



Participation Trends

16th September 2008

Introduction

2008 showed an overall drop in participation numbers within New Zealand for the first time in a number of years. In reaction to this Brad Jensen, National Coaching and Development Manager sent a letter to all of the Regional Development Manager's/CoachForce personnel asking them for their feedback and opinions on the participation numbers that were recorded in 2008. As the Regional Development Managers and CoachForce Officers are regularly in touch with all communities in hockey it was felt that their opinions and knowledge would be very valuable when any discussions were taking place around participation trends.

The Regional Development Managers/CoachForce Officers were asked to offer their personal opinions and to provide honest answers so that these could be used in a positive way by any groups undertaking a review or discussion around hockey participation trends within New Zealand.

A questionnaire was designed to cover all aspects that relate to hockey participation in New Zealand, ranging from trends and programmes in their own associations to how they believe Associations can increase and retain participation numbers in the future.

Our Regional Development Managers/CoachForce Officers were very open and willing to take part in this questionnaire and we thank them for the time and effort they put in and their willingness to offer their informed opinion.

On the following pages you will find a summary of their answers with all references to Associations, programmes, and people withdrawn.

1. In your opinion why do you think there has been a decrease in player numbers nationally?

- There are too many choices for young people
- We have not been active enough in promoting our sport.
- Cost – people can't afford to play
- Not enough money and resources spent on improving participation numbers.
- Turf fees and especially affiliation fees are too high
- The change in age group hockey from U15 to U16 – people have become disgruntled at not being able to play representative hockey.
- Question if there is in fact an overall decrease in player numbers – the across the board decrease of 1% could easily be considered within the margin of error

2. In your opinion why do you think there has been a drop/increase in player numbers in your Association(s)?

Increases

- I have upskilled many coaches, set up clear processes and protocols, established websites, put numerous articles into the paper and most importantly promoted the right people to the right positions especially in the regions. Our results also over the last few years have been consistently better which has led to more confidence, competition for places etc. And we are seen by the public as being organised and a good sport to be involved with I am told
- We are pretty much at saturation point for hockey, where the number of available venues are at full capacity. One reason I think we have still had some growth is the administration of the sport is very good.
- Increase in population growth
- There were two developments this year that have raised numbers. One is that clubs are looking at putting in development teams using good coaches and attracting school leavers. They also put a few experienced heads in the team to give structure. There has also been a co-ordinated approach to dealing with surplus players in clubs. The hockey manager requests numbers of surplus players for each team and puts clubs in contact with each other to form a new team.
- We have more secondary school teams than previous years
- We have restructured our primary competition to have more teams playing but less players playing in them.

Decreases

- There are cheaper sports to play, players finding it hard to commit to hockey due to other interests.
- Increase in costs.
- People involved in variety of different sports
- Decrease in physical activity.
- Limited turf availability for practice times and also the time that turf is available for practice is not sociable. Clubs limit teams entered in competitions/club numbers by closing their roll to new players.
- Lack of practice time prior to 9pm – driving players away and stopping extra practice time for some players.
- Junior hockey limited by turf space and for both games and training. As Sec School runs from 4pm-7pm this limits turf for practicing for Juniors and therefore limits participation numbers. Travel is also an issue – cost/distance
- The local media focus heavily on other sports, in particular rugby, cricket, netball and soccer.
- Lack of turf time and increasing fees have contributed.
- Over the last 4 years our player numbers have remained reasonable static. Our biggest difference over these 4 years is 42 players. We are in a good position with a new turf having been built this season which will hopefully promote the sport in this region, thus potentially doubling our junior player base.
- A lot of kids are still deciding what their main sport is going to be and parents are encouraging them not to pick hockey as the fees are more expensive than sports like netball or soccer for example as all they need to play on is a field.
- I would dispute that we have had an overall reduction in player numbers. 0.6 is not significant.
- We have certainly had a reduction in mini numbers. This was almost entirely due to net ball changing their playing night to a Monday which is the same as our junior night.

3. Please comment on the trends shown in your Association for:

Combined Comment

We have 2 outstanding Board members who put in huge hours and are receptive to change. Our turf is well situated also.

a. Open

Increase

- Older players coming back to play, more social grades. Major effort to move times games are played so as to fit with life styles.
- It has increased because we have introduced a new wet dress surface to take our number of fields to 4.
- Our open grades don't really change. Every year mostly the same people come back.
- This has remained constant for the past 4 years. Could be an area that with funding or incentives these numbers could be increased. The building of the new water turf will definitely be an incentive to encourage past players back.

Decrease

- Personally I think the major reason for this is players leaving secondary school do not stick around any more, they move to other centres for University or do not play at all.
- Structure of the competition in this region has an impact as well as facility pressures. Some grades are being played at inhospitable times and that certainly puts players off.
- Time and cost are both mainly relative to senior players. A 17 year old starting into club hockey and a new job struggles to find the time to train and play with their new responsibilities. At \$350 for 20 games it is also relatively expensive.
- Drop out of senior men's club teams (not sure reason why)
- Steady – set teams in each grade – full use of turf facilities across our region
- Disappointing. Rising affiliation fees, old turf and very little turf time available for practice all contribute.

b. Secondary

Increase

- The school scene is being evened out a little, we have seen some schools go backwards and some come back on the scene. It is a more even playing field with these schools.
- These numbers continues to rise, again with new facilities, these figures can only get better.

- Our increase in secondary and decrease in primary has occurred due to the fluctuating numbers of rural players in satellite modules. Because these areas often rely on one person to push things along, once they move on the numbers drop. It is a continual battle to bring on new organisers in the rural regions.

Decrease

- Students are more interested in socialising with their friends, rather than playing sport.
- General decline in physical activity, lack of teacher and parent support, more other sports available
- More choice of sports at Y9-Y10 – not so many beginning hockey at this level
- Some traditionally strong hockey colleges only have 1 boys and 1 girls teams now. Rugby has taken over, not sure why.
- The trends show a decrease in numbers of players. This is odd as we now have more teams playing than last year?????
- We have restructured our secondary school competitions to make them more fair and even and the outcome has satisfied players/coaches/organisers
- Secondary schools seem to have dropped a bit. We are hoping that our new facilities will attract more players especially as our fees won't be much dearer than they are now.

c. Primary

Increase

- More schools pushing hockey, cool sport for females to be associated with, still struggling with boys numbers, rugby and soccer still a big drawcard. Popularity and success of the local rugby team is a big part in juniors playing rugby
- Our region has a very dedicated junior committee
- Steady – restricted by playing and training times
- The improvement in this sector was encouraging. I have completed at least 3x the amount of primary visits required by NZ Hockey, I believe this has contributed to the improved numbers. Would have better numbers if boys and girls didn't play together maybe.

Decrease

- I know of primary school sports coordinators who will not offer hockey to the children as they think it is too expensive. This annoys me very much as I

think it should be the children and their families decision not the sports coordinators.

- These numbers have dropped in the area, according to the stats provided. Hockey for some kids in our region is their second sport. And a drop off could be these kids having to make a choice between their chosen sports. Again cost is a possible factor.
- The trends show it has fallen or remained the same. We have restructured our primary competition, although this needs further attention
- We have more teams as we introduced an 8 a side competition, this was because we had teams that couldn't field 11 players but had enough to make an 8 a side team. We also felt the 8 a side was a better transition to playing 11 a side hockey
- I don't have any reasons why we have had a decrease in the primary area unless there has been growth in other sports. Have our players gone from hockey to soccer for example. If soccer has had a huge growth in the junior area then they may have poached some of our players. Do you have their figures?
- Primary school is doing well. We have started a Saturday morning XXXX program where kids from 5 – 12 yrs turn up with \$2 and get a 1hr Hockey training session with games. Any kids can come, whether they already play in a team or not. I think the increase in young players will show next year due to Saturday morning XXXX.
- Mini had a significant female decrease due to net ball competition night change

4. Is the availability of turf time having an effect on both the recruitment and retention of players?

Yes

- It has some effect, but not a major factor I believe. Late trainings are resented though
- Turf availability is a big factor in the playing numbers, we are at capacity. We have three turfs and over the winter season they are fully booked from Friday afternoon to Sunday night.
- This is a huge issue in our region. But will be fixed in 2009 with the new water turf and resurfacing of current sand turf.
- Most definitely. Some of our players have to alternate playing on turf and grass which is far from ideal. There are nearly 1500 people playing hockey in our region and we have only one turf, lots of teams can't practice at all. Games are having to be cut short too, next year when we have our second turf I think we will find player numbers improve across all categories.

- Turf availability is always an issue. Having a new turf has reduced the strain on the 3 we previously had. We have reduced the amount of late games we need to play but we need to have 3 turfs to become a hockey stronghold in NZ. Our Association needs to take control and ownership of the turfs – currently it is run by a trust.
- I think so. As we only have one turf here our schools do not have after school hours to train and are forced to do it in school time. However, with our new facilities being built this shouldn't be a problem next season at all.

No

- We have no problems with turf time. And our numbers should increase with the new turf.
- Not necessarily unavailability, more so the balance of turf time. E.g. Senior hockey week nights takes up valuable practice times for club and rep teams. Sat afternoon turf sitting free with only one or two games being planned
- We have no trouble with available turf time. With 3 water and 2 wet dressed turfs under our booking control we are in a fantastic position.
- I don't believe so. We have very little games on the grass compared to pre turfs.
- No – although we run at full capacity I would say we are highly efficient in use of turf time. I don't believe it is a reason not to retain players.

5. Do you think School visits are having an effect on recruiting new players?

Yes

- For sure as long as there is a coach to take them further. Targeting certain age-bands e.g. 5-7 year olds had an impact this year
- School visits certainly play there part in attracting players but generally too late in the year. I make a point of informing all school kids when I am visiting a school at how few games have been cancelled due to the weather. We have lost one maybe two and the Soccer and rugby six or seven.
- School visits have a huge effect on player increase. All regions increased numbers due to our schools program.
- A school with a keen hockey TIC or parent will ask for school visits. Schools without someone keen to get hockey going or who don't want support are the hardest to get into. Need to be coaching children, coaches and teachers. Can coach primary and intermediate teachers as part of their professional development so hockey is a sport chosen to be taught in class.
- I think school visits are helpful. It often relies on a good teacher or parent to convert the enthusiasm expressed on the day into registrations but we can only do what we can do. We need to keep the profile high and get as many kids with hockey sticks in their hands at an early age as possible.
- Excellent way to recruit and promote our sport to those kids that wouldn't even think about hockey as a sport they would chose to play. Making sure you are available to schools whenever possible is advantage and developing a rapport with teachers.

- Yes – introduces students to hockey and they will participate during school hours in interschool.
- Yes definitely. There was an increase in primary playing numbers this year. Next year the numbers will hopefully improve again because of this years work. More posters etc. would be good; I ran out pretty early and asked for more but didn't receive them. Could the Black Sticks sign some of them? We need bigger sticks, it's hard for a 6 foot tall year 8 to use a 32 inch stick.
- I have completed at least 3x the amount of primary visits required by NZ Hockey, I believe this has contributed to the improved numbers and will improve even more next year
- Yes I think school visits have an effect on recruiting players.
- We have a quota of schools visits that is set by HNZ. It has decrease over the past 3 years from 40 – 25. I have found that when I do a school/class visit, that if I ask straight after I have finished the session “who wants to play hockey “ $\frac{3}{4}$ of the class puts their hand up. Unfortunately due to time and promoting the game to more than one school / class this enthusiasm is never used. We leave the school and don't go back there until the next year. This is the problem: what's the point of doing a visit if you don't collect the names of the kids who are keen? Should we make time for this? If we leave it up to the school to do this will they do it? As far as I know HNZ doesn't guide us in how we recruit players. They leave it up to each association to do this. (I maybe wrong).
- This season we have taken the approach to pay two Satellite coaches to work with a cluster of schools. They are employed to do multiple class visits, lunch time small games and they are to liaise with their cluster of schools to ensure that all their hockey needs are catered for. Ideally we would like these coaches to be our NZ reps or NHL players.
- For the out of town schools I think it is. It is very hard for most country schools to get sports teams so the kids don't really get the chance to experience the fun of playing the sport.

No

- Not really.
- Some town schools will benefit but I have found a lot of classes I have taught the kids either already play or aren't interested at all as they already play other sports.
- I think they are having little effect. A certain number of school visits I feel are important but perhaps a shift in approach is necessary. We actually have to sell hockey. The BlackSticks Road show directly after the OQT was a huge success and perhaps a better use of our resource when going into school. This could be rolled out nation wide potentially.

6. Do you have summer options available in your Association?

All RDM's/CoachForce Officers responded yes to this question.

- Yep – we have summer hockey, I run a camp in January and sometimes take an 'elite' group over November/December
- We have social six aside options for juniors and social teams in the summer, along with Masters hockey.
- Yes all regions have summer programs
- Yes sort of, but currently looking at revamping. Thinking of multisport summer league where play hockey, soccer and say touch all in one night. Get more punters and open up the bar.
- We have Business House 6-a-side ½ turf, Intermediate and Secondary 6-a-side ½ turf and Club/Social 11-a side. We have one module before Xmas and one after.
- There is a summer league held on 2 week nights. With the new turf being laid this will only happen for a limited amount of time this year. There is room to improve this once the new turfs are up and running in 2009.
- Yes. We usually have twilight Hockey pre Xmas and Indoor post Xmas, but this year we will probably change the order of the two. Hopefully then we can play provincial matches vs other Associations in those forms of the game.
- Indoor is quite big in our region.
- We have a summer competition run before and after the xmas break.
- Yes we have junior and senior summer twilight hockey leagues. They both have competitions pre Christmas and in the New Year. We have up to 96, 6 a side teams playing in each senior twilight block.
- The aim of these competitions is to generate income from non hockey players as well as trying to introduce new players into winter hockey.
- We are also in the process of creating an 8 a – side competitive competition over the summer.
- Yes. We have summer hockey competitions, off-season trainings. We are going to keep Saturday morning XXXX running for summer. As our new facilities are to be finished in summer we are hoping to encourage lots of players with these options.
- Yes – Senior Social Summer Hockey in a variety of grades. Primary and Intermediate summer hockey competitions.
- 8 a side premier, U15 club based competition, both 2008 initiatives

7. Are all your players registered with your Association?

Yes

- As far as I know
- Summer hockey does not attract registrations. Apart from the Business House, most other players are registered via the winter season anyway.
- Yes
- All winter hockey players registered
- Yes I believe so; however I'm not sure if all of the twilight and indoor hockey players are.
- Yes. Apart from summer hockey players as they just pay as they come.
- Yes – although data entry is an on going challenge.

Unsure

- Unsure. I believe XXXX is now registering all players. I revisited the participation no's for our Association and I am not sure how correct they are.

No

- *"I would ask this question of player numbers. "How honest are the associations being when they are submitting their numbers?" The reason being that the more the numbers the more they have to pay to the Federation by way of affiliation fees."*
- *"All areas have had an increase in juniors, just doesn't show it."*
- *"Are we actually recording all registered players? Or just affiliated players? I.e. Our Association for example have 80-100 5-8year olds that simply train / play for an hour on Saturday mornings. Although registered with our Association these registrations are not passed on to Hockey NZ. Summer hockey and Masters figures are a similar scenario. What do other associations do with these more social or seasonal registrations? Our overall player numbers may actually be closer to 50,000?"*
- *"For our Open Men we have only 31 players affiliated. However I know that there are 4 men's teams in the XXXX comp ,and 1 XXXX team and 2 XXXX teams in the XXXX comp. Which if there were 16 players in each team = 112 players, and even if half these players were school kids that would be 60 players, not 31. I am wondering if XXXX have included the XXXX and XXXX sub association affiliation no's."*
- *"The trends show a decrease in number of players. This is odd as we now have more teams playing than last year?????"*
- I would imagine that there are some players who participate in the secondary school sport hockey competition that are not registered.

- There are hundreds that play hockey on the grass for the primary and intermediate schools sport that would not be registered as well.
- I doubt if all players are registered in our regions.
- No our new entrant hockey players aren't registered to our association. They pay no fees and come as individuals to a 1 hr session split into 30 minutes of skills 30 minutes of a 3 v 3 game on small fields or in an indoor centre. On average we have 30 new entrant players attending per week. It fluctuates on the weather

8. Do you have any thoughts on how to increase player numbers both in your Association and nationally?

- I am into a quality rather than quantity model. If we are perceived to be a quality product then the numbers will happen.
- Need more resources to engage in an ongoing recruitment program.
- Due to volunteer turnover it is hard to run a recruitment campaign from year to year.
- A nationally co-ordinated recruitment campaign would be one way to boost numbers.
- Change the time junior competitions are played during the week.
- Saturday is traditional but with record numbers playing soccer and rugby and netball, the question has to be asked "are we missing out on players because they are playing these sports?" Would we not benefit from playing junior hockey on a Thursday or Friday so those who want to play both can?
- Try to keep the cost down, be pro active, and allow change, i.e. don't be stuck in the old ways. Move competitions (i.e. junior hockey) to a week night so as not to have to compete with other sports. You don't have to play your sport on a Saturday.
- Run primary age have a go at hockey sessions earlier and sign up the same time as soccer.
- Promote hockey at senior level. Massive drop off from school to senior club. Need pathways from sec school to clubs.
- Offer more flexible options. Some examples might be:
 - Running the lower grade competitions in the summer rather than the winter.
 - Offer week night and weekend options in each grade.
 - Offer super six at various times during the year.
 - Offer senior mixed competitions.
- Hold open days for youth
- Have skills sessions to develop basics 6 weeks prior to start of season
- Encourage pre-season competition – 6-a-side tournaments with prizes for senior and secondary school grades.

- Working with schools within cluster groups close to turf areas – encourage interschool game days.
- Market the game better; use the likes of Simon Child, Hayden Shaw, and maybe Dave Kosoof, Gemma Flynn, Charlotte Harrison, the people that younger players can look up to.
- Decrease affiliation fees and give more money to RDOs.
- Hockey may need to move towards a shorter game that can be played on a user pays basis – this would mean players wouldn't be registered to clubs to play. There are problems with this from an HP point of view, but for participation it's a good idea.
- Hopefully our Satellite Coach initiative that I have mentioned will increase players.
- We need to keep making the sport fun. All coaches should look like they are having fun.
- Well we are hoping to attract new players with our new turfs, also with Kiwi Kids.
- I think a way to increase interest would be to have annual Blacksticks days, where Blacksticks go around different associations, showing off a bit, having hits with kids, getting the associations to make a bit of a festival with it like the All Blacks did this year. If Blacksticks could come do drills and show their amazing skills I know kids will think 'wow I wish I could do that'. I know that's how I felt when Mandy Smith came down here to do a workshop when I was very young.
- Reliant on a passionate teacher or parent in the school. The schools that thrive have such a person. Very challenging to foster this without a driving force within the school
- "HNZ Produced" – film and produce more hockey "things" professionally – get clips from NHL teams and put together.

9. In the course of your work as Regional Development Manager for your Association have you tried any new initiatives/programmes that have increased player numbers?

- Ministicks was an initiative of mine which caters for 5-7yr olds. We had none 4 years ago and now have over 100 and the clubs have adopted the programme. Also 'have a go' days run by a rep team as a fundraiser primarily (U16s this year) have been great for recruitment and role modelling
- The time to do a lot of the recruitment is pre-season. However this is a traditionally busy time anyway, with RCC's to organise, rep trials for U16 and U18 teams. U21's are going, as well as summer hockey and pre season competitions as well the other stuff that has to be done for the start of the season. I have run give it a go type sessions at the turf with an extremely poor response, so much so I never bothered again!

- Junior sports days. Changed the junior hockey program from clubs to association control, dropped the price from \$60 to \$25 plus they get a free stick.
- Ran primary school hockey tournaments. Summer schools program.
- Have A Go at Hockey for beginners. Should be run early in the year.
- Our High Performance programme is touching a lot of players and although this will not show participation benefits in the short term it should reap some benefits in the future due to the higher profile of our players and better club competitions.
- Held skill session nights for players in April 08 prior to start of season starting.
- Held Holiday Clinics in April holidays for non players and players.
- Increased the number of school visits in area prior to 2007.
- More interest in midweek interschool games within various School clusters. Work with clusters that have interschool hockey – introduce schools within clusters that do not participate on hockey.
- I have run 2 & 3 day fun clinics open to anyone aged between 6-14.
- Over 60 primary school visits
- Fun days
- Used photos of kids on website (non hockey players trying hockey at a school visit) makes them think positively about hockey.
- I have tried a hockey day out (free of charge) before the season starts to encourage people to play – in the end the increase if any is marginal.
- Satellite coaches (see responses to Q5)
- I've noticed the most effective way to do things is to just get out there and have fun coaching sessions open to all like our Saturday mornings. Also events like Have-a-go days are good as a lot of kids come to hockey because they are curious and already are familiar with the other sports.
- A big thing I've noticed is associations also really need to concentrate on their elite players as well, as a lot of rep players are moving on from hockey after a few tournaments as they feel they aren't going to get any further

10. Do you have any further comments relating to participation trends?

- We have to be careful not to follow the Super 12 model with too much elite and not enough grass roots
- Promote hockey as fun, fitness, skill, team work.
- HNZ need to change the age group back to U15.

- Keeping primary school players once they leave for high school is vital for the sport. And developing strategies to assist with transition is very important.
- Getting Secondary schools to start thinking about the hockey season in Term One, and not just as a 'winter sport' is something we need to encourage
- Encourage schools to come to turf facilities during week – need to look at bus/vans for some schools as cost too great. Cost is a factor for many
- I'm sure after the Black Sticks being in the Olympics, kids are going to be keen to play as I've heard a lot of kids talking about it after watching them on TV.
- Get the message out there that artificial surface means kids play every Sat compared with rugby, soccer where fields are closed when wet. So not really more expensive if look at no of games played in a season. (Especially this winter).
- I think that we have a work in progress. Promoting hockey as a sport for everyone is a huge positive.
- Keep trying!!!! Times have changed, people attitudes have changed, and sport is not as much of a priority for people any more. Find ways to make the sport cost competitive and fun.