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Capital region gets all-female hockey association

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It's a league of their own and it can't come soon enough, say proponents.

The Capital Region Female Minor Hockey Association is set to become Greater Victoria's first girls-only minor hockey association when it starts up in September. It will add to the eight female-only youth hockey associations already operating on the Lower Mainland.

There are all-girls teams in existing hockey associations on the Island, as numbers allow, but it's a patchwork as female players are also mixed into boys' teams. Canada is a medal-winning powerhouse in women's hockey at the IIHF worlds and Winter Olympics, but getting to that level can be a hit-or-miss proposition at the youth levels across this country.

"There's never a guarantee a girl can play on a girls' team in current associations. This new association will go a long way toward guaranteeing that," said Ian Fleetwood, president of the Capital Region Female Hockey Association.

"You can't now reliably play on a girls' team, and then we lose those players for good from the sport. I believe this will lead to an instant expansion in programming for girls' hockey in Greater Victoria because female initiatives will be the priority."

This will take the uncertainty out of the system for female players, said Fleetwood: "It's about sustainability and longevity. An association now may have a good run for five or seven years with a girls' team, but then those parents go away when their kids are done. This new association will make it more of a continuum."

Female hockey players in Greater Victoria will have the choice to play within the new Capital Region Female Minor Hockey Association or on integrated teams in their existing local minor hockey associations.

"We've had a lot of success with all-female associations on the Lower Mainland," said Barry Petrachenko of Victoria, chief executive officer of B.C. Hockey.

The recently completed Female Hockey Report by B.C. Hockey includes findings that female associations have proven successful at recruiting and retaining female athletes, and forms the basis for the decision to approve the new capital region association, he said.

"Young girls would prefer an all-female associaton. This gives them that option, at least," said Petrachenko.

"It's a very good step forward for the Victoria area. Everyone supports getting more female players into the game. But you have to get to numbers where you can have female-only teams. Hopefully, this will make that easier."

Petrachenko said of the 45,000 youth hockey players in B.C., 10 per cent are females.

"We want that number to grow," he said.

"In fact, we want both boys' and girls' hockey to be flourishing. And we understand the need for more ice within communities to make that happen."

Information regarding registration and boundaries can be accessed on the Capital Region Female Minor Hockey Association website at victoriagirlshockey.ca.

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