

# #THANKTHESTRIPES



# December 6-8, 2024

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To: APSJ Admin, Officials & Mentors

From: Mitchell Jeffrey, Vice President of Officials for APHA & SJAMHA

Happy #thankthestripes!

Officials, both on-ice and off-ice, strive not to be the center of attention—our greatest success is when a game can be fair and safe without our needing to be *the show*. Interestingly, when a game is at its best, it is easy to forget officials exist.

Indeed, it is too easy to ignore officiating when things go well and too easy to trash the officials when things go off kilter. As such, #thankthestripes is particularly important. You put in the work, you learn, you improve, you hustle, you bounce back from mistakes. As always, thank you for that commitment, the curiosity to learn, and your involvement in our APSJ community.

This year's theme for #thankthestripes is "Artificial Intelligence in Officiating". A.I. is an interesting topic for #thankthestripes when we think about the possibility of computers replacing officials with strategically placed cameras and sensors. These cameras and sensors would send data to a computer using the rule book and algorithms to make decisions about stopping the clock, assessing a penalty, or signalling a goal.

To some extent, this is already happening with computers detecting whether a tennis ball is in or out. Whether a baseball pitch qualifies as a strike or a ball. Whether a hockey puck entered the goal. However, so far, A.I. has not been able to make officials obsolete. For myself, I believe that A.I. is best when it complements human abilities rather than attempting to replace those abilities. Just because we can do something—automated cars, for example—should we? (I am reminded of Disney's 2008 movie, *Wall-E*, where humans on a spaceship became dependent on A.I. so much so that they stopped walking, lost muscle mass, and lived on individual hover carts.)

Officiating is about more than rule knowledge. Conflict resolution. Stress management. Understanding that the rules are more grey than black-and-white. These "soft skills" is what make humans, for all our fallibility, ideal to be hockey officials.

So, #thankthestripes for your humanity in officiating our great game.

Mitchell Jeffrey, Vice President of Officials for APHA & SJAMHA