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Rob Hubbert's self-imposed break from "the long process of coaching" is officially over.

While the process of coaching may be long, Hubbert's break from it was not. The Review reported Thursday morning that Hubbert had decided Monday to leave the junior B Welland Junior Canadians, a job that had earned him the coach of the year title last season.

Thursday afternoon, the junior C Chippawa RiverHawks revealed that they had hired Hubbert and his hand-picked team of assistants to lead the team into this year's campaign.

"I can't wait to get going," said the newly appointed coach and general manager of the RiverHawks. "We want a fast-paced club.

"We will be a great hockey team, with no toleration (for things that impede that goal)."

In introducing Hubbert as the new coach and general manager at the Gale Centre, RiverHawks chief operating officer Mick Wolfe stressed that the team was rebuilding, but that results were expected to restore the team to the competitive force they have been in the recent past.

After a successful stint at the junior B level, Hubbert said that he didn't view taking the job with a junior C as a demotion.

"Not at all. The way I look at it, I'm still in junior hockey," he said. "The difference between the two levels is so small. The top players in junior C could be on a junior B team. There's overlap.

"Is this a demotion? No. This is an opportunity," he said. "I get to come to the rink with my friends, coach hockey and help players develop with a management team here that is committed and values the same thing."

Hubbert made reference during the press conference to his highly competitive nature.

"I don't like to lose, you need to know that about me right away," he said. "I don't lose well ... I'm not happy about losing. You can write this down, we will not finish last.

"When you're in last place, there is only one way to go and that's up. Straight up, and that's what we will be doing."

Hubbert and his new crew have their work cut out for them. The RiverHawks were last in the East Division of the Niagara and District Junior Hockey League last year with just nine wins and one overtime loss in 36 games, for 19 points and a win percentage of just .264.

But the head coach isn't coming in with rose-coloured glasses. He knows there's a lot of work ahead, and he knows just where he needs to begin.

"My philosophy to winning hockey games is the same as Mick's," said Hubbert. "You have to stay out of the penalty box. You can't be fighting, tripping, slashing all night long.

"Have you seen the size of the Gale Centre? You would need a team of 70 every night, because I play the whole bench.

"You can't win hockey games if you're in the penalty box all night. That's one of the things we'll change right away."

Hubbert has obviously done his homework. While the Hawks were last in points, they were first in penalty minutes with 1,330. When he arrived in Welland as coach, the Junior Canadians were the not-so-proud owners of the same dubious statistic. During his coach-of-the-year season, he turned that around and built a highly disciplined team.

Wolfe said that another goal that the team management and Hubbert have in common is the desire to see the club as a truly development program. To that end, the RiverHawks are hopeful for closer ties with the Niagara Falls junior B Canucks.

"I'll be honest, Terry Masterson and I have had our disagreements over the years," said Hubbert. "But I respect Terry so much. Two Sutherland Cups, all those titles ... and after (Welland lost to Port Colborne) being up 3-0, he was the only guy to call to say, 'There will be another day.'

"I respect coaches who take the time to talk to, and help out, other coaches. So, I'm hoping we can work together. I can use him as a resource and he can use.

"It's about developing the players to be the best they can be."

Hubbert and his team weren't the only happy Hawks at the announcement. With Hubbert assuming general manager duties, the former GM and long-serving Winston Auld was promoted to vice-president of hockey operations.

"I'll be doing a lot of the same things that I was doing before, but now I'll be funneling a lot of that information to Rob," he said. "I'm really looking forward to working with him."

In making the introduction of the new head coach, Wolfe also thanked former head and assistant coaches, Andrew Joyner and Jonathan Baglieri.

"We would like to thank Andrew and Jonathan for all of their work over the years," he said.

In a statement released June 13, former coach Andrew Joyner wrote: "In the last four years with my team around me, we've accomplished together in winning coach of the year twice, back-to-back years. It's been awhile since a coach has stayed more than one year with the club, the last one to do that was the great Al Boone. I want to thank the Chippawa Riverhawks and I wish them all the best and thank them for the memories."

Before the introduction of Hubbert, Wolfe also announced that Auld and Andre and Claude Cloutier had been recently honoured by the Ontario Hockey Association.

Auld will receive the prestigious OHA Crystal Puck award for his years of service to the club, while the Cloutiers will receive the OHA Board of Directors Citation.

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