EMPIRE LEAGUE TO GO YOUNGER

February 25th was a watershed day for the Empire Junior Hockey League as the Board of Governors voted to eliminate 20 year old players from the League.

The League currently has a restriction of no more than 4-20 year olds per team. Under the new rule, the number of 20 year olds will be reduced to a maximum of 2 per team in the 2010-2011 season. Starting with the 2011-2012 season there will be no 20 year olds in the League.

The move was made to inform potential players and their parents that, as a B League operating in the East, we are committed to player development and advancement. This goes hand in hand with the earlier adoption of Eastern Junior Hockey League rules (NCAA based) that severely punish fighting and ban wearing half shields in favor of full cages.

More than half of this year's teams have already committed to younger rosters. The transition will help those teams who do have older players to adjust over time.

Both the EJHL and the Chair of USA Hockey's Junior Council are in full support of this move.

"I want to commend the Empire Junior Hockey League for making the move to an age classification of 19 and under," said EJHL Commissioner Jack Sweeney. "The Empire league has long been a standard of excellence in the realm of Junior Hockey here in the United States and now they have become a pioneer in what I think is the right move for Junior B hockey. With the bulk of college and pro hockey recruiting dollars being spent watching and luring today's Junior players, the younger hockey playing population has taken notice and now recognizes the value of spending their most impressionable development years under the Junior Hockey umbrella. This move by the Empire League demonstrates its sincere commitment to the development of the younger hockey playing population. The Eastern Junior Hockey League not only supports this move but is proud to be partnered with a group who has placed the development of today's young people at the forefront of their league."

By making the league more attractive to the premier age 16 and under player, while at the same time providing a place for talented 17-19 year olds to further develop, the Empire hopes to be seen as the league of choice for development and as a feeder to the EJHL and other Junior A programs.