



Referee Activities during the Cancelled 2020-2021 Season: Implications for Optimism?

Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic caused the cancellation of the 2020-2021 season sending referees, players, coaches, and fans to their homes to entertain themselves with non-hockey activities. This survey focused on what referees did in their time off as well as their interest in returning to the ice. The following can be taken as the main outcomes:

1. Respondents did not like that the season was cancelled and looked forward to the day that hockey resumed.
2. There was enthusiasm for returning to the ice whether the pandemic was over or not. However, there was more enthusiasm to return to the ice when the pandemic ended.
3. Respondents were more likely to engage in exercise activities rather than sedentary activities to fill their time.

For full details about this survey, please read on.



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No one needs to be, nor wants to be, reminded that the world has spent 2020 and 2021 in a pandemic. However, this research draws directly from the cancelled 2020-2021 season. Therefore, the existence of the pandemic is a necessary part to explain why HWRD would ask the general question “what are you doing with all the free time created by the 2020-2021 hockey season being cancelled?”

HWRD collected data about what officials were doing during the lockdown between January 21st and February 12, 2021. Thirty-five responded with the following experience and ages:

Years of Experience	Number of Respondents	% of Total
First Year	3	8.57%
1-3 Years	12	11.43%
4-6 Years	6	8.57%
7+ years	14	57.14%

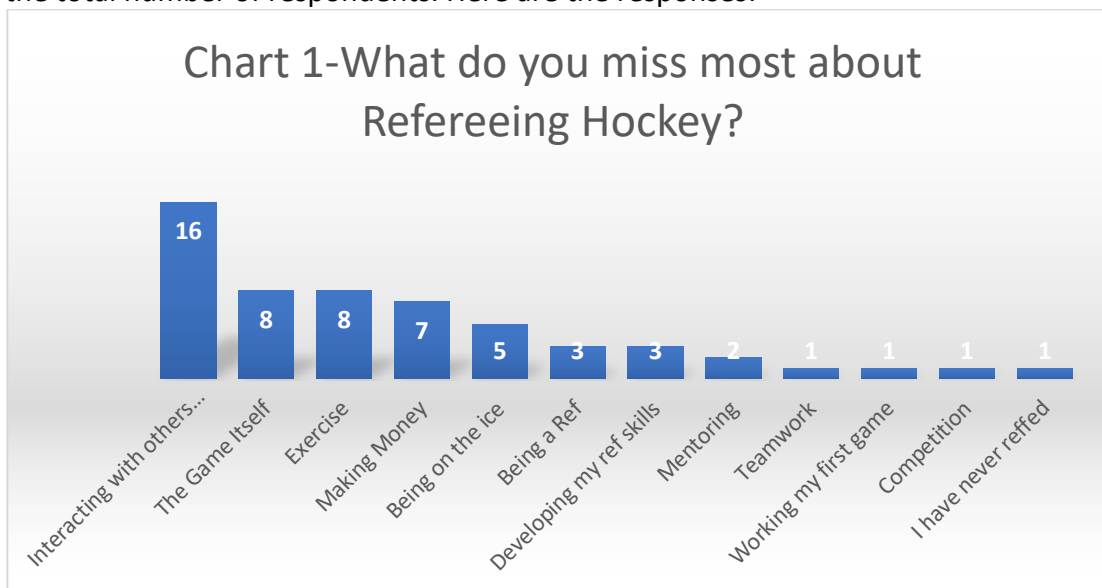
Age	Number of Respondents	% of Total
13-17 Years	12	34.29%
18+ Years	23	65.71%

The following 4 general question categories were explored using a variety of questions and agree-disagree statements:

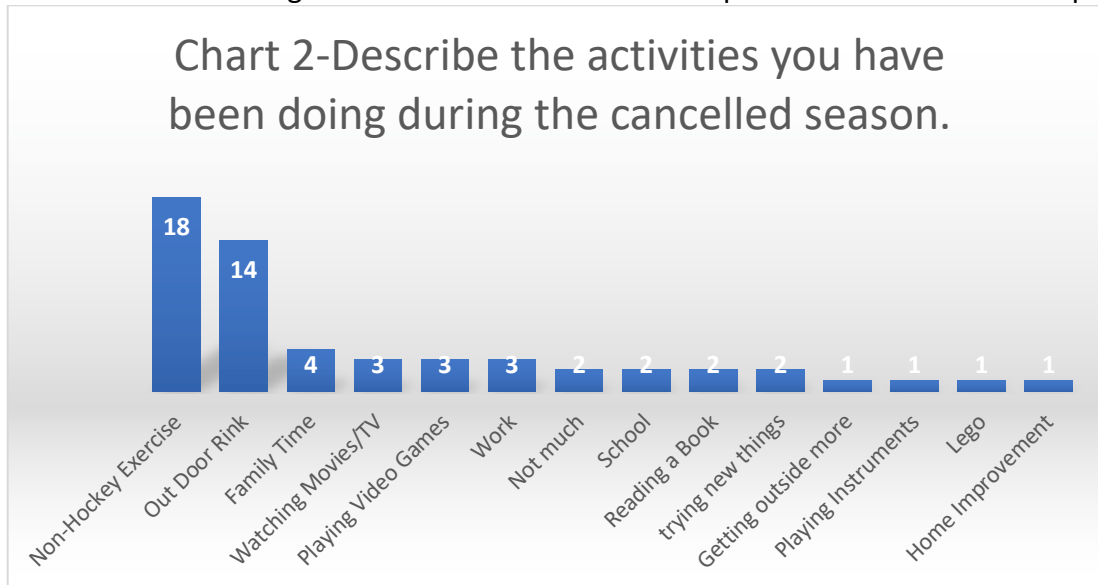
- What do you miss most about refereeing?
- What activities have you been doing during the cancellation?
- Do you plan to return to refereeing when it is possible?
- Do you see the cancelled season as positive or negative?

Results

What do you miss about refereeing hockey? This area was explored using an open-ended question resulting in a range of answers. Note: respondents who gave more than one answer had all their answers recorded. Therefore, the total number of responses in this chart is higher than the total number of respondents. Here are the responses:



What activities have you been doing during the time you would be refereeing? This was explored with an open-ended question resulting in a range of responses. Note: respondents who gave more than one answer had all their answers recorded. Therefore, the total number of responses in this chart is higher than the total number of respondents. Here are the responses:

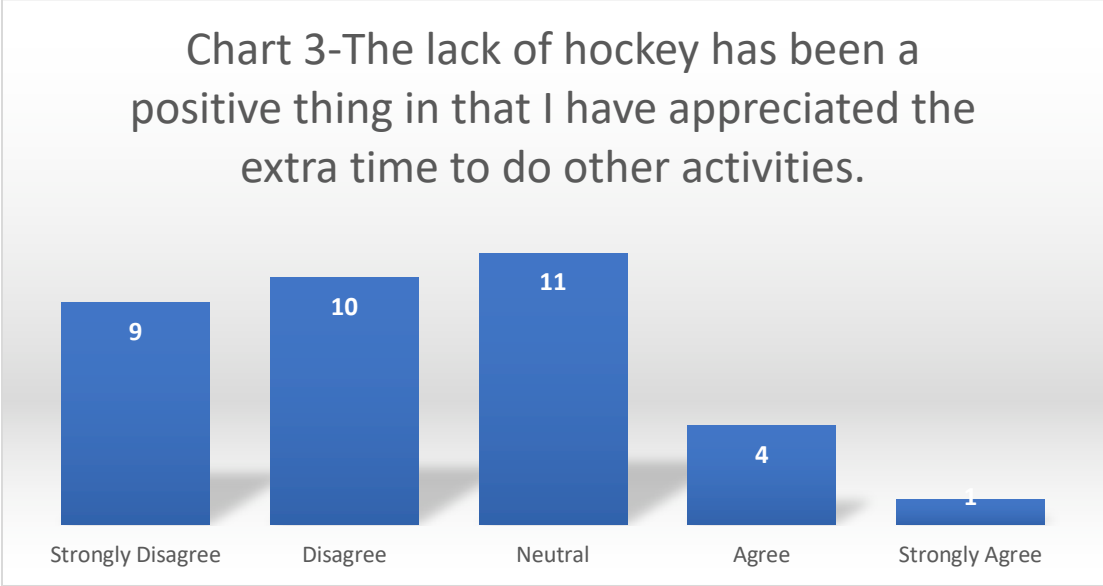


Do you plan to return when possible? This question was explored by asking respondents to agree or disagree with the following statements: I plan to return when hockey returns if...

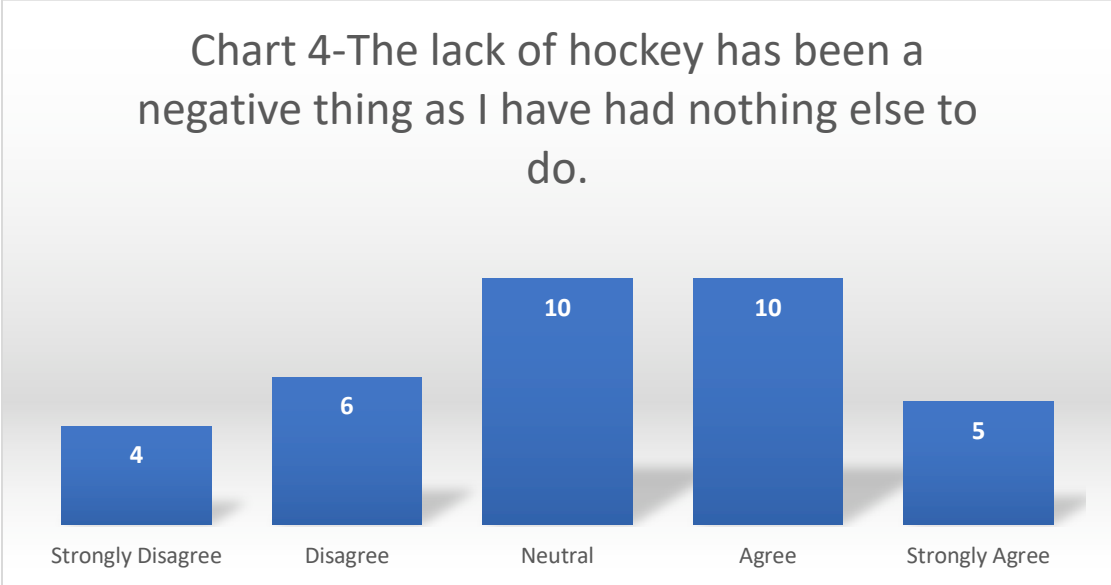
Table 1	<u>...COVID is no longer a pandemic.</u>	<u>...COVID is still a pandemic.</u>
Strongly Disagree	0	0
Disagree	0	0
Neutral	0	0
Agree	4	11
Strongly Agree	31	22

Do you see the cancelled season as a positive or a negative? This question was explored by asking respondents to agree or disagree with the following statements: The lack of hockey has been a...

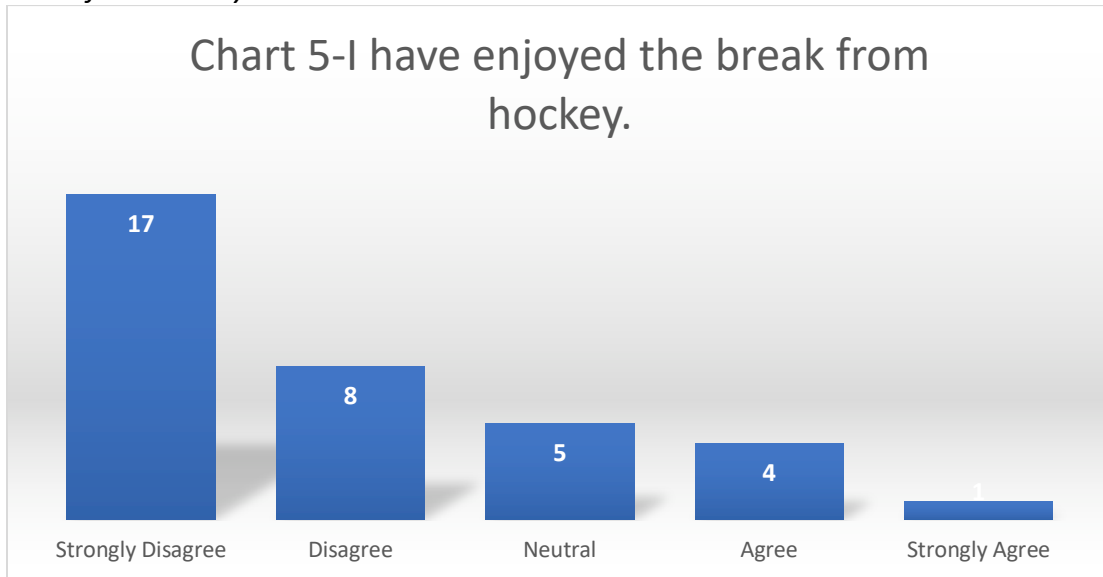
...positive thing in that I have appreciated the extra time to do other activities.



...negative thing as I have had nothing else to do.

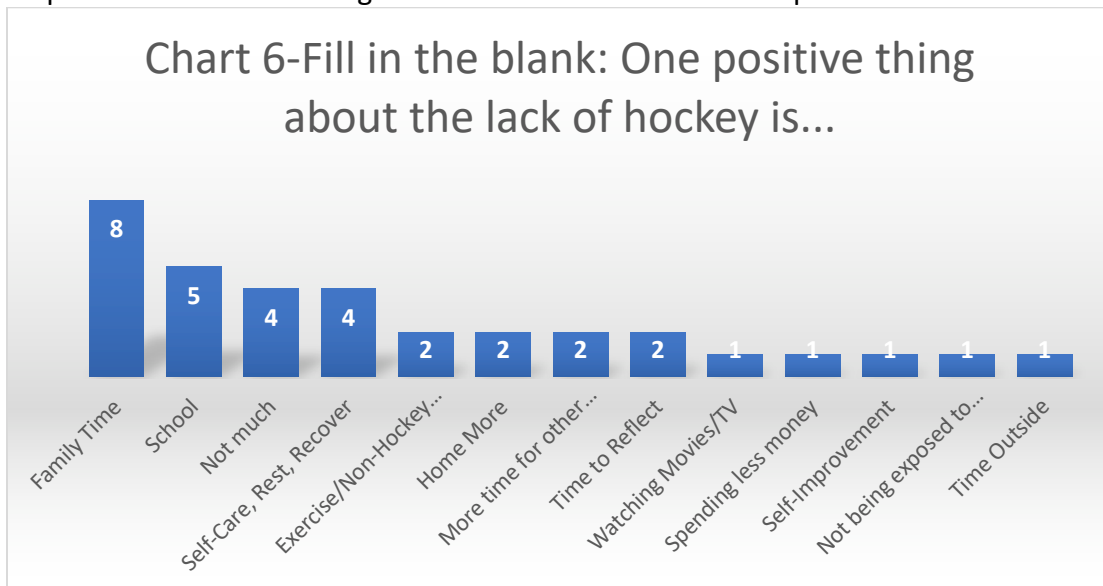


Respondents were also asked to agree or disagree with the statement: *“I have enjoyed the break from hockey.”* Here are the results:



Also, 34/35 respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement *“I look forward to getting back to reffing hockey.”*

Finally, respondents were asked to *identify one positive thing about the break*. This was explored with an open-ended question resulting in a range of results. Note: respondents who gave more than one answer had all their answers recorded. Therefore, the total number of responses in this chart is higher than the total number of respondents. Here are the responses:



Discussion

There were 4 questions posed at the start of this report. Here are the answers:

- What do you miss most about refereeing (Chart 1)?
 - The social aspect of being an official. 16 out of 35 responses for interacting with others was double the next two most popular responses (the game, exercise, making money).
- What activities have you been doing during the cancellation (Chart 2)?
 - There were 32 responses related to non-hockey exercise and going to the outdoor rink. This was by far more popular than any of the other response.
- Do you plan to return to refereeing when it is possible? (Table 1)
 - 31 responses were “Strongly Agree” and 4 were “Agree” for “if hockey returns when COVID is no longer a pandemic”.
 - 22 responses were “Strongly Agree” and 11 were “Agree” for “if hockey returns even if COVID is still a pandemic.”
- Do you see the cancelled season as positive or negative (Charts 3, 4, 5, 6)?
 - 19 out of 35 “Strongly Disagree” or “Disagree” with the pause being positive (Chart 3).
 - 15 out of 35 “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the pause being negative (Chart 4).
 - About 30% of respondents were neutral when responding to the break being either positive (Chart 3) or negative (Chart 4).
 - People generally disagreed with the statement “I have enjoyed the break from hockey (Chart 5).
 - The number 1 positive outcome of the break was “more time with family”.

Conclusions from this Survey

1. Referees choosing to come back during the pandemic:
 - a. The survey showed less enthusiasm for returning during the pandemic than after it. In real life (using the authors’ experience in the author’s home area) there was shortage in officials that reflects this reduce enthusiasm.
 - b. Furthermore, the primary shortage was for officials who previously worked U15-U18 hockey not U13 and lower. The survey reflects this because 66% of respondents had 4+ year’s experience. Generally officials working higher levels have more experience. The survey results are reflecting what has happened in real life.
 - c. In January 2022 the Omicron variant is causing record cases of COVID-19. There are more officials in the author’s home area who are taking a break during January than during Fall 2021. Again, table 1 suggests there were fewer people who strongly agreed that they would return if hockey was being played during a pandemic.
 - d. Given that the survey results are mirroring what is happening in real life, one can be optimistic that more referees who did not referee in 2021-2022 may return when the pandemic is over. However, this is only true if the reason for staying

away is the pandemic and not other reasons like “finding new activities” or “getting too old” or “moving on to a new job”.

2. This research suggests that referees are athletic individuals who like being active. Take a look at Chart 2; referees were more likely to go to the outdoor rink or do non-hockey exercise than other sedentary activities (like reading, movies, or video games)
3. The break from hockey was not appreciated (Charts 3-6).
 - a. Chart 3 showed that the majority of people disagreed or strongly disagreed with the break being positive while Chart 4 showed the majority of people agreed or strongly agreed with the break being a negative thing.
 - b. Most people strongly disagreed or disagreed with the statement: I have enjoyed the break from hockey.
 - c. While the break was not appreciated, about 1/3 of respondents felt neutral about whether the break was positive or negative. This suggests there is ambivalence about whether some time off was good or bad.

There are three main limitations to this research:

1. 2/3s of responses were from adults over the age of 18 and with more than 4 years of experience. This means that the results better represent more experienced officials.
2. The survey was conducted in January-February. Therefore, the results could be different if the survey had been completed in October-November.
3. The sample of 35 officials represents less than 10% of the officials in Winnipeg, which is generally accepted to be between 400 and 500 each season.