

NORTH AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE

JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH

LEAGUE GUIDE





ABOUT THE NAHL

The NAHL, or North American Hockey League, is the premiere Tier II, Junior A league in America. Players in this league regularly receive division I and division III scholarships or move up to the USHL.

The “NA” is the equivalent tier to that of Canadian Junior A. It comes in beneath the top-tiered USHL and above the various tier III leagues littered throughout America.

HOW TO PLAY IN THE NAHL

Given that the NAHL spans such a wide territory, players from different parts of the country will take different routes.

Most players entering the league will come from Midget AAA hockey. They will be seen during regular league play or get scouted during tournaments and showcases.

Outside of the AAA systems, players from Minnesota (and Michigan) will jump to the league after playing high school hockey. Playing at that level is simply the standard way while a player is of school age in Minnesota and other states.

Players can also come up through tier III junior after gaining some experience.

Many future players also get noticed at the league’s annual February Future Prospects Tournament. Players aged 14 to 16 register for the tournament through the league website. They then play in front of team scouts at the tournament, and also receive educational talks and information while there.

Once a player is on a team’s radar, he can become their property a couple of different ways.

Sought-after players become property (“get ‘tendered’”) by signing tenders, which are like letters of intent. (See ‘Protected List’ section.) Once he signs a tender, the player cannot play for any other team. He will attend his team’s camp the next fall (or jump up immediately).

The other common route is the NAHL draft. Any untendered player can be drafted, and from there they will attend their team’s training camp in the fall.

Players can also contact teams for tryouts. Every year, tendered and untendered players unexpectedly jump up to the USHL or Canadian leagues and this leaves spots open for walk-on players. Walk-ons are not unheard of in this league. Players who show up to camp and show they can play will get a shot.

(For info on how to contact teams, use the Junior Hockey Truth’s Training Camp Invite Formula.)



AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE LEAGUE

Like most Junior A leagues, the typical player begins at or by age 18. However, players do begin playing in this league at 16 and 17.

More important than the player's age is their development and readiness to play in the league. If a young player is prepared to play in the league, a team may give him a shot in hopes that he grows into his role. The league is slowly morphing into a feeder league for the USHL, which is making its average age grow younger.

On the flip side, the vast travel in this league can make keeping up with high school difficult, so a mature 16 or 17 year-old must really be ready to play.

CANADIANS IN THIS LEAGUE

While there are Canadian players who have played in this league, it is still not common.

Each NAHL team is allowed four import players. These can be Canadians or Europeans, i.e. non-Americans. More Canadian players are being drafted each year.

NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

The NAHL usually will create a draft pick or two straight from within itself each year. However, the typical draft pick with NAHL ties will move up to the USHL or the NCAA and get drafted from there.

Interestingly, goalies seem to be the most highly sought after in this league.

TRAVEL

There is no junior league in North America with travel quite like the NA. Players don't just bus to games; they fly too. With franchises spanning from Alaska to Texas to Pennsylvania, there is no shortage of time on the road.

Players must be mentally and physically prepared for the time away over their 60-game schedule.

SCHOLARSHIP POTENTIAL

Top NAHL players will receive scholarships and will go to division I schools. Some of these schools are top NCAA programs, but most are to average programs. This is still better than most North American Junior A leagues. There are also a solid amount of division III scholarships.

Young players in this league value the opportunity to move up to the USHL as much as they do playing under NCAA scouts' eyes on a nightly basis. Either through the NAHL or moving up to another level, this league provides opportunities to get a scholarship.



ENTRY DRAFT

The NAHL holds a draft every June, after the USHL draft. Any player under the age of 21, i.e. still eligible to play junior, can be drafted. Players who sign tenders (see 'protected list') are no longer eligible for the draft.

The number of rounds in the draft is not set in stone. Each team will continue to pick until their protected list is filled. Some teams will pick more than others. In 2013, all teams picked in the first five rounds, 12 teams picked players in the first nine rounds, and only a few picked after that in subsequent rounds.

Players do not have to register for the draft. If a player wants to be drafted he must catch a team's attention with his play; he will be scouted beforehand.

PROTECTED LIST

The NAHL maintains a 30-player protected list. This list includes active players, draft picks and tenders.

A tender is similar to the NCAA's letters of intent. Players who sign tenders are indicating their intention to play for the offering NAHL team. When the tender is signed, the player is placed on that team's protected list. He cannot play for any other NAHL team.

Of course, a limited number of tenders can be offered as the team's list fills up. (Each team has a maximum of 10 tenders to offer. Tenders can be traded.) Leftover spaces on the list are filled each year with draft picks.

Boiling it down, a good player will know whose list he will end up on through the tender system. Players drafted, while getting on a list, won't be able to choose which team owns their rights within the NA.

Getting put on a list is a good thing. It means a team wants a player and projects that he could fit into their lineup in the future.

PAY TO PLAY

Technically, the NAHL is not a pay-to-play league in the traditional American sense. There are no team or ice fees, and teams provide equipment and coaches.

However, players do have to pay for their own billets, which is around \$300 per month.

NAHL DETAILS

Nicknames you'll hear: "The N.A."

States covered: Alaska, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Washington, Wisconsin

Established: 1975

Teams: 24

Games Played: 60

Trophy Name: Robertson Cup

Reigning League Champion: Amarillo Bulls

SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

According to numbers NAHL website, by the end of the 2012-13 season, there were 176 NAHL players who received college commitments while playing in the NAHL (plus other who had as alumni). Of these scholarships, 91 were to division I schools, 84 were to division III schools and other American tier III colleges, and one was to Canadian University Hockey (CIS).

NOTABLE ALUMNI

There is a rich history of NHL players who have made a stop in this league since it used to play host to the U.S. National Team Development Program. (The USNTDP is a USA Hockey all-star team composed of the best U18 players nation-wide.)

Some current NHL players who've played in the NAHL as non-USNTDP players are: Craig Anderson, Ben Bishop, David Booth, Drew Miller, Ryan Miller, George Parros, Brandon Saad, Tomas Vanek, James Wisniewski.

LEAGUE CONTACT INFO

Commissioner: Mark Frankenfeld

2601 Avenue of the Stars
Frisco, TX
75034

Phone: (469) 252-3800

E-mail: <http://www.nahl.com/the-nahl/contact/contactform.cfm>

www.nahl.com

