

The 2004 season started badly with the withdrawal of the Sacramento team who has been a stalwart of the league for many years. It is hoped that they will return to the league soon.

One the positive side we have seen the overall league membership grow by 30% to almost 200 and the results of the BAFHA survey indicate overall satisfaction with the league.

The hockey played this year continued to be of a high standard. For comparison I was able to visit some tournaments both here and in the UK this year. There is no doubt that we are playing hockey to quite a reasonable standard and there are clearly some exceptionally talented players in the league. It was especially heartening to be asked by the coach of the US U21 team to put up a team to give them some match practice. Despite being on the losing side BAFHA acquitted themselves with distinction and gave the "youngsters" a good test.

It seems to be a perennial complaint in the league that the umpiring standard is very uneven. I have to say I was disappointed to not be able to do more umpiring that I did. The work done by some of the umpires was exceptional and I really want to thank those umpires who turned out week after week to officiate at our games. I also want to thank those of you who took your first steps into umpiring this year too. We have tremendous plans for the year ahead to work on umpiring with the appointment of a Head Umpire position responsible for training, mentoring and monitoring umpires. As you know, it's a very difficult job and I would ask that you give the umpire respect and courtesy at all times.

The year had a couple of unpleasant incidents and I want to acknowledge the professional and discreet manner that the umpiring committee dealt with these issues. It is a difficult and onerous task and this group, lead by Brett Lee, do very good work.

As many of you know this is my last season as President and I want to thank you all for your support. I have been especially blessed with an outstanding management team who have taken on the burden of organizing hockey in the Bay Area with energy, dedication, commitment and a sense of fun. Few of you realize the effort required to get each season rolling. We are lucky to have Harv Dhaliwal working behind the scenes to make sure clubs are participating fully in league activities. Since Niall Murphy took on the accounts we have instant and ready access to the overall state of our finances which are, I might add, reasonably healthy. There could be no finer secretary than Andreas Kadavanich who has the most difficult job of all managing the executive meetings, the membership and the USFHA relationship. To all of the officers and to the club representatives whose wise counsel has made these two years such a privilege I say thank you. The league is enriched by your contributions.

My best wishes to the 2005 management team and of course the new President. I am here to help if you need me.

And remember, be first to the ball and look up.

Kevin Parker