

SASKATCHEWAN JUNIOR HOCKEY LEAGUE

JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH

LEAGUE GUIDE



This is a guide to the SJHL, also known as the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. I grew up in Saskatchewan, played my bantam and midget there, and I was protected by an SJHL team. Combined with interviews with the league president, this is a comprehensive look at how to play in this league.

HOW TO PLAY IN THE SJHL

Saskatchewan's development system is tightly integrated. Homegrown SJHL players typically rise through the bantam AA leagues (same as AAA in other provinces) into Midget AAA. Having only one AAA league in the province, Saskatchewan players who can make a AAA team stand a solid shot of moving up to the SJ.

SJHL teams typically have spring camps to identify their best prospects. Players who excel at these camps earn an invite back in the fall. (These fall camps are typically held a week before WHL camps.) Fall camps are smaller, and the best players go from fall camp to the league-wide showcase tournament to start the season. Final cuts are then made.

Interestingly, a couple of players from AA Midget, the second tier of midget in Saskatchewan, end up on SJHL each year. Teams like Weyburn and Estevan have AA teams playing right under their gaze, so scouting players who've played locally for a couple of years gives them a certain look where AAA teams may have misjudged.

Saskatchewan also has a single Junior B league. Some SJ teams use Junior B clubs as defacto affiliates, and with the ability to watch them closely, the odd prospect who isn't in AAA does get picked up or scraps his way onto a team.

AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE SJHL

The short answer is that most SJHL players' are 18 when they start playing.

For the longest time, the SJ had a reputation as an older players league. The league has now taken steps to debunk this reputation by lowering its number of 20 year-olds. With this change, more young players should enter the league. However, it still wouldn't be surprising if 17 year-old players stayed with their AAA clubs until they were 18.

That being said, players do make the SJHL at 17. If they can compete at this age they will have an advantage in getting a scholarship. More scouts will see them earlier and they'll be more mature by the end of their junior career.

OUT-OF-PROVINCE PLAYERS

Plenty of out-of-province players come to Saskatchewan. The top spot for OPPs is Manitoba, but players do come from almost every province and some northern territories in Canada. This more universal spread isn't as common in other leagues.





Naturally, teams on the west end of Saskatchewan tend to have more Alberta players, teams on the east have more Manitoba players. B.C.'s abundance of Junior B players also leads some SJHL teams to look west. SJHL teams to look west. Players looking for a tryout should refer to the Junior Hockey Truth Training Camp Invite Formula for the correct way to obtain one.

AMERICANS IN THE SJHL

The states with the most Americans in the SJHL: Illinois and Minnesota. There are also multiple players from California and Michigan. It also can't be understated that there are Americans in this league from over a handful of other states.

Notre Dame, a prep school, carries a roster predominantly made from Saskatchewan-born players who are 18 to 20. There is an American influence on it too though.

As per national regulations, each team is allowed a maximum of seven American-born players on their lineup at any time. The SJHL doesn't scout America heavily, so a proactive player will want to call up teams and market themselves.

NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

The SJHL does produce NHL draft picks, usually one every couple of seasons. While these picks usually aren't too high, it's often tough for an NHL team to take a Junior A player in the initial rounds of the draft anyway. It should be noted that multiple players have received NHL tryouts and even contracts from this league.

Interestingly, the SJHL has a proven record of sending more players to legitimate minor pro leagues than most other Junior A leagues. Players regularly jump to the Central League after their 20 year-old year. Some also choose to play in the semi-pro in leagues like the SPHL.

TRAVEL: 2.5/5

Given how centres in the province are spread out, the typical SJHL road trip is usually three hours long. Additionally, teams have to shoot up to remote communities of La Ronge and Flin Flon. The longest of these trips can be over 8 hours, but most are shorter. There are no real swings in this league, just short road trips of two or three games. Some teams also have just an hour's drive to nearby rivals.

Most SJHL towns are just that—towns. The typical SJHL centre has around 5000 people with some having less and some having more. To put it in perspective, Yorkton is the biggest city in the league at 20,000 people. Saskatchewan has some brutal winters, hitting -40 C/F at least once per winter. All this being said, fan support within these communities is second-to-none, and their rinks can be a Saturday night's church.

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SCHOLARSHIP POTENTIAL: 2.5/5

Typically, the SJHL gets less than one NCAA scholarship per team. These range from poor schools to great schools. If a player is good enough for a good scholarship, he can get it with some work.

The majority of the league's American scholarships are to div III and other American colleges. It does, however, send more players to the CIS and Canadian colleges than most Junior A leagues west of Ontario.

ENTRY DRAFT: NO

The SJHL does not have a draft.

The league does have a mandate around local players. Any player who lives within the municipal boundaries of a team's city automatically becomes property of that team and does not count against that club's protected list. This system ensures that local talent stays local.

PROTECTED LIST: YES

The SJHL keeps a 50-player protected list. This list includes players on the active roster and prospects.

Local players are property of an SJHL team until their 18 year-old year. They cannot leave for another SJ team until they are released. At the same time, these players are free to go to another Junior A league after midget.

PAY TO PLAY: NO

Traditionally, SJHL teams treat their players quite well within their means and this means no fees. Over the past decade, many SJHL rinks have also been renovated or new ones have been built. (Some are featured in my blog posts and videos.) The league always has strong sponsorship deals as well.



(One of the nicest dressing rooms in the SJHL, the Melville Millionaires.)

As part of the SJHL model, all teams are community owned and have adequate budgets for the Junior A level.



SJHL DETAILS

Nicknames you'll hear: "The S.J."

Provinces covered: Saskatchewan, Manitoba

Established: 1968

Teams: 12

Games Played: 58

Trophy Name: CANALTA Cup

Reigning League Champion: Yorkton Terriers

Royal Bank Cup National Region: West

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

According to the SJHL website, there were 36 players with college commitments during the 2012-13 season. Of these scholarships, 5 were to division I schools, 8 were to division III schools and other American tier III colleges, 8 were to CIS school and 15 to Canadian Senior Colleges (such as the ACAC and BCIHL).

NOTABLE ALUMNI

Rod Brind' Amour, Chris Chelios, Ruslan Fedetenko, Jordan Hendry, Chris Kunitz, Brad Richards, Ted Purcell, Willie Mitchell, Derek Dorsett, Jaden Schwarz

(Many notable alumni have played for the Notre Dame Hounds, a private school just outside of Regina that has been around longer than the league.)

RADIO/TV COVERAGE

It's pretty much standard that each team's local radio covers the team. These stations stream online. Additionally, certain games are broadcast on local and provincial cable networks.

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