

WESTERN HOCKEY LEAGUE

JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH

LEAGUE GUIDE



HOW TO PLAY IN THE WHL

The majority of WHL players will come into the league through its annual bantam draft. If a player is picked, he on the right trajectory to make a WHL team. After a season of midget, drafted players become eligible to play in the league at 16.

Players not chosen in the draft automatically become free agents when the draft ends. They can be protected by a WHL team and attend camps as 15 and 16 year olds.

Typical, if not nearly all, WHL players play Midget AAA hockey before jumping up to the big league. A small amount of players may play Junior A beforehand in lieu of AAA, especially at age 17. It is also common for players in British Columbia to play in one of the three Junior B leagues in the province.

WHL DRAFT

The WHL Draft, aka the WHL Bantam Draft, is held every spring at the beginning of May through the league's head office in Calgary. Players chosen in the draft must be finished their second year of bantam. This is their 14 year-old season, their last of bantam. Prospects selected in this draft attend WHL training camp that fall.

For players not chosen, they can still attend camps and get placed on a protected list at any point. They do not re-enter the draft—there is no point. They would just get listed.

All players in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba are eligible. There are also a handful of players from the Yukon, Northwest Territories (and Nunavut) each season.

Americans west of the Mississippi (including Alaskans) are eligible to be drafted.

Here is a breakdown of where the 2011 WHL Bantam Draft picks:

REGION	# OF PICKS	% OF PICKS
ALBERTA	83	36%
B.C.	52	22%
MANITOBA	42	18%
SASKATCHEWAN	46	20%
USA	22	9%

Unlike Ontario and Quebec, the Western League does not have a central scouting service.

Players will put themselves in front on many WHL scouts before the draft though by playing in their province's respective elite Bantam showcase, including:

- British Columbia—BC Cup
- Alberta—Alberta Cup
- Saskatchewan—Sask First
- Manitoba—Program of Excellence



These are tournaments where teams are divided up by geography and only the players in each region are selected. Ultimately, each province selects an elite provincial team from those attending a tournament. These teams funnel into the Western Canada U16 Challenge Cup, an event sponsored by the WHL.

AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE WHL

Most WHL players will break into the league at 17 years old. This is their NHL draft year. The top 16 year olds in Western Canada will also play in the league, usually two per team.

A good 16 year-old will play nearly all games on the schedule. An average 16 year-old will play around 40 of the 72 games on the schedule.

Most players who do make a WHL team start out as a affiliated player. Top 16 year-olds can AP five games at 15. Players of junior age will likely stick with the team if they are playing more than a handful of games anyway.

AMERICANS PLAYING IN THE WHL

With five teams situated in Washington and Oregon, the WHL is no stranger to America. There were 40 Americans playing in the Dub last season.

During the 2013-14 season, American states with four or more players in the league were: Colorado (9), Minnesota (9), California (7). There were also players from Arizona, Alaska, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Texas and Washington.

American players are spread throughout all teams in the league, but the historic trend leads to them playing for the American franchises (Everett, Portland, Seattle, Spokane, Tri-City). On the flip side, over a handful of WHL teams carried no Americans in 2013-14, including a couple American franchises.

Every spring the league holds an invite-only prospects camp in Southern California with the express purpose of scouting American players. (April 12 – 14, 2014.) The camp is run by the league, features head coaches from within the league, and also has WHL players appearing behind the scenes.

As a note, American players can glitch the system as 16 year-olds. If they have no place to play in the States (and if they can't be convinced to play Junior B in Canada), they may find a place on the roster where a Canadian kid wouldn't. This has been known happen; it's not a rule or guarantee.



NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

Players in the WHL are constantly in front of NHL eyes.

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 WHL players go on to careers in other pro leagues, usually starting in the ECHL if they are not under an NHL contract. Some do, however, make the jump to the AHL or explore low-level pro options in Europe.

TRAVEL

The Dub has some of the harshest travel in junior hockey. While the typical road trip will be less than four hours, swings can be further.

Every year, teams go on a two-week road swing through their opposite conference. The division they visit within that conference alternates each year. In simpler terms, an example would be Portland visiting Brandon one season, and Brandon visiting Portland the next. In the end, teams play each other once per year. However, most games are divisional, where teams within a couple hours of each other play many times per year. This creates some great rivalries.

WHL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Like the other Major Junior leagues, the WHL scholarship program is play a year, get a year. This means for every season a player plays in the league, he gets a year of his post-secondary education paid for—books and tuition, not living.

American players can use their money back when they are finished playing. The tuition granted is that equivalent to the cost at their state school. For example, an Arizona-born player can go to Arizona State University fully covered (for each year he played in the WHL). He can also go to a non-state school. However, if the tuition at that non-state school exceeds that of Arizona State, the league would only cover the amount equivalent to that of ASU. This same rule exists for Canadian players and their home provincial universities. (Our tuition is pretty much on par everywhere though, so it's not a big deal or difference.)

The scholarship program is now run through the league's head office. Players submit their receipts for book and get a reimbursement. Tuition is paid straight to the school from the league.

Speaking from personal experience, the WHL was flawless in their coverage and promise. I got every penny they said they'd pay. Likewise, I was a player who played university hockey for a season and decided to pack it in and transfer schools. Under WHL rules, this means the player's education is still covered. You don't have to be playing to use the school money.



It is also worth noting that players can use the money toward any approved program. This could be university, college, or even the RCMP or culinary schools.

Currently, there are over 325 former-WHL players using their scholarship money toward university and professional programs. Additionally, many players go to university while still playing in the league, or they go to school through correspondence at Athabasca University. This is covered by teams and does not count toward a player's earned scholarship.

PROTECTED LIST

Each WHL team maintains a 50-player protected list, also known as the 50 PPL. 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.

In order to get placed on a protected list, a prospect must perform well enough in AAA or lower levels of junior to catch a team's attention. If they want him, he is added to the team's stable through the league office. The team does all the work and notifies the player.

WHL DETAILS

Nicknames you'll hear: The "Dub"

Provinces/States covered: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Washington, Oregon

Established: 1968

Teams: 22

Games Played: 72

Trophy Name: Ed Chynoweth Cup

Reigning League Champion: Portland Winterhawks, 2013

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