

STILLWATER AREA HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Stillwater, Minnesota • Home of the Ponies

April 2026

Dear SAHA Members,

I am excited about the opportunity to serve as your next president. I'm honored to have been nominated by Matt Fosse and Joe Garvin, two people I admire greatly.

I became a member of SAHA more than a decade ago when my oldest daughter started skating. I've been a hockey coach for over 20 years, but coaching my own kid for the first time was something else entirely — a lot of crawling around on the ice, picking up Beanie Babies, and wiping the occasional tear. I'd never been so happy.

I grew up playing hockey in Shakopee. My dad was my coach and a Shakopee Hockey board member for 33 years — also a Zamboni driver, ice rink manager, and occasional seamstress when the old inflatable Shakopee rink (The Bubble) would tear in the wind and need emergency repairs with veterinary needles and heavy fishing line. He gave his whole life to Shakopee Hockey, helped thousands of kids learn the game, and inspired me to make hockey my career.

I went on to play four years of NCAA hockey at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, serving as a Captain my senior year and helping with the Eau Claire Youth Hockey Association whenever I could. Inspired by my dad to make life easier for youth hockey volunteers, I co-founded a sports technology company called SportsEngine. I continued coaching throughout, working off-season camps at every age level. Meanwhile, SportsEngine grew quickly — and through our customers, I gained a front-row view of the inner workings of nearly every youth hockey association in America. SportsEngine became the largest sports technology company in the world, with over 35 million monthly users across 45,000 youth sports organizations. I eventually sold SportsEngine to NBC Sports, which gave me the time to focus on my own kids' hockey here in Stillwater.

My involvement with the SAHA board began in 2016 with five years as a tryout evaluator, then three years as a level director, and for the past two years as Girls Director. With my son playing at the Peewee level and my two daughters at U15 and U10, I've had the opportunity to coach at nearly every level in SAHA — from Mites/U8s to Bantam/U15. Having been both a parent and a coach at every level has given me a critical perspective.

Our skater numbers and coach volunteer numbers at the Mite/U8 level are fantastic and our travel teams win numerous district titles every year, and many compete for regional titles and state berths. More importantly, we are committed to doing this the right way, delivering an incredible experience for every player at every level, from Mite/U8 to Jr. Gold/U19 and from C to AA. We are here to help our players become outstanding young people, who learn the importance of sportsmanship, teamwork and resilience. Anything less isn't good enough.

From a SAHA board perspective, the past couple of years have been a real breakthrough. We have a cohesive, collaborative board committed to making SAHA a top-tier program while keeping hockey affordable for all. This year, in the face of aggressive inflation and rising costs, we lowered participation costs for nearly every family — and prices went up for no one. A huge accomplishment! That was the result of diligent expense review by the entire board, aided greatly by outstanding performance from our charitable gambling team.

There is tremendous momentum in SAHA, and I'm passionate about continuing it as president. I'm also excited about the steps we can take to move further forward:

- We will form a hockey coaching education team to provide ongoing training and resources to every SAHA coach who wants them. We have high-caliber coaches eager to share their knowledge, and a consistent training cadence will raise the bar for the entire association.
- We will establish a hockey decision/development committee to advise on training techniques, player development tools, evaluation criteria, team placement, and more. We have an abundance of hockey knowledge in this association, and it's time to engage those people even more deeply in SAHA's long-term success.
- We will significantly step up our commitment to goalies. With Alex Stalock, Kyle Kraemer, and others on the board, we have an exceptional group of goalie experts to carry this torch. Great strides were made this year with weekly St. Mary's Point sessions and upcoming summer training, but there is much more to be done. We will make goalie development a genuine area of strength for SAHA.
- We will push to make hockey as affordable as possible at the Mite and U8 levels. Our entry-level program is flourishing, and keeping costs low for kids just getting started is critical to the association's long-term health. There is already a significant body of work underway here, and we need to stay focused on it.
- Recruiting high-quality non-parent coaches remains a core SAHA priority. Because the pool of young non-parent coaches who can commit to a full season is limited, we must identify and recruit more candidates during the off-season to meet our needs when the season begins.
- We will create more committees and bite-sized volunteer opportunities. Our candidate pool for board roles is smaller than we'd like because the time commitment is daunting. By spreading that burden across more volunteers and committees, we'll attract more participation and make the whole organization stronger.
- With nearly 1,000 skaters across roughly 500 families, we have countless talented moms and dads in this association. When someone has a great idea, we'll encourage them to run with it — providing the guardrails to keep it in the spirit of SAHA, while giving them the freedom to put their talents to work for all of us.

I want to thank all of the SAHA members for what they have given my family these past 10+ years. You are all amazing and we love our SAHA family dearly. I want to especially thank my wife Jill. She is a force of nature. The very best there is. Whether it is as a fan in the hockey stands or as a coach on the lacrosse field, she bleeds red and black. These board roles are a huge commitment and I am so grateful for her partnership and support.

Sincerely,

Justin Kaufenberg

SAHA Girls Director • President Candidate
