

# National Post

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## Body-checking dangers becoming harc

Matthew Coutts, National Post · Wednesday, Aug. 25, 2010

TORONTO - After hearing nearly two hours of sentiment opposing body checking in youth hock and former NHL players, one hockey father attending the World Hockey Summit just had to say

His boys are going to learn how to hit while they are young.

He wants his son to make it to the hard-hitting big show, where checking is as coveted a talent is part of the process.

"Don't do it," Brendan Shanahan said simply, when asked for reaction.

"I always had a dream of playing in the NHL," he added later at Toronto's Air Canada Centre, "I made any decision that was steering me toward that direction. They never put me in harm's way

For many, checking in youth hockey is a frustrating uphill debate that seems to pit common sense against a parent's desire to start an NHL career at the age of eight.

To Shanahan, now the NHL's vice president of hockey and business development, his argumer words: Bryan Marchment.

Shanahan played minor hockey with Marchment, in a league that had banned hitting. Both mad one of the most feared hitters in the league.

"He didn't have body checking when he was a kid. He turned out to be a great body checker," S percentage of these kids are going to make it to the NHL or even play at the collegiate level, so development is more important."

A recent University of Calgary study by Dr. Carolyn Emery, cited yesterday by Mark Aubrey, the Federation's chief medical officer, found that allowing body checking between 11-and 12-year-c chances of injury.

Following 74 teams in Alberta, where body checking is permitted, and 76 teams in Quebec, wh years of age, Emery found nearly three times as many injuries in checking-permitted leagues.

"How many kids give up hockey at the tender age of 11, 12 or 13 when body checking is introd not ready, and they are scared?" Aubrey said. "They lose confidence rather than gaining confid

While the panel was nearly unanimous, the debate is not. There appear to be experts who, if not parents, defend hitting in youth hockey.

In a study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, a group of researchers from the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, studied 1,000 players between four and 18 years old and found 66% of injuries in junior league were deliberate hits. The results would seem to suggest body checking among younger players is not

More to the point, a professor from the University of Regina recently stated injuries stem from play that was better to teach the skill at a younger age.

"How you introduce the skill is far more critical than when you introduce the skill," Harold Rieme recently told Postmedia News. "Associations need to be far more proactive than reactive about

Currently, most hockey associations across Canada allow hitting in peewee hockey, when play that does not permit hitting until the bantam level (13-14). Aubrey would like to see the rest of Canada

Shanahan, meantime, says that children should start playing for the love of the game, not as a

"Let them dream about the NHL, but that is not the reason they should be playing hockey," he says

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