

Burke calls for more T.O. rinks

Leafs GM one of four named to lead August hockey summit

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Toronto needs more hockey rinks, says Maple Leafs GM Brian Burke.

"In Toronto, we need places to play," said Burke, named one of four leaders of this summer's hockey summit in Toronto that will chart the future of the sport. "It doesn't matter if you have all the money in the world if you don't have rinks. We need to build rinks and maintain rinks."

Burke pointed out the Leafs' new four-pad practice facility on Kipling Ave. was the first new arena built within the confines of the city in 25 years.

"We've stopped building rinks in Toronto

and we haven't maintained the ones we have," said Burke. "We have to find places for kids to play."

The city has plans to build another four-pad facility on vacant land near the Don River, although those plans are bogged down.

Burke, Lightning GM Steve Yzerman, Senators captain Daniel Alfredsson and Team Canada's Hayley Wickenheiser participated in a conference call after being named leaders of the summit by its organizers on Wednesday.

For Burke, affordability is the key to the future of the sport, both in the availability of ice for kids to develop and of equipment for kids to use.

"We have to keep the game available, affordable and to make sure we're always looking at alternatives," said Burke. "If we can't afford to build 365-day-a-year refrigerated ice rinks in Canada, why don't we build roller rinks where players can play in-line (hockey) in the summertime? We have to focus on alternatives where we can develop skills. . . . In-line hockey is a wonderful development tool. We haven't used it properly."

Burke cited the changing demographic of Toronto with its large influx of new Canadians who don't understand hockey as one challenge, and the expense of the sport as another.

Renting ice time can cost up to \$400 an hour in Toronto. Outfitting kids with skates, sticks and the rest of the equipment, if bought new, can go over \$1,000.

"How do we get ice time at a subsidized rate? Can you do an equipment recycling program, where kids are able to use equipment other players have outgrown but is still perfectly good in terms of safety?" said Burke.

"The cost to play this sport is really prohibitive," said Yzerman. "Everyone should be involved in the solution, from the equipment manufacturers on down. You need kids playing the sport to sell equipment. It's just good business."

Wickenheiser said getting women's hockey to the next level, and expanding its talent base, was her priority.



DAVID COOPER/TORONTO STAR

Paul Henderson touches puck from Canada's 2010 Olympic victory at unveiling of Hockey Hall of Fame display Wednesday.