

IN THE MATTER OF ADAM ROBERT JOHNSON (DECEASED)

**RESPONSE TO THE SENIOR CORONER'S REGULATION 28 REPORT OF 3
NOVEMBER 2023¹**

1. This Response is filed on behalf of the Elite Ice Hockey League (“EIHL”).
2. The Senior Coroner South Yorkshire (West) (“the Senior Coroner”) commenced an investigation into the death of Adam Robert Johnson on 1 November 2023.
3. On 3 November 2023 the Senior Coroner issued a Report to Prevent Future Deaths under Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013 and under paragraph 7, schedule 5 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.
4. The EIHL is a Properly Interested Person for the purposes of the investigation and inquest.
5. The EIHL is to respond to the Senior Coroner’s Regulation 28 report by 29 December 2023.
6. The EIHL is a commercial organisation which manages the highest level of professional ice hockey in the UK. There are presently 10 teams in the EIHL, including the Nottingham Panthers and the Sheffield Steelers.
7. The National Governing Body for the sport of ice hockey in the UK is Ice Hockey UK (“IHUK”). The International Ice Hockey Federation (“IIHF”) is the worldwide governing body.
8. Adam Robert Johnson was a professional ice hockey player. On 28 October 2023 he was playing for the Nottingham Panthers in a game against the Sheffield Steelers at the Utilita

¹ Served on the EIHL on 14 November 2023

Arena, Sheffield. During the game, Mr Johnson sustained an incised wound to the neck caused by impact with the skate of another player. He died as a result of his injuries.

9. The Senior Coroner identified a risk that future deaths will occur. The Matters of Concern are as follows:

“The International Ice Hockey Federation (“IIHF”) recommends that neck guards or protectors are worn, but there is no requirement for ice hockey players over the age of 18 to wear equipment designed to protect the neck.

“In due course the inquest will consider whether the use of a neck guard or protector could have prevented Mr Johnson’s death. At this stage in my investigation however, I am sufficiently concerned that deaths may occur in the future if neck guards or protectors are not worn”.

10. The IIHF Rulebook for 2023/24 says this:

“Rule 9.5 – Protective Equipment:

Equipment must conform to safety standards and be used only to protect Players, not to enhance or improve playing ability or to cause injury to an opponent.

All players are strongly recommended to wear equipment made of cut resistance material for their safety.

For all players in the senior competition category it is strongly recommended to wear a neck laceration protector in a proper way and that is not modified or damaged.

“Rule 9.12 – Neck Laceration Protector²

All players are recommended to properly wear a neck laceration protection. This protective device is recommended to cover as large of an area as possible on the player.

² Different, more prescriptive rules provide for U18s etc. For the purposes of this Response, only the rule for adult games is set out.

11. EIHL follows the IIHF Rulebook for the purposes of games played under its auspices.
12. Since the inquest was opened, matters have moved on. On 4 December 2023, the IIHF issued the following statement:

“The IIHF Council, on recommendation from its Medical Committee, has decided to mandate the use of a neck laceration protector, specifically designed for this purpose, at all levels of IIHF competitions. The neck laceration protectors are now mandatory for the senior categories in addition to the U20 and U18 categories, for which neck laceration protectors had already been enforced as per IIHF Official Rule Book.

“The exact date this mandate will go into effect for the senior categories will be determined by the supply situation. The IIHF remains in close contact with its suppliers to ensure they are able to respond to the current high demand.

“Until the rule officially goes into effect, the IIHF continues to strongly recommend that neck laceration protectors are worn by all players performing in an IIHF competition”.

https://www.iihf.com/en/news/56022/iihf_mandates_neck_laceration_protection_at_all_le

13. Following the IIHF statement, the EIHL issued the following:

“The Elite Ice Hockey League remains committed to player safety as our top priority, and we continue to work with players, officials, clubs, and relevant authorities to enhance this.”

“Since the tragic loss of Adam, we have continued to follow the International Ice Hockey Federation Council guidance and strongly recommended the use of neck laceration protectors. In light of the Federation’s decision to mandate the use of neck laceration

protectors for its competitions, the Elite Ice Hockey League will consider how best to implement this mandate and provide further updates to players, officials and Clubs as soon as possible and importantly when supply issues have been determined.”

14. It being noted that nearly all players in the EIHL have used neck protection since 28 October 2023, it has now been resolved as follows:
 - (i) The use of neckguards is to be mandated for all players in the EIHL from 1 January 2024 in training, pre-game and in game;
 - (ii) A temporary rule change has been put in place to sanction non-compliance pending the provision of the full rule change from the IIHF.

15. Accordingly:
 - (i) Action has been taken to protect the necks of ice hockey players in the EIHL;
 - (ii) The timetable for action is set out above.

16. The issue of whether the use of neck guards or protectors would have prevented Mr Johnson’s death will be the subject of evidence at the inquest.

Dated this 22nd day of December 2023

Served by Horwich Farrelly Solicitors