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Teen hockey official rising through the ranks

By: [Cody Sellar](#) STAFF REPORTER

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Hey there, time traveller!

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Westwood resident Josh Miko is a rising star in the world of whistleblowers and skating zebras.

The 19-year-old has worked his way up through the ranks of hockey officiating and has been hired this year to work as a linesperson by both the Western Hockey League (WHL) and the American Hockey League (AHL), both of which feature on the resumes of some of the world's best hockey players.

"It's an honour, actually," Miko said. "It's definitely a moment I'll remember, seeing those emails pop up and being recognized as

someone that can handle that level and be trusted.”



Supplied photo

Josh Miko readies for the play during a Manitoba Moose game.

Miko began refereeing at age 13 in St. James-Assiniboia, beginning like other young officials by calling “house league,” or beginner-level, games. From there, he kept at it, working up to higher and higher levels.

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After making it to AAA and junior hockey leagues, such as the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League, Miko was invited to Penticton, B.C. to referee in the 2022 Young Stars Classic hosted by the Vancouver Canucks.

The classic featured prospects eager to gain clout within four National Hockey League (NHL) organizations — the Vancouver Canucks, Calgary Flames, Edmonton Oilers, and Winnipeg Jets.

“It was unreal,” Miko said. “Growing up watching these teams, I had this moment where Cole Perfetti was behind the net, and I thought, ‘Holy crap, how about that?’”

When his visor scuffed, he asked the Calgary Flames equipment manager to buff it out for him. The equipment manager simply replaced it and refused to accept payment — exactly the sort of big-league attitude that reminded Miko how special it was to be there.

Now donning the stripes for the North America’s second-best professional hockey league, the AHL, Miko said the moments stepping out on the ice with the lights low and the music blaring are surreal, but when the puck drops, it’s all about focus, making the right calls, and keeping a level head.

Staying even-keeled is key in hockey —which fosters more than a little hotheadedness — is a true talent. Imagine, for example, keeping calm when one of the NHL’s most feared big men, Winnipegger Ryan Reaves, is

yelling at you, calling you a bum. Miko doesn't need to imagine, he can simply recall when it happened to him while refereeing an off-season scrimmage at the RINK Hockey Academy.

“For all of Josh’s success, he maintains his humility.”

All that has led to Miko being an experienced linesperson (he was sure to use the inclusive term) at the age of just 19. He was also sure to give credit to those who helped him along the way.

“I want to emphasize how lucky I was and how many different people helped me along the way. Whenever I did have a bad game or there was a situation or rule I didn't know, there were always people for me to lean on and ask for help,” he said.

One of those people was Mitchell Jeffrey, who holds a host of titles within various leagues and refereeing organizations and was an on-ice mentor to Miko.

“For all of Josh’s success, he maintains his humility. One of the most humble people ever. To watch him from when he was 13 to now, there’s a pride that he’s had so much success,” Jeffrey said.

Jeffrey credited Miko’s humility for helping take him to the next level. It allowed him the openness needed to ask questions and learn, he said. It helped Miko was already a good skater and stood at six-foot-three, but he possesses the intangibles, as well.

Jeffrey said Miko immerses himself in the community of referees and is already helping to develop the next generation to wear the black and white sweater.

“He puts in the effort, and he pursues his dream,” Jeffrey said.

Miko said his goal is to take his refereeing career as far as it will go.

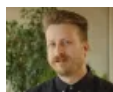
“There’s only 35 full-time spots in the National Hockey League and that’s a bit of a tall order, but I’m hoping with how fortunate I was and how blessed I was to get into the American Hockey League at my age, I’m hoping I have a shot,” Miko said.





Supplied photo

Nineteen-year-old referee Josh Miko puts his arm to signal a call in an American Hockey League game.



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Cody Sellar is the reporter/photographer for the Free Press Community Review West. He is a lifelong Winnipegger. He is a journalist, writer, sleuth, sloth, reader of books and lover of terse biographies. Email him at cody.sellar@canstarnews.com or call him at 204-697-7206.

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