

# Women's Comment

This article is about a man who is on the ice for a minimum of seventy-eight games a season. He wears number 8, but he's not Tom Webster, or Wayne Hillman, or Ted Hargreaves. He's one of the most important men on the ice, but nobody pays the admission price to watch him. He's Ray Thomas, a World Hockey Association referee.

We, the fans, continually boo, criticize and harass our game officials. We fail to understand that they are trying to do their job (which is probably one of the hardest in professional sports) the best they can. They are trying to let the two teams play hockey the way it should be; fast moving, few delays, and good, clean end to end action and excitement.

Ray is now in his second year with the World Hockey Association. A native of Sudbury, Ontario, Ray has been refereeing for five years. He spent one year in the Netherlands as Referee-In-Chief of their league. He played his Junior "A" hockey with the Sudbury Wolves of the OHA. Because he felt he could never make it as a professional and his love for the sport continued, he turned to refereeing.

The referees in the World

Hockey Association go through a strenuous one week training camp, run by former NHL referee Vern Buffey. Physical conditioning is stressed throughout that time. They then work two weeks of exhibition games, which helps them get themselves back into condition.

Since hockey players are a superstitious lot, one wonders if referees are the same way. Ray puts his right skate on first. This he feels is not really a superstition but a habit which comes naturally with each game.

An interesting point is how a ref decides to send his linesmen in to break up a fight. If Ray sees that the two opponents are of equal stature and they are going to hurt only themselves he will let them "go at it" for awhile. However, if there is a difference in size and he feels that someone may get hurt, the linesmen are immediately sent in.

Ray has never been hurt in an altercation. A player may "come at him" in the heat of the battle, and threaten him with his stick but they would never intentionally hurt the referee. They respect him for doing a good job.

Do the ref's hear the fans when they call out their little remarks. Normally they're immune to the barbs, unless someone yells an interesting comment out of the blue. One that Ray particularly remembers is "Hey, Thomas, if you're a ref, I'm the POPE!" The fans don't realize that the officials don't commit the offences, just detect them.

Mickey Ion (he ref'd in the '30s) once took his partner aside and said, "There are 14,000 people here friend, but of them there are only two who are sane — you and me!" Ray believes this is true to a point but not completely. He feels the players and fans aren't against you, but they're caught up in the emotionalism.

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Ray's contract with the WHA is for him to work half of his games in the WHA and the other half with the Southern League. So a typical week may have him working his way up north with stops in Charlotte, North Carolina; to Macon, Georgia; to St. Paul, Minnesota; to Winnipeg. It's a wonder they don't all suffer from pneumonia, with the changes in climate!

Being a referee means that you're on the road almost continuously from October through April. Your home is the St. Paul Hilton, Chateau Lacombe, or the Northstar Inn. Remember a referee and his linesmen have no home games. If they're lucky they may get home once or twice a month. This is what Ray believes is the most difficult part of his job. The travelling and back to back games are exhausting. An official skates to 60 minutes a game, not once every three shifts.

A referee is many things, an arbitrator, a garbage disposal at the end of a penalty assignment session, a prey to fast moving high sticks, victim of more body checks than many well padded players, a man dedicated to his job but most of all a human being.

I don't envy their position, do you?