

# **UNITED STATES HOCKEY LEAGUE**

## **JUNIOR HOCKEY TRUTH**

**LEAGUE GUIDE**



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## HOW TO PLAY IN THIS LEAGUE

The USHL is one of the best junior leagues in the world and the best Junior A league in the world. It is an indiscriminant recruiter and will collect upcoming players from all corners of America, parts of Canada and even Europe.

The best shot players have at get recruited by the USHL comes through America's top Midget AAA leagues. These include the Tier I Elite League and the High Performance Hockey League. These two midget leagues are simply scouted the most, have the best players at the midget age level (U-18), and some players even have scholarships locked up prior to junior.

However, players do come from outside of AAA. The USHL will pull in high school players who have either completed or are entering their senior year. Players also come up from various tier III Junior A programs. These tier III alumni are often 16 or 17 years old and have used tier III as a stepping stone. No compensation/trade is necessary to move up from tier III.

Players also move up from the NAHL (tier II Junior A), and they occasionally cross the border from Canada too, either after midget or a season of Junior A. Interestingly, players can also be traded up from the NAHL.

Any player who wants to enter this league should make it a priority to attend one of the various showcases ("Prospects Combine") it holds throughout the year. Each of the three showcases held covers a different age group. Every team in the league will be in attendance. Players should register early on the USHL site.

To find out if players from your state are scouted by the USHL and which junior leagues near your son are most popular, check out the "Play USA Junior Hockey" Video Series.

## USHL DRAFT

The USHL Draft is a two day event held annually in the first week of May. Each day plays host to a different "phase" of the draft.

Phase I is called the "futures" draft. Any player who finished a U-17 season can be chosen in this draft. For 2015, most of the players selected will be 1999 birth years. The majority of players chosen in this draft will not jump into the league the next season. It is a system of allotting future prospects to teams. Those who are chosen are usually playing AAA or elite high school or prep school hockey. These are a mix of minor and major midget players. Phase I is always eight rounds.



Phase II of the draft is for older players. Any player who is of age to play junior hockey can be chosen. This means that if a player is drafted they will have a legitimate shot at stepping into a USHL lineup the next season. The players chosen in this phase really do come from all corners of the continent, and it would not be uncommon for them to be contacted before the draft. Phase II concludes when teams stop selecting players, i.e. when their protected lists are filled to capacity.

Of course, if a player has been protected or tendered by a USHL club they cannot be drafted. Any player can be drafted—your son does not need to do anything special to enter the draft.

## **PROTECTED LIST & TENDERS**

Protected lists and tenders tie-in to the USHL draft process more than in other leagues. The size of the protected list changes depending on the time of year.

Each spring at the draft, protected lists open up to allow each team 45 players. Teams will go through the USHL draft and continue drafting in phase II until their list is maxed out.

Teams will begin sorting through their picks and rosters, splitting their list into a 30 player protected list and 18 player affiliate list by July 10. The majority of roster spots for the next season will be guaranteed by the team at this point during June camps.

By the start of the season, USHL teams will have trimmed down their active roster to the standard 23-man size, all while maintaining their 18 player affiliate list. They will maintain the list at this size until the next USHL draft.

Included on the affiliate list will be the two tenders each USHL team receives. Like a letter of intent, a tender is an agreement that a future player will play for his chosen USHL team, and the chosen USHL team will effectively promise the player a spot. The benefit of signing a tender is that the player knows which team he will play with instead of rolling the dice in the draft. Conversely, the USHL team is insured they get the player they covet.

Tenders are selectively awarded—when a team signs a player to a tender, they must give up their first-round draft pick the next year and they must guarantee the player will play. Not every team uses their tenders every year.

## **AVERAGE AGE TO BREAK INTO THE USHL**

The typical age a player would want to break into the USHL would be 17. This allows him to be eligible for the NHL draft and keep him young enough to get interest from a buffet of division I NCAA schools.



That said, the most elite players, usually one or two per team, will crack a squad at 16 years old. If a player makes a team at this age, he must play in the majority of games, so teams often won't take a young player if he isn't ready.

As with all junior leagues, USHL players can also start at 18. Usually, players of this age have been playing junior in another league, wanted to graduate high school before moving up, or simply didn't get garner attention until an older age.

It would be rare from a 19 or 20 to be a rookie in this league.

## CANADIANS PLAYING IN THE USHL

More and more Canadians are crossing over to the USHL in search of a scholarship. Nowadays, Canadian players are getting drafted into this league and often indicate an interest to teams, either through contacting them for an invite or using a family advisor.

Some Canadians jumping to this league have already played Canadian junior. These players do not need to be traded to a USHL; however, the USHL team will need to provide monetary compensation to the Canadian club.

If you're a Canadian who wants to play in this league, indicate your interest to a team at a young age. The league is open to Canadian players.

## NHL DRAFT PROSPECTS

If any league in America is going to get a player drafted, it is the USHL. In 2014, the USHL had 35 players drafted, which was more than QMJHL. This is significant because it shows that USHL is competing with Canada's tier I leagues, which have long been considered the quickest route to the NHL.

That being said, of the 35 players drafted, 18 were from the U.S. National Team Development Program. The USNTDP is a U-18 all-star team made of the best 17 year olds in the States, most of whom are practically guaranteed to be drafted. Regardless, the 17 players drafted from regular USHL teams is still the highest of any Junior A league in the world.

If you want to get drafted from Junior A, this league can get the job done.

## TRAVEL

The USHL covers a large territory, spanning from the Dakotas over to Michigan and Ohio. The majority of teams are centered around Iowa and Illinois. While the travel is greater than some tier III leagues, it is certainly less than the NAHL and is comparable to that of Canadian tier I leagues.

Teams take care of their players really well in this league, and travel is just part of the game at the tier I junior level.



## SCHOLARSHIP POTENTIAL

If you play in this league, you're pretty much guaranteed a scholarship of some sort. Since the USHL is a league based on skill rather than physicality, most players are capable of a division I scholarship before they finish playing. The best players in this league get full rides to the best division I schools. (In fact, the very best players enter this league with a scholarship out of midget or high school.)

According to the USHL website, 316 USHL players, including USNTDP members, had college commitments to division I schools lined up before the start of the 2014-15 season. In a worst case scenario, a USHL could go division III quite easily, but this is the one league where going D-I is actually more common.

Top USHL players, especially NHL draft picks, have been known to cross the border to the OHL and give up their NCAA scholarships in order to play in the CHL. These players are often on the fast-track to pro hockey and are exceptional cases.

## PAY TO PLAY

Pay to play is laughable in the USHL. Everything your son would need, including billets is covered by the USHL. He only needs to get to town in order to play.

It's a professionally run league that treats players well.

## USHL DETAILS

**Nicknames you'll hear:** "Tier I"

**States covered:** Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin

**Established:** 1947

**Teams:** 17 + USNTDP

**Games Played:** 60

**Trophy Name:** Clark Cup

**Reigning League Champion:** Indiana Ice, 2014

## LEAGUE CONTACT INFO

327 W. Washington Blvd.

Suite 3C

Chicago, IL

60607

Commissioner: Bob Fallen

Phone: (312) 546-7300

Email: [ushl-contact@ushl.com](mailto:ushl-contact@ushl.com)

Website: [www.ushl.com](http://www.ushl.com)

