

Metro Morning Interview with David Branch – starts at 0:58

Metro Morning	David Branch is the President of the Canadian Hockey League. This is the umbrella organization that represents 3 junior hockey leagues in Canada. He's on the line with us now. David, good morning.
David Branch	Hi, good morning Matt, it's good to be with you.
Metro Morning	Good to have you with us. What was your reaction to this lawsuit?
David	Well, we just received it yesterday and you know, we're just going through a process now of reviewing it of course but you know, of course our position clearly is that our players are amateur student athletes and they receive incredible support through our teams in many different ways not only as a player but as a person and you're looking at our scholarship program which we suggest is the best in North America – a player receives a minimum of one year tuition and books for every year played. We had 594 players currently at Canadian universities on scholarship, we also have players attending trade schools and colleges that our scholarships can be used for.
Metro Morning	But that isn't what this is about. This is about players not being paid appropriately for the work that they are doing. The law suit suggests that these players are working 35, 40 up to 65 hours a week and being paid as little as \$50 a week. Is that accurate?
David	Matt I think that what I was trying to demonstrate and played out is that we made a decision some 10 years ago that we felt was a lot more important to support these young people to develop not only as players but people, instituting concussion management programs, drug education and anti-doping programs. We recently announced a mental health program through the Canadian Mental Health Association. All their expenses are paid for. They are in billet homes. All their education is paid for while playing in our leagues. All their equipment is provided for.
Metro Morning	But they are by contract made to work a certain number of hours. That is part of the contract and so let's get back to the question which is, is it accurate that they are being paid as little as \$50 a week for up to 40, 65 hours a week of work?
David	You know what – I would question the hours of work as positioned. Clearly that is not always the case, may not never be the case quite frankly. I've never done an analysis of that. I think it's important to note that when players sign their agreement they must also have their parents sign. 97% of our players have agents or family advisors and you know what Matt, there's other options; there's any number of leagues out there that players and families can choose from and it's for that reason that we chose to support and provide the

	best programs available to attract the best young players.
Metro Morning	Should junior ...
David	No one is being forced to play in our league.
Metro Morning	But if you play in the league you do have to sign the contract. Should junior hockey players be paid minimum wage?
David	We believe they are amateur student athletes and we think this is a very important point not only for us but all other amateur sports in this country.
Metro Morning	Should amateur students ...
David	For that reason we'll be vigorously certainly defending our position.
Metro Morning	Should ... I'll use your term amateur student athletes – should they be paid minimum wage?
David	Ah, I don't believe that minimum wage is a factor here. I believe when you look at all the other support mechanisms, considerations that they receive it's far and beyond what the average young person might receive who does not have the ability or the benefit or privilege of playing in our leagues or any other type of part time job while going to high school, college or university.
Metro Morning	The point that the lawyer made yesterday was that this is a league that makes a lot of money. It has significant revenues. These teams make a good deal of money through television contracts and that wealth needs to be shared. Does he have a point there?
David	We've certainly enjoyed success without question in terms of, you know, developing a strong corporate partnership for special events but there's - just using a special event like MasterCard Memorial Cup as an example, ah, you know, the Home Hardware Cup Prospects game, on and on and on. I think that what people, ah, and I think most people that know us understand is that we represent small markets in Canada across the country; we have 52 Canadian markets of which the vast majority – 80% or more – have 100,000 population or less. We have 15 franchises in communities of 50,000 or less so it's a struggle and we work together to support all our teams in order that we can keep everyone, all franchises, all our centres in the game.
Metro Morning	How much does the league make a year?
David	We don't make any money at the end of the year quite frankly.
Metro Morning	There are no profits at the end of this?

David	No that the profits ... any profits that we might recognize or realize are distributed back but you must understand that the cost of operation of the league office is funded by our teams for on-ice officials; we have a central scouting bureau, we have any number of programs in place to support our players so that all goes towards funding our league and the like.
Metro Morning	Last question ... just ... what is at stake here do you think, ahem, if this lawsuit moves forward? This is not the first time of course – Unifor was looking at representing these players I guess a couple of years ago. This is an issue that has been raised in the past. Just very briefly, what’s at stake here do you think?
David	Well I think one of the issues that is at stake is the very concept, structure and position of amateur sport in this country and it’s for that reason that we will vigorously defend our position that our players are amateur student athletes and that we are supporting our players to the best possible extent.
Metro Morning	I really appreciate you talking to us about this. As I say it just came in front of you yesterday and there’s probably a lot that you can’t say but thank you so much for coming on.
David	Thank you Matt.