

ONTARIO HOCKEY LEAGUE

JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH

LEAGUE GUIDE



HOW TO PLAY IN THE OHL

The standard route to play in the OHL is to go through the OHL Draft. Players picked in this draft enter the pipeline to making an OHL club. They will also have a step up on other players their age. Alternatively, undrafted players who become free agents can step into a training camp and crack a squad.

Nearly all players who make the OHL have played AAA hockey of some sort in midget. If they don't jump up from Midget AAA—minor (15) or major (16, 17)—they also have the option of playing at lower tiers of junior beforehand. It is not uncommon for players to play in one of Ontario's four Junior A leagues, which include: CCHL, NOJHL, OJHL, SIJHL.

Other pre-OHL junior options are the various Junior B leagues in Ontario, some which are quite skilled compared to the typical third tier of junior hockey in Canada. While AAA is standard, players have made it this way before too.

Once a player is drafted, he'll either make his club as a top pick or get sent down for more seasoning.

OHL DRAFT

The OHL Draft, aka the Ontario Hockey League Priority Selection, is a Minor Midget draft held the last weekend of April every spring. This is the first day that 15 year-olds can become property of an OHL team. Lasting 15 rounds, teams select in reverse order of how they finished in the standings.

If a player is not selected as a 15 year-old, he cannot attend an OHL camp that fall. He must wait another season, his 16 year-old year, and he will re-enter the draft. If he is not taken the second time around, he becomes a free agent and can go to the camp of any OHL team who invites him.

All players in the Ontario Hockey Federation are eligible for the draft. They do not need to do anything to enter. Likewise, all American players in the OHL American territory can be chosen as well. No extra requirements are necessary to be picked.

Being picked in the draft does nothing to affect a player's NCAA eligibility. You're merely property of that team and cannot play for any other OHL team until you're released or your rights are traded.



Here is a breakdown of where the 302 OHL draft picks came from in 2012:

REGION	# OF PICKS	% OF PICKS
GTHL	70	23%
USA	49	16%
ALLIANCE	46	15%
ODMHA	23	8%
NOHA	11	4%
NW ONTARIO	6	2%
OTHER	4	1%

In total, 147 players (49%) who were drafted played in the OHL Cup, a major, invite-only scouting event put on by the league. Here's how it works: the top ranked teams within the different regions of the OHL and Michigan play each other in a round robin format in the spring. This allows the best teams (and thus best players) from around the territory to gather in one spot in front of OHL scouts.

AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE OHL

Typically, most players start in the 'O' at 17 years old. With a limit on the number of 16 year-olds that can play each year, few make it this early. On top of this limit, most players won't be mature enough physically (and/or mentally) to handle the bigger man's game just yet.

The small amount of 16 year-olds who do make the league will usually have an education contract locked up before camp and come to town early to settle in with the team. This isn't guaranteed but it is accounted for often so as not to disrupt the player's school.

Conversely, players do step in as 18 year-olds when they have a good camp and have shown they can offer a club something unique.

AMERICANS PLAYING IN THE OHL

More Americans play in this league than in the WHL or QMJHL. With teams based in Michigan and Pennsylvania, and its proximity to many hockey rich states, Ontario has an easier time drawing players in than other Major Junior leagues.

Some American players go through the OHL draft and choose to play in this league long before they are of age. However, it's not uncommon for a player to come from the USHL or NAHL and cross the border.

Sometimes players who have commitments to schools get drafted by NHL teams and give them up to play in the 'O'. These players (or their agents or NHL clubs) often feel they have a better chance to develop in a league that is more geared to pro hockey.





In the 2013 OHL draft there were 59 Americans selected (out of 300). The majority came from Michigan and New York, followed by New Jersey and Missouri. However, other players were selected from the Great Lakes region and states further south.

There is no special way for an American to enter the league other than to be drafted or protected as any Canadian player would.

The American states whose player are eligible to play in the 'O' are east of the Mississippi and west of New England going south all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.

American players must be added to the draft by Central Scouting. Central Scouting does this on their own, and if a team wants a player he will surely be added. American players do not have to go out of their way to enter the draft.

OHL CENTRAL SCOUTING

Like the NHL, the OHL has a central scouting service. The Service's role is to identify players who could play in the league, highlight their strengths and weakness and provide reports for member clubs. It acts as a second opinion and additional resource to the scouting staffs of each team.

Any lists or information gathered by the service is not publicized. Any outside scouting services or lists are private business and have no bearing on how an OHL team makes its selections. They're fanfare.

NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

It goes without saying that any player in this league will be seen by NHL scouts on a nightly basis. If he performs, he'll have a shot at the Show.

Players who get taken in the NHL draft will do so at the end of their 17 year-old year. After that, most players won't get any official attention until their 20 year-old season, the first year they can sign as free agents.

Many OHL players go on to careers in other pro leagues, usually starting in the ECHL if they are not under an NHL contract.

TRAVEL

Compared to the other Major Junior leagues in Canada, the 'O' has the best travel. The league plays an unbalanced schedule, meaning teams within close proximity of each other, i.e. in their conference, play each other more than those that are far away. This reduces travel. A team will play another outside of its conference twice in a season, and the remainder of its games will be in-conference. This creates a couple of road swings each season with most games being closer to home.

Most road trips are ones where teams return home the same night or weekend, but some stretch much longer where buses drive hours in the double-digits.

OHL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The OHL scholarship program is pretty straightforward—play a year, get a year. If a player makes a squad after training camp, he'll get half a year covered. If he plays after the trade deadline, he'll get the second half of the year covered.

"Covered" means books and tuition once the player is in a post-secondary institution and can include university, college, technical school or professional program. Tuition is paid directly to the school from the league office.

A Canadian player can use his schooling at any approved—basically all—Canadian institutions. An American player can go to a Canadian school (where the advantage is that he can play collegiate hockey), or go to a school in his home state. In either case, tuition will be covered on the basis that the cost is the equivalent of the provincial/state university within that player's home jurisdiction. In simpler terms, if you go to school in Canada, you're covered. If you go to school in your home state, you'll get the equivalent tuition of your state school.

Players do not have to play hockey to use their scholarship money. Once it's in your pocket, it's guaranteed. Use it how you like within the criteria. The caveat is that players have 18 months after the end of their 20 year-old year to use the money or it evaporates. This is a generous extension put into play in February 2014, compared to the previous term of six months. Players do lose rights to their scholarship if they sign an NHL contract (but not an AHL contract).

It should also be noted that OHL teams will cover their players' costs while the player plays within the OHL. This is a good way to get some extra university. Players can negotiate additional terms into their education contract including room and board and no-trade clauses. How much you get depends on how bad the team wants you. It's not the standard but it exists.

PROTECTED LIST

Each OHL team is allotted a 50-player protected list. This list is comprised of the team's active roster and prospects, including recent draft picks. The team may not exceed this number of protected players but can carry less than 50. Only players who are protected can play games as an affiliate.

To be placed on a team's protected list, players must simply play well enough to get noticed and be a free agent. (If they are still eligible for the draft, they can only be protected by being drafted.) The team will contact the player to notify him that he has been protected. From there, the player usually continues play just as before and will head to camp that fall unless the team indicates otherwise.





OHL DETAILS

Nicknames you'll hear: The "O"

Provinces/States covered: Ontario, Michigan, Pennsylvania

Established: 1974

Teams: 20

Games Played: 68

Trophy Name: J. Ross Robertson Cup

Reigning League Champion: London Knights, 2013

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