

## T-Hawks minor football team issued two-year suspension



**By Bill Kilpatrick**

On May 25, Scott Giroux, the Commissioner for the Quinte Skyhawks Minor Football League, issued a decision to suspend the Bancroft T-Hawks Minor Football Team from the league for the remainder of the 2025 season as well as for the 2026 and 2027 seasons. A summary of Giroux's concerns and findings stated:

“After careful review of the 2025 season, including multiple formal complaints, coach reports, sponsor concerns, past commissioner input, and observed game conduct, the Quinte Skyhawks Minor Football League leadership recommends the disqualification of the Bancroft T-Hawks from further league participation.”

The report cited 14 concerns under four separate categories including allegations of “repeated pattern of dangerous, illegal hits, encouragement of aggressive, non-football behaviour, 10 plus unsportsmanlike/ personal foul penalties, verbal abuse by Bancroft coaches, homophobic and racist slurs by players, refusal to correct behaviour, failure to uphold league values, parental misconduct, and disruption of league operations.”

Giroux wrote in his decision that “In light of these documented patterns, and to protect the safety of players, maintain the league's reputation, and uphold the values of sportsmanship and inclusion, the Quinte Skyhawks Minor Football League implements the immediate disqualification of the Bancroft T-Hawks from the remainder of the 2025 season and for the next two seasons (2026, 2027). Bancroft may reapply to the league for the 2028 season.”

Giroux's report went so far as to even cite historical contraventions from past seasons. His report alleged that “Nearly all other participating teams have raised concerns citing years of issues,” and “the team's long history of dangerous play,” and a failure of Bancroft's leadership to address the problem,” as well as “use of abusive, offensive , and discriminatory language” over multiple seasons.” It went on to further allege that patterns of “dangerous conduct” extended over several years, including pushing from behind after whistles (causing broken arms), late hits, spearing, and “tourist hits.”

Lance Conlin, head coach for the Bancroft T-Hawks, along with his coaching staff, sent out a press release which categorically denied all the allegations. In the press release that was addressed to “players, parents, alumni, and fans” it stated that the club “immediately responded by contacting the Commissioner” but that after an in-depth discussion “he [Giroux] remained firm that the suspension was final.”

The press release continued stating that the team “submitted a detailed rebuttal” that addressed all of the concerns raised by Giroux

alleging that 'the commissioner acknowledged that no formal complaints had been filed and stated that his decision was based on the 'past few years' of history. The league's official statement mentioned previous warnings; we want to be clear that there were none, not from the Commissioner, referees, or even other coaches.' The press release goes on to allege that the coaching staff have documentation of the Commissioner 'complimenting us after each of the first two weeks of play.' The press release also promised to publish correspondence between themselves and the Commissioner stating 'In the coming days, we will begin releasing the full correspondence between ourselves and the Commissioner, as transparency is important to us. We want our community to have a clear understanding of the situation.' The press release ended by asking that parents not 'lash out at other teams' players, or coaching staff'.

On May 27, James Forde, a member of the coaching staff for the T-Hawks released numerous emails and text messages on his Facebook page that appear to be correspondence between Giroux, Conlin, and other members of the T-Hawks coaching staff. One email dated May 25, at 1:43 p.m. appears to be the rebuttal email addressed to Giroux sent from Forde. In it the T-Hawks dispute the claims made by Giroux arguing that 'We categorically deny fostering a culture of dangerous play or targeting players with intent to injure.' In a section titled 'final position' the coaching staff stated 'We find this disqualification ruling to a severe overreach rooted in anecdotal and unverified reports, lacking procedural fairness and transparency. At no point were we invited to participate in a formal hearing, respond to concerns, or present our evidence. Disqualifying a youth team without this due process-especially one that has made meaningful improvements- undermines the league's values of development, inclusion, and community engagement. We respectfully request the immediate suspension of the disqualification until a proper, impartial review can take place- one that includes: specific documentation of all formal complaints received, direct witness testimony and video evidence, a chance for the Bancroft T-Hawks leadership to present evidence.'

In another email dated May 25 at 5:28 p.m. Giroux appears to be responding to the coaching staff's rebuttal. In it he says 'I want to explain clearly why we are standing by the decision to disqualify the Bancroft T-Hawks for the rest of the 2025 season?' Giroux mentions that complaints were filed, but does not state directly that those complaints were formal. He wrote, 'We take player safety very seriously. Even if formal complaints were not filed, the combination of referee reports, video review, and concerns from other coaches and parents show repeated unsafe play. It's not just about one or two penalties- it's the over-all pattern.' Regarding 'language and conduct' Giroux also stated 'We have received complaints (from referees, coaches, and parents) about abusive or aggressive behaviour. Even if there were no formal complaints or game flags every time, the repeated concerns are enough for the league to step in.'

However, the Quinte Sky Hawks Code of Conduct states that 'If a violation of the 'CODE' has been brought forward the first step will be followed below and if proven, one or more of the following sanctions (suspension or dismissal) may be imposed, discretion is based upon the executive and all decisions are final.' The first step as outlined in the code of conduct is 'verbal or written warning' A verbal statement or an official, written notice will be presented to the individual that is in question to the allegation. From there a meeting would be setup to begin proceedings towards necessary steps if necessary. In some instances where evidence has been provided, immediate dismissal or suspension can be given upon the discretion of the executive.' The second step in the code of conduct is suspension and the third step is dismissal.

For members of the T-Hawks the suspension notice was a total shock to them and their players. Head coach Conlin stated 'We've been completely blindsided and unfairly treated, frankly. There's never been a single coach or a single player that has been informed of anything. We have not had a coach or a player ejected. We haven't even had a player kicked off the field this year.' Forde pointed out that 'we received no verbal warnings before our suspension,' and Conlin confirmed that the team received no written or verbal warnings last year either. While the Sky Hawks Code of Conduct appears to give the executive the power to 'immediately suspend a team' based on evidence, Conlin and Forde both feel that this decision did not give them a chance to correct any of the alleged violations prior to the decision to suspend the team. Conlin stated that if they knew about the alleged violations they would have been dealt with promptly.

As a result of the Sky Hawks' decision Conlin filed a complaint with Football Ontario. Bancroft This Week reached out to Aaron Geisler, the CEO of Football Ontario, who confirmed that 'Football Ontario is reviewing the situation with our discipline/appeals committee,' adding that he was unable to provide any details due to the ongoing investigation.

Bancroft This Week reached out to Commissioner Giroux for comment concerning the alleged lack of formal written or verbal complaints regarding the allegations. The Commissioner responded that "At this time, I am not providing additional comment beyond what was already shared in my previous written statement to the Bancroft T-Hawks and their community."

For the time being the suspension remains as Football Ontario reviews the decision.

This is a developing story.