



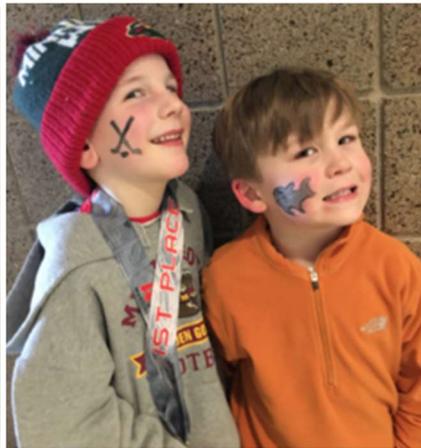
It's been a crazy year for hockey. From "The Pause", to spectator limits, to masks, to cancelled tournaments...this has been a tough year for many. But from the darkness and frigid temperatures of a Minnesota winter, emerged an awesome hot new star called Hotdish Hockey...we're talking Tater-Tot Hotdish levels of awesomeness here, folks.



In 2020, Christian McNellis (sons Sammy and Joey), Dave Smith (sons Talen and Reed), Clif Meier (son Jackson), and Matt Knutson (sons Bennett and Grant) cooked up the idea of Hotdish Hockey. Thus began a semi-regular broadcast schedule of Firehawks hockey games, transmitted live to YouTube, with all the fanfare of Hockey Night in Canada! What's their secret recipe? Take a few hockey parents who love the sport as much as anyone, toss in a base layer of play-by-play calling, add one tripod, an iPhone, then sprinkle on some spicy commentary and you've got yourself some Hotdish Hockey. Mmm! Mmm! Good!



Sammy McNellis and Reed Smith



Joey McNellis and Grant Knutson



Jackson Meier and Bennett Knutson

We recently sat down (virtually) with one of the creators of Hotdish Hockey, Christian “Presiding Ignoramus” McNellis to get some insights into our new favorite meal.

AVHA: What exactly is Hotdish Hockey?

McNellis: Don't we all want to know? We provide a platform to stream games live on YouTube, for people to watch wherever they may be. But it's also parody and we have an unfiltered, live, good time bringing youth hockey to the masses. I bring you hotdish. Dave “Mr. Meaningful” Smith brings you hockey.

AVHA: Who is involved with Hotdish Hockey and what is their connection with our Association?

McNellis: Dave has coached Sammy along with Clif Meier, Eric Robb and Kevin Morris since mini-mites in 2014. Now that a couple of these guys are glass-lickers like me because their teams have real coaches, they've got nothing else to do. So there is myself and Dave that normally handle the broadcasts. Clif Meier and another guy we'll call Matt Knutson work recon and intel. Dave's wife, Jill, helps Dave get dressed everyday and we're all grateful for that. In addition she has provided the smoothest swiveling tripod in the game, microphones, and some really great social media/life advice. My wife, Melissa, has prevented me from doing some things - stuff you don't even know about - and you should probably thank her. Honestly, where would we be without the women in our lives? Maybe living together in like a middle-aged frat house? Sure that's better, but would we have still met? Tough question.

AVHA: What inspired you to create Hotdish Hockey?

McNellis: I've never been one to sit on the sidelines, and always figured I'd be coaching my boys in whatever. Problem is, I am a MN transplant from CO, and don't know dog squat from Shinola regarding this particular sport. A couple of years ago, I felt a way I could chip-in was to provide video footage for review to the coaches. I feel like especially with kids, this can be very effective for training (one reason we fight for the best view). Well, I'm egocentric and can't keep my mouth shut. I stumbled across what I think was "Ustream" at the time, and thought "everyone wants to hear me!" It was like Moses and the Burning Bush, really. Last year I created a Facebook page, Firehawks Hockey, and live-streamed there but discovered maybe not all Firehawks fans wanted to hear my opinions, so I decided to get creative. And this year, because there is a God, Dave is bringing meaningful hockey related content* with the insight I lack.

**Editor's note: This statement has not been independently verified by USA Hockey.*

AVHA: How can people watch your broadcasts?

McNellis: On the YouTube. But you can join The Flock on the Twitter and the Facebook. The 1,000th subscriber gets the \$27 balance left on my gift card at Westwood!

AVHA: Can people request you broadcast a game or scrimmage?

McNellis: Honestly, we are having so much fun and each time we get a little better. So, yes! However, it is a little time consuming and probably won't be pro-bono forever.

AVHA: Anything else you'd like people to know?

McNellis: It's important to try something new and to work with passion. The lessons I have learned just from unabashedly making mistakes and not being afraid of criticism, but learning along the way, has been another meaningful twist to an astonishing year. It's amazing how things come together sometimes. Also, we will never belittle any kid or team. But parents are fair game and we will question their parenting skills the entire broadcast. Oh, and games look better on bigger screens.