Several long-time members said it was the best CIHA event in all their years in CIHA, so we’ll definitely do it again in 2025!

Youth Representative Teams (U15, U18)

- Youth playing numbers continue to increase, resulting in competitive trials and larger training squads in 2024.
- On-ice and off-ice training was conducted throughout the season with a focus on both skills and fitness.
- The rep U15 team finished 5th in round robin play (of 6 teams) and last overall. On the plus side, the U15s had a very positive team dynamic, and a post-season survey showed excellent satisfaction ratings.
- The rep U18s had a strong regular season, finishing tied for 2nd in round robin points (of 4 teams) and took home the silver in the tournament round. Team dynamics were also very good.
- The NZIHF intends to run three tiers of youth rep hockey in 2025 (U14/U16/U18). This will present some challenges to CIHA in fielding 3 full teams, as we will have very sparse numbers in the U16 range. With the expectation that U16 will be a checking league, the new tiering also requires CIHA to think about how its youth club leagues are run and how to prepare younger players for checking.

Adult Representative Teams (U21s, Inferno, Red Devils)

- U21s: As in 2023, U21 players had a single, long weekend of competition in Dunedin. Cross-regional teams were formed, with balance in mind, and players competed in an exciting 4v4 format.
- Inferno: The Inferno had a solid year, finishing 2nd in round robin play (of 4 teams) and taking home the silver. The fan support was great to see in the two home game weekends (the first being a round of friendlies), with strong ticket and merchandise

sales. Thanks to the Inferno coaches, managers, and other volunteers, and to Matt Chavez and everyone else who helped produce the live streams.

- **Red Devils:** Helmed by a new Head Coach, Anton Purver, 2024 was a challenging year on the ice for the Red Devils, with several strong 2023 players moving overseas. Off the ice, Red Devils management and CIHA marketing collaborated closely with Alpine Ice on promotions and game-day operations, resulting in very strong attendance and merchandise sales throughout the season. Sponsorship was excellent—many thanks to all the generous Red Devils supporters, the Red Devils managers and players who secured donations, Matt Chavez again on the live stream, and everyone else who worked so hard behind the scenes for the boys.

Finally, congratulations to all the players, coaches, and managers selected to represent New Zealand in the 2025 worlds. Well done, and best of luck next year.

Progress Against 2024 Objectives

Last year around this time, I laid out primary objectives for 2024, with the first two being “evergreen” goals, and the others being specific to 2024:

- 1) Grow Membership
- 2) Improve Member Satisfaction
- 3) Other Objectives:
 - a. Reassess All League Formats and Schedules
 - b. Promote “Volunteer to Play”
 - c. Explore adding a General Manager
 - d. Formalise a Referee Recruitment, Training, and Advancement program

1) Grow CIHA Membership

After very strong growth from 2019-2022, our overall membership numbers have plateaued. Around this point last year, CIHA had 559 members (barely up from 557 in 2022), and membership decreased slightly in 2024 to 549, with the overall membership mix showing a slight increase in youth players that was more than offset by a decrease in senior players. This is a disappointing and a reminder that CIHA needs to ensure that the Learn to Play program remains a priority in 2025 to continue to build a pipeline of new players into our club.

2) Improve Member Satisfaction

CIHA conducted its 5th annual member survey in October 2024, collecting 185 responses, to try to better understand member satisfaction. The anonymous survey asked members to rate their feeling toward various aspects of ice hockey in Canterbury. High-level results are shown below, including an “Overall Happiness” measure, the average of all scores, which ticked up slightly in 2024 largely due to a jump in satisfaction with Alpine Ice where our members have noticed significant positive investment in the facility and a closer collaboration with CIHA.

(1=Poor, 5=Excellent)

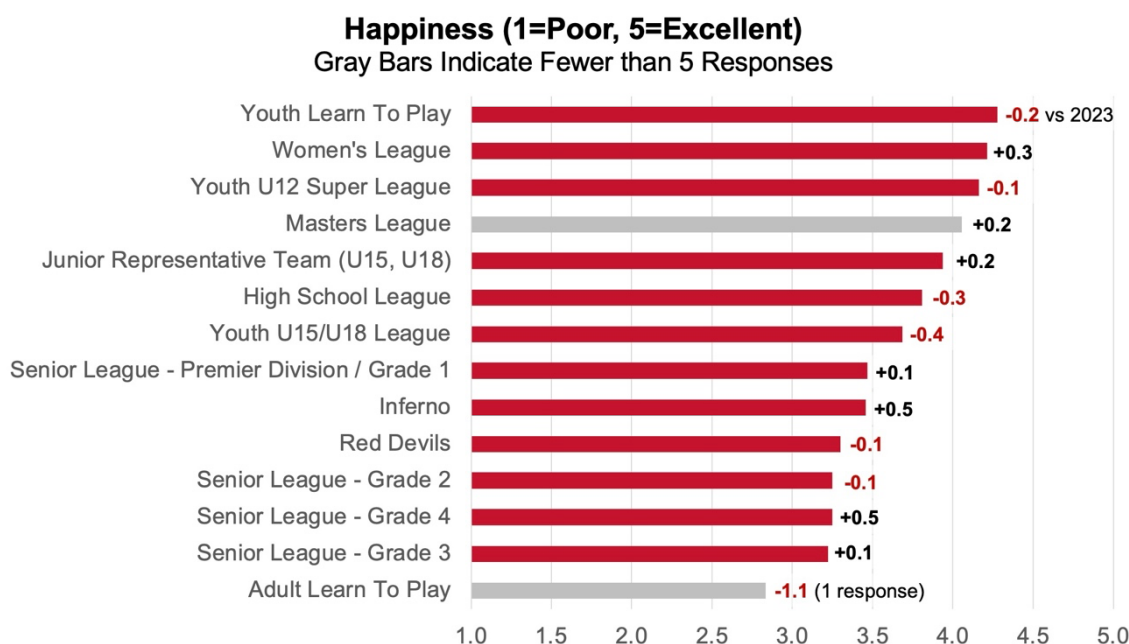
What Is Your Feeling Toward...	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Ice Times	3.1	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.3
Value for Money	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3
Game Officials*	-	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.5
Your League**	3.5	4.1	4.0	3.6	3.6
Your Team**	3.5	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.1
Alpine Ice	2.8	2.7	2.7	2.9	3.3
NZIHF	3.1	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.6
CIHA	2.9	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7
Overall Happiness (Avg of Scores)	3.1	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6

* = Game Officials question was added in 2021

** = Prior to 2023 these two questions were combined as “Feeling Toward Your League/Team”

I’d like to note that “Value for Money” remaining steady from 2021-2024 is a positive, since our operating costs increased significantly over that period. CIHA’s primary expense, ice time, increased 27% per hour over that period, for example. Why? Because Alpine Ice’s operating costs increased significantly over that period, particularly energy costs, and those costs need to be borne by ice users to ensure the business remains viable. Inflation has affected everyone in recent years, so it’s positive to see our members feel they’re still receiving good value.

The survey also asked respondents to select their primary league of participation in 2024 to try to shed some light on how members in each league feel. Some leagues had few responses, so those results have little statistical significance. But most leagues had a reasonable sample size and comparing the overall happiness of the leagues provides some insight. The difference in happiness from 2024 to 2023 is shown to the right of each bar.



The general pattern is akin to last year, with Youth Learn to Play and Youth Leagues tending toward the highest ratings and Senior Leagues tending toward the bottom, except for

Premiers/G1. Women's League had a noticeable jump in satisfaction, likely due to a resurgence in playing numbers over the past two years, expanding from 2 teams in 2022 to 3 in 2023 and now 4 in 2024. Youth U15/U18/HS saw a drop, possibly because of growing pains with more players, especially in U15s who were dissatisfied with game times starting as early as 6.30am in 2024. On a positive note, several youth players turned in strong performances with the Inferno, securing a silver medal in a well-run season with large crowds and support, all of which likely contributed to a jump in Inferno player satisfaction. Grade 4 satisfaction also increased, with efforts to offer a G4 league all year round, and those players reported stronger satisfaction in every metric, and especially toward Alpine Ice and the CIHA.

By and large, CIHA had mixed progress in improving member satisfaction, with an overall sideways pattern.

3a) Reassess All League Formats and Schedules

This goal was set largely in anticipation of the loss of certain ice time slots CIHA had enjoyed in the past, higher playing costs, and larger numbers in our youth segment requiring more playing slots.

Achieving this goal led to some hard choices, including expanding club U15s to 4 teams with games starting as early as 6.30am and playing the final Grade 2 games on Sundays slightly later, with a 10pm start, the same time Grade 3 has played on Mondays for many years. We also made the choice to postpone Premiers to summer and keep Women's League in summer.

We also surveyed Senior League players to gauge interest in expanding the draft format used in Premiers to a broader group that would include G2 and G3 players, so that one of the two winter/summer seasons per year would be played using a draft format and the other the traditional Senior League fixed-team format. Survey results were split down the middle, with many keen to try a draft format and many preferring to retain the current format all year round. In the end the decision was made to maintain the status quo for G2 and G3—although there was certainly enough interest to revisit this idea again in the future, especially given the persistently lower satisfaction scores in these grades.

3b) Promote "Volunteer to Play"

We often hear from players that ice hockey is becoming too expensive—and what can be done to lower costs. At the same time, the reimbursement rate for officiating a game, or serving as a scorebencher or first aider, is comparable to the cost of playing a game. We made more of an effort in 2024 to convey this message, but not a lot of effort was needed: we had a steady roster of first aiders and scorebenchers, as well as being able to fill up a 3-official system at most Senior League games. It was fantastic to see several seasoned Senior League players who are experienced referees but who hadn't officiated in recent years, hopping on the ice in stripes to help—and great to see a solid pipeline of youth players officiating.

3c) Explore Adding a General Manager

Our club is likely to benefit greatly by adding a General Manager, responsible not only for overall club operations, but also for improving the playing experience for our members, across all leagues and teams. Other regional associations in NZ have General Managers in place, as does the NZIHF. Simply put, the CIHA is well behind the curve here. And unfortunately, little progress was made in 2024 until after the winter season when a subcommittee was formed to focus on bringing in a GM and a draft job description was produced. Overall progress on this objective was poor but has picked up recently and will be a key focus in 2025.

3d) Formalise a Referee Recruitment, Training, and Advancement Program

Player numbers across NZ are growing, but the number of trained game officials is not keeping pace with growth. In 2024, CIHA set a goal of formalising a referee program, hoping to lean on efforts expected to be made at the national level, which unfortunately didn't transpire. With the exciting news that the NZIHF is transferring from the IIHF Asian region to the Americas region, we're optimistic that the NZIHF will deepen its relationship with USA Hockey, in particular, which has been providing coach training modules to NZ coaches for the past two years. We're hopeful that a similar effort for game officials will be made in the coming year or two that the CIHA and other regional NZ clubs can leverage.

In the meantime, our club made some progress in referee recruitment and training over the past year, holding two referee classroom training sessions and pairing new game officials with experienced officials at the appropriate level of play for mentoring. We also used a 3-official system for most Senior League games, not only for improved officiating for the players, but importantly as a development tool for our game officials. We will continue these informal methods in 2025 while hoping for more formal progress at the national level.

2025 Objectives

In addition to our "evergreen goals" of growing our membership and improving member satisfaction, in 2025 I believe the CIHA should:

1) Review Youth Programs for Improvements

Several factors suggest we should review our youth programs for 2025: survey results show a drop in satisfaction, we have a growing number of youth players but apparent waning High School participation, and perhaps the most significant is the NZIHF change to running 3 national rep team leagues (U14/U16/U18), with body checking expected in both U16 and U18. At our younger ages, with more U12 players and a wider skew of skill levels, we should review whether splitting players into two tiers (perhaps U12 and U10) would offer more enjoyable and skill-appropriate games for players. The NZIHF may also launch a national U12 development programme in 2025, which may impact how we approach this age group.

2) Establish Closer Event and Program Collaborations with Alpine Ice

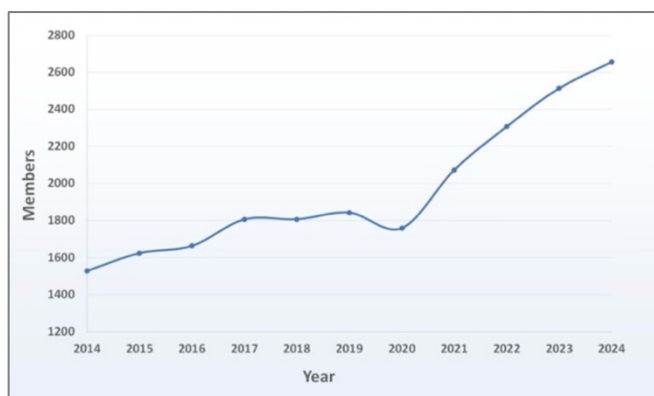
Over the past year it has been a delight to work with Alpine Ice, and extremely encouraging not only to see the investment and improvements to the facility, but also to experience the

openness and willingness to partner with the CIHA on events, especially Red Devils and Inferno games. Alpine Ice provided numerous benefits to these teams in 2024, from advertising on Alpine’s social media channels to improved game-day operations, to waiving fees on door ticket sales and other expenses, to outright donations to the teams, whether it be in the form of sports drinks or other contributions.

Collaboration with Alpine Ice is very welcome and mutually beneficial, and CIHA will seek to work more closely with our most important partner in 2025. With more Inferno home games expected in 2025, we will ensure a closer coordination on Inferno games. We will also seek to advance discussions begun in early 2024 centred around the shared goal of attracting and retaining ice customers—and whether there are new programs, or modifications to existing programs, that might help towards that goal.

3) Hire a General Manager

CIHA has discussed the idea of adding a General Manager for the past two years for reasons outlined above and also presented in the President’s AGM reports in 2022 and 2023. The CIHA has significantly more members and playing opportunities than in the previous decade, which is a positive, but the club is now far more difficult to run through volunteer efforts, and volunteer burnout is increasing. And while CIHA membership and survey satisfaction have moved sideways over the past two years, membership overall in NZ has continued to grow sharply in the past two years. Other regional clubs and the NZIHF, including the much smaller Wellington Ice Hockey Association, have paid General Managers in place to the great benefit of their clubs. The time to act is here, and the CIHA needs to hire a General Manager in 2025.



Concluding Remarks

Overall, in 2024 the club saw a sideways trend in membership and player satisfaction, and mixed progress against goals set last year, which is somewhat disappointing. On the other hand, our ~550 members had another great year of ice hockey and made new and lasting memories on and off the ice. And for that I’d again like to thank the many, many volunteers who make it all possible—thanks, and see you at the rink!

Kind Regards,
Tom Fontaine
President, Canterbury Ice Hockey Association