

Minor Midget Hockey

Where do I go now?

It's what you learn after you know it all that counts.
John Wooden

What are the chances of making it in professional hockey? Does it matter where a player plays minor hockey if he has professional or collegiate hockey aspirations? Those are questions that are asked every year by parents, players and coaches across the minor hockey community.

What people within minor hockey never see are the cold hard facts related to “turning pro” or “getting noticed”, that get distorted every day by recruiters, agents, managers and coaches. It happens in both minor and junior hockey. Recruiters will paint a rosy picture at the “front door” with promises of exposure and elite instruction

This handout is not intended to provide precise answers as to where a player should play hockey in subsequent years or in what category. It is a tool to help the player manage any future hockey aspirations. The Minor Midget year can be a very confusing and eventful period in a young hockey player’s career. If planned properly, a young athlete can maintain and manage both an education and pursue a career in hockey. An unmanaged and ill informed player, may result in some poor decisions and thus future unhappiness.

Goals of this handout:

- Assist in decision making process
- Identify options for Minor Midget aged players
- Demonstrate that all options are not ideal for every player
- Demonstrate the need to manage hockey to suit your individual needs
- Demonstrate the many influences that accompany each decision
- To begin to view hockey as a means to an end
- Identify the “Stroking” process for Elite Players.

There are decisions to be made. These decisions are made more difficult because there are existing rules that make it impossible, in some cases, for a player to change his mind once he has made an initial commitment. Selecting a hockey option requires knowledge and an understanding of what ramifications each decision will have on a player’s future.

This handout will attempt to show all of the various future hockey options. The information should help in making sound decisions regarding the direction a player may follow, based on his unique needs, wants and desires. A good planning process also enables a player to keep as many options open as possible.

Where can I play next year?

Midget

Midget is not the end of the road for your hockey career. Next year scouts will be looking at 1991 birth years and any 1990 birth years that may have missed or that have improved.

High School

Mostly regarded as recreational.

Junior B

A good place to go if you need a little more time to develop and you can handle playing against older players. Reduced cost for parents.

CJHL

At the beginning of each season all junior teams attempt to recruit the most talented players possible. In the CJHL teams submit a protection list, which gives them the playing rights to players in a specific geographical area. Players do not get to choose who they play for. After the protection list there is a draft for the rest of the players. In the Ottawa Valley, these players will come from Minor Midget, Midget, Junior B, & Junior C. The lack of cost is a surprisingly big factor to a parent when deciding where their boy will play next year.

OHL

The OHL is considered the number one breeding ground for junior players aspiring to play professional hockey. The OHL provides an excellent opportunity to combine high caliber hockey with educational opportunities between the ages of 16-20. It is strongly recommended any player who has the opportunity to play in the OHL do so. Remember that this is a business, and that for each player drafted, his team or association gets money from the OHL, if that player signs a card.

An example of the OHL draft

Rounds 1 thru 3 you would select players you think can play the next season

Rounds 4 thru 7 you would select players you think will be able to play in two years.

Rounds 8 thru 15 you select players with talent but might need more time to develop.

Should a player decide to go this route, he would be bound to go to the team that owns his playing rights. If he didn't want to play for it, then he couldn't play for any other team in the league. You can get to the NHL or pro hockey by way of the OHL or American college, but the OHL is probably a faster route. Major junior is a business and is highly competitive. The player should be willing to make some sacrifices socially and scholastically to play at this level. He will be boarded with a family if he is drafted away from home. If you attend a major junior training camp for over 48 hours you **may** be ruled ineligible for an American scholarship. If you stay at an OHL camp for more than 48 hours it is suggested NOT to accept money from the OHL team for room, meals, etc. so that you **may** stay eligible for American college. Whatever you do, think before playing a game, because you will then be ineligible to play for an American college team for one year, plus one game.

The OHL now has an education package for every player in the league this package is the minimum that each team can allow. Most teams negotiate a package. Some teams have arranged their package by the round the player was drafted in. This package must be

completed before you sign. This package is void if you sign any kind of pro hockey contract.

Major junior hockey in Ontario is generally regarded as a scaled-down version of the National Hockey League. The schedule ranges from 68 to 72 games plus playoffs, and the club owns a player's rights, meaning that he can be traded up until a deadline, ranging from mid-January to mid-February. Major junior leagues are founded on the same basic premise, which is developing players for a career in professional hockey. As a result, the majority of today's professional players graduated from major junior hockey.

As far as education is concerned, every major junior team in the OHL will pay a player's expenses (tuition, books, etc.) while he is a member of the team. The major junior leagues, in the past, have been criticized for not paying enough attention to education, but they've worked diligently to improve their image. You should be able to graduate high school and play in the OHL. The Ottawa 67's miss about 4 full days of school and about 8 half days during a season

"The No. 1 reason a player plays major junior hockey is to apprentice to be a pro," says OHL commissioner David Branch, "but that isn't to suggest we're out of the education business. Our studies show that 86 per cent of our players are in school, compared to a provincial average of 60 per cent for the same age group. The average number of school days missed by one of our players because of hockey is eight. Of course, Sault Ste. Marie is the highest but a couple of teams only miss three or four for the whole year. We flatly deny that it's impossible to get a high school education while playing in the OHL".

Dave King, former junior coach, says, "Anyone who says a kid playing major junior hockey can't get an education just doesn't know what he's talking about. Sometimes it's a little tougher and requires more discipline, but I've seen too many do it to say it can't be done—even in the West."

As far as eligibility rules go, the three major junior leagues have reached an agreement on American born players. Each league has states that belong only to that league therefore all players from that state belong to that league. Also, if the league has a team in a state, all players from that state belong to that team. Look for the OHL to put a team in New York soon. Ontario players are restricted to their respective leagues. Age is the only other real criteria (20 at the top end).

The majority of boys drafted by the OHL will come out of Minor Midget hockey. The round you get drafted in can be higher if you played Junior A or Junior B; but it has more to do with your ice time and the quality of the league.

Central scouting rates about 400 players per year from Ontario and the USA for the upcoming draft. You cannot be drafted if you are not on the central scouting list. The OHL pays for central scouting so they will not give out any information about the rated list. This year's draft will be for boys born in 1992, 1993. The OHL is most similar to the NHL so pro scouts get a better idea if a player can make the jump to pro hockey. This is because of the long schedule, the travel, being away from home, and the pressure to win.

After your OHL days are over, if you do not sign a pro contract you can go to a Canadian university to play hockey. Remember that school package you got when you first signed to play in the OHL?

CIS (Canadian Interuniversity Sport)

This option would be taken after your junior hockey is over; this is a mature hockey league. Most of the players in this league have played some major junior. Many Canadian schools offer players financial assistance after the first year. If you want to play CIS after the OHL you must not sign a pro contract and you must get your school package from the OHL team. You can play CIS even after signing a pro contract but you would have to attend the school as you sit out one year to get your status back. Many players have moved on to pro hockey from this level, mostly to minor pro or Europe, with a few even to the NHL.

NCAA

This is an option, which has become increasingly attractive over the past few years. The method of attracting players, from both Canada and the U.S. is by offering scholarships. It is important for all prospective collegians to remember that they not only have to qualify academically, but they must maintain good academic standing in addition to the usual athletic standards. The emphasis is on a shorter schedule, 30 games, depending on the conference, with a ratio of five practices a week to every two games. Most games are played on the weekend, which means that very few school days are missed. Unlike major junior the player must attend class. In fact the premise of the sport is that all players are “student athletes.”

Your central league General Manager should have literature about US colleges. If you attend a major junior training camp for over 48 hours you **may** be ruled ineligible for an American scholarship. If you stay at OHL camp for more than 48 hours you cannot accept money from the OHL team for room, meals, etc. so that you **may** stay eligible for American college. Whatever you do, do not play a game until you are sure!

There are two types of school packages offered to American colleges.

Grant and Aid:

Grant & Aid schools give full and partial scholarships that help pay for tuition, books, and room and board. These scholarships will result in the lowest out of pocket cost you to go to school.

Financial Aid:

Financial Aid colleges give academic scholarships not athletic scholarships; therefore your GPA must be such that you can get into this type of school. Financial Aid colleges give their money out in four parts:

- 1- a guaranteed student loan, you start to pay this back your first year out of school (5 to 10) Years to pay back
- 2- work- they find you a job (low hours - high pay)
- 3- your parents pay based on their ability to pay

4- the school pays a portion

Your educational background is a major factor in determining whether you choose the OHL or American college. Good grades in high school will keep both of these options open. Your size could play a role in the decision to pick school over the OHL. If you are under 5'10" school could be better because your chance of moving on to pro hockey is slim.

Full scholarships to Canadian players are almost non-existent today. The U.S. is developing hockey players at an incredible rate and when it comes time to recruit, NCAA schools are offering their packages to American players. The number of Ontario players on full scholarship in the U.S. has dropped 63% in the past ten years! Scholarships are not "full" as many people tend to think. Canadian players are considered "out of state" and regular tuition ranges between \$25,000-\$40,000 U.S. per year. In most cases, Canadian players are on partial scholarships where only 40-60% of their education costs are covered. If you spend four years at an NCAA school, you may return home owing or having paid approximately \$50,000-75,000 U.S.! Very few Canadian players today attain "full rides" to NCAA schools. Most NCAA teams only have 17 scholarships per team with 30 players on their roster.

Very few players graduate from their programs after four years. With many hockey scholarships, the school does not cover the 5th year unless players are entering postgraduate work-study. So to finish a degree, players would have to pay final years tuition. There is no such thing as a four-year scholarship. Scholarships are reviewed after each year, therefore if grades, part time work and hockey ability are not up to school standards, the scholarship can be withdrawn. All scholarships are renewable every year. The majority of NCAA institutions will honor a moral commitment for four years, but there have been occasions when a school will terminate a scholarship. Check the school's past record for terminating scholarships.

NCAA eligibility rules are tough and if you make one small error, it may cost you a chance to play college hockey. You cannot play major junior hockey, spend more than 48 hours at a major junior training camp, or acquire the services of an agent. The NCAA has designated major junior as professional, therefore if you play with or against them you are ineligible to play NCAA. You can however, ask the advice of a lawyer. "You can't use ignorance as an excuse. If you're not sure about something you shouldn't go ahead until you know it is safe. You've got to be sure to know exactly what you can and cannot do before you do anything." says ex Hockey East commissioner Lou Lamoriello. The NCAA publishes a guide for the college bound player, write to:
P.O. Box 1906, Mission, Kansas, 66201
or check the web.

Parents, Questions to ask, information to get, just things to think about

Keep in touch with your boy. Get to know the people who are boarding your son. Stay in touch with his school. If his schooling was important before he left your house it should be important now. Your son has to understand that just because he left home to play hockey he must keep his grades up.

There are less and less scholarships going to Canadian players every year. American college is expensive. Tuition and outside expenses are in American funds. Remember they're still boys and they will spend money.

Before going to an OHL camp know the eligibility rules of the NCAA.

Is my boy a "jock", is sports all he thinks about, then maybe the OHL is for him.

Does your boy enjoy reading, being alone, talking about everything, then maybe he would enjoy campus life.

Is your boy mature enough to be away from home 8 months a year?

If your son wants to play CIS after the OHL, you must not sign a pro contract and you must get his school package from the OHL team.

If your boy is rated by the OHL, a team or teams will contact him or you during the playing year. During your contact they will ask you if he intends to play in the OHL or is he planning on going to school your answer will greatly impact the round you will get drafted in.

If your son signs to play any junior hockey, that does not mean he will be on the team for the whole year. Each team has a minimum of 35 cards that they can use over the course of the year. Your son can be traded or released at any time.

There are some very important dates to remember in **all** junior hockey. **December 1st** every team has to be down to 25 players or cards, **January 10th** every team has to be down to 21 players or cards.

Questions to ask recruiters, agents and teams. :

When do you practice?

Does the team cover medical and dental expenses?

For players with academic aspirations what provisions are made for secondary and post secondary education?

What happens if my son's playing days are ended by an injury?

What are the minimum academic standards to maintain a scholarship?

Do I have to go to school when I play in the OHL?

What is the Bobby Smith Award?

Is an agent required for OHL hockey?

How do I get an agent? What does he charge?

Is it better to play hockey on a good team and get some ice time or is better to play on a weaker team and get lots of ice time?

What is the average education level attained in the OHL?

How much training time should be put in during the summer?

What GPA do you need to get an American scholarship?

What does a scholarship pay for?

Can you play in the OHL and graduate High school/College?

What kind of sacrifices will have to be made to reach the goal? Are we prepared to make those sacrifices?

Straight facts about making it in pro hockey
An analysis of “what hockey doesn’t have to offer”
By Jim Parcels January 1999

What are the chances of making it in professional hockey? Does it matter where my son plays minor hockey if he has professional or collegiate hockey aspirations? Those are questions that are asked every year by parents, players and coaches alike across the minor hockey community.

What people within minor hockey never see is the actual cold, hard facts related to “turning pro or getting noticed that get distorted every day by recruiters, managers and coaches. It happens in both minor and junior hockey.

Recruiters love painting the rosy picture at the “front door” with promises of exposure and elite instruction. What very few people think of is the not so rosy picture at the back door of the development process for the 99.999% that pass through minor or junior hockey systems without guaranteed financial returns.

The OHL is considered the number one breeding ground for junior players aspiring to play professional hockey and rightfully so. The OHL provides an excellent opportunity to combine high caliber hockey with educational opportunities between the ages of 16-20. I would strongly recommend any player who has the opportunity to play in the OHL do so.

“How many of those players received some sort of financial return or end result on their investment of 15-20 years into the game of minor and junior hockey?”

Of the 38 players who went through the Petes dressing room in two years, only four ever played in the NHL and only two are still there on a regular basis today.

“The Chances of Making It in Pro Hockey for Ontario Minor Hockey players.”

The only accurate way to measure the chances of making the “pros” is to take an actual “birth year” as a sample category. Since hockey’s a competitive structure is based on the age of players, this is really the only accurate way of taking a sample group.

I utilized the birth year “1975” as a sample. This included all players active in minor and junior hockey in the province between the years 1988-1991. The approximate number of players active in Ontario in 1991 was roughly 22,000!

That total doesn’t include approximately 7,500 players who left the game through attrition from Tyke to Bantam who were also born in 1975. That creates a sample group of 30,000 players, born in 1975, for which this study is based.

For the players born in 1975 the Ontario Hockey League draft was held in 1991 (for underage Bantams born in 1975) and 1992 for the “open” Midget draft year.

Remember too, that many NHL scouts considered the “1975” group of players in Ontario the strongest of any crop ever to come out of the province.

In the 1991 and 1992 OHL Drafts, there were 232 Ontario developed players selected by the 16 major junior teams (at that time). The following breakdown shows how those 30,000 players active that year “progressed.”

Out of those 232 players drafted to the OHL, only 105 ever played one game in the OHL! Out of those 105 players, only 90 finished their full 3-4 years of eligibility in the OHL

Of the 22,000 players, only 41 played NCAA Division 1 hockey! The most notable being Todd White of Kanata now in Minnesota.

What should also be known is that full scholarships to Canadian players are almost non-existent today. The U.S. is developing hockey players at an incredible rate and when it comes time to recruit, NCAA schools are offering their packages to American players. The number of Ontario players on full scholarship in the U.S. has dropped 63% in the past ten years!

Scholarships too, are not “full” as many people tend to think Canadian players are considered “out of state” and regular tuition for a player without scholarship ranges between \$25,000-\$40,000 U.S. per year. In most cases, Canadian players are on partial scholarships where only 40-60% of their education costs are covered. That means if you spend four years at an NCAA school, you may return home owing or having paid approximately \$50,000-75,000 U.S.! Very few Canadian players today attain “full rides” to NCAA schools. Most NCAA teams only have 17 scholarships per team with a 30 players on their roster. Something has to give financially for a roster that big!

What is disturbing, however is out of those 41 NCAA players, very few graduated from their programs of study when they left their school! That begs the question: Why did they pursue an education through hockey if they have a minimal hockey future and no degree? With many hockey scholarships, 5th years are not covered by the school unless players are entering postgraduate work-study. So to finish their degree, players would have to dole out approximately \$25,000-\$40,000 to complete the degree at that school. Scholarships are also reviewed after each year. Therefore if grades, part time work and hockey ability are not measuring up to school standards, the scholarship can be withdrawn.

Of the 90 players who finished their OHL careers and the 41 who played in the NCAA, only 48 were drafted to the NHL while two signed NHL free agent deals. The most notable being Jason Allison.

This was the best NHL draft result for any birth year in Ontario! This was also the last year the NHL had 12 rounds in their draft. Today there are only nine rounds. Of those 48 drafted players (and three free agent signees), only 34 signed contracts with NHL teams. Four signed free agent deals as non-drafted players.

Of those 38 signed, only 23 have seen action to date in an NHL game.

Of those 23, only 11 are currently active in the NHL (as of January 1, 1999). The low for the 1975 category active in the NHL was seven earlier in the 1998-99 season.

Of those 23 who played an NHL game to date, research shows that only 10-12 will earn a second contract with an NHL team.

Of those 30,000 players there were approximately 80 “1975” players active in Canadian University (CIS) programs. Many of those players (about 75%) were former Major Junior (OHL, WHL, QMJHL) players who decided to pursue an education instead of minor pro deals. The others entered CIS programs through Jr.B./ Tier II or minor programs. The graduation rate from those programs by former major junior players from CIS schools is approximately 50-60%. In the cases of many players from major junior, a portion of their tuition (ranging from \$1,000-5,000 per year of service in the league) is paid by their former junior teams. This “education package” is open to all players but is null and void if the player signs any professional hockey contract regardless of its amount.

The following is a breakdown of the average salary and the expected career length at each level:

NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE (NHL)

12 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 2.4 years

Average initial salary \$220,000

Original signing bonuses ranged between \$550,000 and \$750,000 for those nine players.

These players are the lucky ones!

TIER TWO MINOR PRO

AMERICAN HOCKEY LEAGUE (AHL)

13 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 3.5 years

Average salary \$40,000

TIER THREE MINOR PRO

EAST COAST HOCKEY LEAGUE (ECHL)

29 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 3.1 years

Average salary \$25,000

TIER FOUR MINOR PRO

UNITED HOCKEY LEAGUE (UHL)

5 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 1.8 years

Average salary \$16,000

CENTRAL HOCKEY LEAGUE (CHL)

8 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 1.6 years

Average salary \$18,000

WESTERN PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE (WPHL)

5 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 1.5 years

Average salary \$16,000

WEST COAST HOCKEY LEAGUE (WCHL)

2 current Ontario "1975" players

Average career – 1.6 years

Average salary \$20,000

This is the breakdown on a generation of players from Ontario who were in that elite group of players who “made it” and where they are today.

Another factor to consider is pro hockey lifestyle. Yes, playing in the NHL for a million a year sounds tempting and attractive. Players in the minor pros however live on a day-to-day basis with many fearful of picking up the phone and taking a call from their GM or Coach telling them to pack up the family and move on through a trade or waivers.

The average number of times a player gets traded, waived or signs with another team for a minor pro player is 3.5 times over the course of a 5 year career. There is a player that was with the Petes who has played with 18 minor pro teams in four years! That didn't include the four junior teams he played for in three years in the OHL!

The key development years for a player under an NHL contract is between the ages of 20-23. Usually players sign a 3-4 year contract with an NHL team that will see the player play in the American Hockey League (AHL), during that contract. Only 1 in 10 players drafted will see action in over 100 NHL games. Keep in mind that the NHL Players pension does not kick in until 400 NHL games are played. The study also determined that for every year past the age of twenty your chance of making the NHL are virtually cut in half in each succeeding season! Remember too, that there is a draft of new players each year looking to take your job!

Where does all this lead us? What is the motivation for parents to go to the lengths they do to get their kid “noticed” in a minor hockey program? Why is it that 60% of Ontario players who currently play in the NHL played in minor hockey programs below the A classification in smaller rural towns?

Let the game take you as far as it can. Don't gamble your future by concentrating on hockey full time. Make the game part of your life, not a majority of it.

When considering junior hockey, remember to make hockey a priority right along side education. The Ontario Hockey League has an excellent record of producing pro players and students and many of their clubs work hard at trying to keep those priorities straight. In closing, this story is in no way an attempt to dishearten or demoralize the dreams of children playing minor hockey. What this study does is educate parents and players on what “Hockey Doesn't Have to Offer.”

It's just an eye opener for many parents and players.

Play minor hockey at home with your friends, go to school and concentrate on a career outside of hockey in addition to playing the game for fun! If you have a chance to play at a higher level in junior, take it, but don't expect it to be a ticket to the National Hockey League and throw out all educational concerns.

Don't sacrifice a normal family lifestyle to become a pro player. You have enough pressure to deal with, you do not have to become their possible retirement plan.

The thing that scares me about publishing a story like this is that there will be 5,000 parents out there that will read this and truly believe that their kid will buck the odds and be one of the “fortunate” dozen or so players.

That's what concerns me the most!

This handout has been created from many sources.

Options Are Simple, But The Rules Aren't
Reprinted from – The Hockey News, March 15, 1985
Writer – Bob McKenzie

Straight facts about making it in pro hockey
An analysis of “what hockey doesn't have to offer”
By Jim Parcels January 1999

Midget Crossroads
CAHA
John Almstedt

Blake Callaghan NCCP Advanced II

