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## **Junior hockey players deserve to be paid decently: Editorial**

**Junior hockey players in Canada are working up to \$60 hours per week and being paid allowances of \$35 to \$120 per week.**



Chris So / Toronto Star

Former junior hockey player Sam Berg is the representative plaintiff in the claim against the CHL.

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They are talented young athletes working 30 to 65 hours a week, but receiving as little as \$35 to \$120 for their efforts.

Now a \$180-million class action suit is demanding that junior hockey players in Canada be paid minimum wage by the Canadian Hockey League, which oversees their teams.

That would seem not only fair – but it should be mandatory.

These young men are not skating for high school teams where fans attend games for free. They're skating and travelling for 60 teams in three regional leagues that sell tickets to loyal fans and sponsorships to major corporations. According to the suit, which has not been proven in court, the players generate “hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues annually.”

Regardless of the amount, what is clear is the players provide the entertainment that is being sold – and they should be paid for it.

Still, CHL President David Branch argues the players “are amateur student athletes” who are paid an allowance and are eligible for university and college scholarships for their participation in a hockey program.

Really? A hockey “program”?

This isn't cub camp. The reality is that these are young people (typically 16 to 20 years old) being taken advantage of by an organization that is the main funnel of talent for the enormously wealthy National Hockey League. (The average NHL team was worth \$413 million in 2013, according to Forbes.)

Asking the players to work for \$35 to \$120 per week is like asking managers to work for free until they make the corner office. Their hard work on the way up earns the NHL its profits down the road — never mind the revenues the CHL earns immediately.

Even the promised scholarships are a point of dispute. The claim suggests the conditions to receive one are so onerous that the CHL pays out scholarships for only four players a year, totalling \$30,000. The CHL disputes that. It says the Ontario Hockey League alone paid out \$2 million in scholarship funding last year.

It's not the first time the players' plight has been raised. Canada's largest private-sector union is lobbying Ontario's premier and labour minister to launch a task force examining the working conditions of junior hockey players. “These are for-profit organizations and there's no rhyme nor reason why they should be circumventing the laws on minimum wage,” says Jerry Dias, the president of Unifor (whose members include Star journalists).

Former junior hockey player Sam Berg, the representative plaintiff in the claim, has it right when he says: “I hope kids that have a passion for the game won't be exploited for it.”

The CHL needs to play fair with kids with big dreams of playing in the pro-leagues. Their players have the right to a fair wage for the work they do. Anything less is offside.