

BRITISH COLUMBIA HOCKEY LEAGUE

JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH

LEAGUE GUIDE





The BCHL gets the most scholarships in Canadian Junior A hockey. If a player cracks a squad in this league, he stands a very good chance of playing NCAA. Info for this BCHL hockey guide comes from interviews with the commissioner and players. I also played for three teams in this league, one in each division and speak from experience.

HOW TO PLAY IN THE BCHL

The best way for your son to play in the BCHL is to get noticed by a team when he is 14 or 15. At these ages, he'll travel further in the province, so more BCHL teams will see him. If he plays BCMMHL hockey, he'll certainly get a look from teams and will travel the province more. If your son is good enough to play in that league, he likely will have invites coming in already.

Additionally, B.C. Junior B is respectable hockey—some of the best Junior B in Canada—that gets players noticed. If your son is young (15 or 16) and can keep up in these leagues (VIJHL, PJHL, KIJHL), not only will he turn scouts' heads, but also he will likely be ready for Junior A hockey. BCHL clubs keep affiliations with Junior B clubs and will sometimes send their committed prospects to them.

Most players get an "in" with a BCHL team by going to spring and fall camps—usually invite-only—when they are in bantam or midget. (Listen to the commissioner interview with John Grisdale for more info.) This is where a team will really size up their future talent. Local players can almost always get an invite to these (spring) camps by default to fill out the camp roster.

As a player gets older (16 or 17) and he has aligned with a particular team, he should be getting called up as an affiliate. If they are at that point, they will likely know where they stand with the organization, i.e. a clear-cut opportunity to make the team the next season. Often these call-ups happen late in the season or in playoffs. Affiliates can play a maximum of 10 games until their regular club is finished for the year.

Junior A teams like to have a couple of local players on their roster. Therefore, being local never hurts, but being local and talented is even better.

AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE BCHL

The best young talent break into the BCHL at 16 and will even get NCAA offers by the end of that season. However, it is just as common for players to start playing at 18 given that this league takes more out-of-province players than most. Good B.C.-born players routinely crack squads at 17 and 18.



OUT-OF-PROVINCE-PLAYERS

Out-of-province players can only start playing in the BCHL at 18.

As with any league, the best way to get noticed as an out-of-province player is to compete hard and put up points in tournaments. This is where scouts gather. Beyond that, having solid stats in midget is key. It's hard to refute a player's ability to put up points when he's doing it on paper each game. Teams also look to stats sheets when wondering who to keep their eye on first at tournaments.

By the Christmas break of your son's 17 year-old year, he should start getting some calls from teams interested in his talent. With only a certain number of cards for the upcoming season, BCHL clubs like to get a gauge for a player's willingness to move out of province early. The BCHL scouts more aggressively than most Junior A leagues and will transverse the Prairies, Eastern Canada and even the United States to find talent.

AMERICANS PLAYING IN THE BCHL

The BCHL attracts a significant amount of Americans compared to other Junior A leagues in Canada. The level of play rivals that of the USHL and the amount of scholarships makes it a quality option for Americans. In fact, the best teams actively recruit these players from all over America since there is no territorial restrictions on recruiting like in the WHL.

It is not uncommon for American players who hail from locations outside the USHL's reach to try B.C. instead. A solid American player in the BCHL stands a good chance of getting a scholarship based on his nationality. It just seems to go that way. (Colleges will sometimes urge a recruit to play for a BCHL club if there isn't quality junior hockey in their state.)

Getting noticed by a BCHL teams is a matter of doing well at tournaments (and maybe having somebody put in a good word for your son). These tournaments include showcase tournaments. Doing well at these tournaments could get a player an invited to a spring or fall camp and that is the time to make an impression or even to sign a card. Players can also contact teams using Junior Hockey Truth's *Training Camp Invite Formula*.

American players must be 18 to play in the BCHL. There is a maximum of seven American-born players allowed on an active roster at one time.

NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

The BCHL commonly has a player picked in the first or second round of the NHL draft each year. This happens because these top players make the choice to forego the WHL route in lieu of a scholarship even though they have the talent. The NHL knows this and has even picked players as high as third overall (Kyle Turris in 2007).



Commonly, a handful or two of players get taken in the NHL draft. If a player secures an NCAA scholarship and plays well in this league he'll get a look from NHL teams. The difference maker in getting drafted will be his development potential. If an NHL believes he's still holds major upside, he'll stand a much better chance at being taken. If he's more-to-less fully developed, they may pass on him to see how he does in the NCAA first. That's why the top scorers aren't always the ones who get drafted.

As an insider note, many teams in this league are located near airports in temperate (Canadian) climates. There are also plenty of WHL teams nearby. For these reasons, scouting the BCHL becomes more convenient and accessible for NHL scouts. There are many scouts living in the province.

TRAVEL: 2.5/5

Comparing travel in the BCHL is tricky. The best locations—Greater Vancouver and Okanagan regions—will have up to a handful of teams located within an hour's drive. However, these same locations will still have to make a couple of week-long road swings through the province to play more remote teams—Prince George, Trail, Powell River.

Overall, the travel is the toughest of any Junior A league in Western Canada, and it is definitely involves longer trips than a Junior A league in Ontario. This travel becomes especially grueling in the playoffs when teams will eventually cross the whole province on an off-day, play their game, then travel back only to sleep at home and play again the next night.

As a silver lining, the weather will be the best in Canada though with most teams being in milder locations or cities where it doesn't even snow at all.

BCHL SCHOLARSHIP POTENTIAL: 5/5

You will not find a league in Canada that gets more NCAA scholarships than the BCHL. Furthermore, those are true NCAA scholarship to top Division I schools, not just Division III schools. Some teams in this league will send off 95%+ of their players on a scholarship by the time they are through their junior careers. Even then, good players on poor teams still get recruited consistently. The league has gained a positive reputation for this reason.

ENTRY DRAFT: NO

There is no draft or limitations in signing homegrown players in B.C. Any B.C.-born player can be signed to play at any age by any team. Out-of-province and out-of-country players can sign with any team at 18. Players sent down from the WHL can also sign with any team. Teams in this league recruit competitively and will send scouts all over North America to find talent. This doesn't happen in many other Junior A leagues in Canada.

PROTECTED LIST

Each team has 22 cards to sign players on for their active roster, but there is no protected list for prospects like in other leagues.

There is also an affiliate list with 17 skaters and two goalies “at large” that teams can call up during the season. Some teams also keep an official or unofficial affiliation with a nearby Junior B club.

With no protected list, BCHL organizations seek verbal commitments from prospects they see as future players.

PAY TO PLAY: NO

The idea of pay to play not part of the conversation in B.C. The top teams are privately owned and funded to compete with the WHL for recruiting. Players get provided equipment, sticks and top-notch dressing rooms on these squads. In fact, NHL teams have even had training camps in BCHL rinks.

BCHL DETAILS

Nicknames you’ll hear: “B.C. J”

Provinces covered: British Columbia

Established: 1961

Teams: 16

Games Played: 58

Trophy Name: Fred Page Cup

Reigning League Champion: Surrey Eagles, 2013

Royal Bank Cup National Region: West

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

According to the BCHL website, there were 152 players with college commitments during the 2012-13 season. Of these scholarships, 124 were to division I schools, 17 were to division III schools, 4 were to CIS school and 7 to Canadian Senior Colleges (such as the BCIHL and ACAC).

NOTABLE ALUMNI:

Glenn Anderson, Jamie Benn, Tyler Bozak, Ray Ferraro, Paul Kariya, Duncan Keith, Scott Gomez, Brett Hull, Brendan Morrison, Mark Recchi, Cliff Ronning, Kyle Turris

RADIO/TV COVERAGE

BCHL games are streamed live on the league’s FASTHockey portal. Many games have audio commentary (local radio) to go along with the on-ice action.



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