

Hockey 'paused' during current provincial restrictions

By Brian Lockhart

There is a lot of optimism in hockey circles that leagues will be able to resume operations in a couple of weeks and finish their regular season schedules.

The word being floated around in Ontario hockey leagues is 'paused.'

Most leagues are saying they have paused hockey operations temporarily in hopes that when restrictions are lifted on Jan. 27, they can resume their schedules and get players back on the ice.

The Ontario Minor Hockey Association posted a statement saying: "In conjunction with this announcement, the OHF and OMHA are pausing all in-person programming [games, practices, on-ice and off-ice training etc.] in its entirety beginning January 5, 2022, at 12:01 a.m. until 12:01 a.m. on January 27, 2022 unless restrictions are eased by the Ontario Government prior to."

Currently there are no minor hockey leagues operating in the province.

The only hockey being allowed is with some elite athletes and select amateur clubs.

If the restrictions are lifted at the end of January, many leagues are preparing to extend the season so they can finish their regular schedule of games.

At the Junior C level, the Provincial Junior Hockey League is planning to extend the season to complete all required games.

"The Provincial Junior Hockey League will follow the provincial mandate and suspend play from January 5 through to 27. We are very hopeful that we will be able to resume play soon after the 27th. Plans and schedule are being reviewed and amended as required to ensure we are able to complete our season and compete for the Schmalz cup," the organization said in a statement.

The League has not had a Schmalz Cup champion for the past two seasons.

In 2020, all hockey was put on hold just as the final series in division playoffs were getting underway.

Last season, there were only some exhibition games played with no champions crowned.

That's two years in a row the record books will have a blank entry in the championship column.

The League is currently at the half-way mark of their regular season schedule.

If the province deems it necessary to extend the restrictions past the January 27 date, Leagues will have to re-think the situation and adjust schedules based on the length of added time off of the ice.