



Dear Players, Parents, Coaches, Referees and Fans of District 1,

On January 18, 1958, 62 years ago, a young man named Willie O’Ree got called up from the Quebec Aces to join the Boston Bruins in a game against the Montreal Canadiens. The Sports Headlines in Boston read that the Bruins gained a rare road win against the Canadiens. Buried on the back page was a paragraph stating that Willie O’Ree had become the first Black player in the National Hockey League. The moment was not celebrated with fanfare, rather it was a passing moment whose significance was only to be realized much later.

On this Martin Luther King Weekend and on the weekend of the Anniversary of the breaking of the NHL’s color barrier, District 1 of Minnesota Hockey wishes to reaffirm our commitment to diversity.

The career and contributions of figures like Willie O’Ree remind us that Hockey is for Everyone. District 1 of Minnesota Hockey has always kept this in mind as we try to provide the best hockey experience for member associations possible. Examples include encouraging member associations to explore lower cost models of hockey and supporting grow the game initiatives that invite first generation hockey players to participate. District 1 has been instrumental in contributing to USA Hockey’s latest rule updates on increased enforcement of racial slurs, and on increasing participation of female referees.

Of course, it is not difficult to see that there is much work yet to be done to ensure the promise that Hockey is truly for Everyone. And so, we call on all who are associated with District 1 in any way to reflect on ways we as individuals can contribute to the cause of welcoming all neighbors into the hockey community. Is there a kindness we have held back? Have we rushed to judgment over cultural differences? Have we assumed that those who come from a different background are more deserving of a penalty? Or less likely to score a goal? We encourage everyone to consider challenging themselves to undertake some simple act of cross-cultural exploration which could include bias training, watching Martin Luther King Jr.’s speeches, read Willie O’Ree’s Biography, knock on your neighbor’s door and introduce yourself.

The District 1 Board commits to continue working towards a Hockey is for Everyone future. We will discuss and consider issues of diversity as a matter of regular board business. Moreover, we commit to listening to the voices of those who have not felt heard. Finally, we will advocate in the greater Minnesota Hockey community for more delivery models that respond to the needs of diverse communities both ethnically and economically.

Willie O’Ree was inducted into Hockey’s Hall of Fame in 2018, 60 years after the achievement. Let us work today to honor that legacy, so that our next 60 years of District 1 Hockey are truly for everyone.

Sincerely,

District 1 Board Members