

Education: NCAA or the CHL

NCAA hockey university graduation rate 84% to the CHL's 16%. *

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The importance of an education

While dreams of playing in the NHL should always be alive in the heart of any elite youth hockey player, the fact is on average only 35 players in any one birth year in North America will make the NHL. The 35 who do make it come from a base of roughly 5000 AAA players that could be playing AAA, high school, prep school or junior hockey.

The fact is 99.9% of the elite youth players will never make it to the NHL and therefore academics should never take a back seat to hockey.

The value of a university education

2006 statistics from the American Federal government indicate the following income levels:

\$19,169 High School drop out

\$28,645 High School graduate

\$51,554 University graduate

\$78,093 University post graduate

The route to a university education

Both NCAA schools and CHL teams claim that they can provide a university degree while chasing the dream of the NHL. The numbers state otherwise.

On a typical NCAA roster of 28, .5 players make it to the NHL, 23.5 graduate from university, and 4 do not graduate from university.

On a typical CHL roster of 25, 1 player makes it to the NHL, 4 obtain a university degree and 20 do not obtain a university degree.

In the contest to graduate players from university the NCAA wins 23.5 to CHL 4.

The question then becomes why does the CHL graduate only 16% of its player base from university while the NCAA's number is at 84%?

The reasons

1) School versus hockey team

NCAA hockey teams operate as part of an educational institution. Without the educational side of the university, there is no NCAA hockey team. Players who compete in NCAA hockey must attend classes at the school they are playing hockey at.

CHL hockey teams operate outside of school. The CHL operates independently from universities and high schools and players are not required to pass academic coursework while playing.

2) Pass to play

In the NCAA, in order to play hockey you must first pass high school and then pass while in university. Don't pass and you don't play.

In the CHL, playing hockey is not tied to passing in school. Passing in school is secondary to playing hockey. In the CHL if you don't pass in school you can still play hockey.

3) The grade 11 junior year

The 3rd year of high school is typically where most hockey players fall off of the education track.

The CHL wants players to fast track into its leagues when a player is in grade 11. Once a player plays a game in the CHL he then has no NCAA option and can only play in the CHL. However, the problem lies in that most 16-year old players aren't prepared physically or mentally to play in the CHL. There are exceptions to this, but they are few and far between.

The result is most of the 16-year old, grade 11 players end up away from home, in an unfamiliar billet home, attending a new high school. Their teammates are players 1-4 years older than them, many of whom are not attending school themselves. They find themselves playing little, either on the end of the bench or in the stands - certainly not playing a regular shift. All of this, and not a single mention of the numerous vices that are presented to them off the ice.

Grade 11 players following the NCAA route typically, but not in all cases, play hockey in their grade 11 year so they can live at home, with their parents, go to their own high school, and play at a level that will allow them a regular shift or more every night out.

4) Supervision: Parents versus billets

No billet, good or bad, is going to supervise a young adult's social and educational life like a parent will.

Elite players geared toward the NCAA are typically in this environment until their grade 11 year and some through their entire high school years.

Elite players heading to the CHL are away from this parental supervision for the grade 12 senior year for sure and many during their grade 11 year.

5) Trades

Players who choose the CHL have no choice over the high school or universities they attend while playing in the CHL. Further, at any time, a player can be traded, to another team, possibly in another country. A trade can happen at the beginning of a semester, during mid-terms, or just prior to final exams. It is at the CHL team's discretion as to when they want to make a trade to better their team for hockey reasons not educational ones.

Of the 40 19 year-old 1987 birth years who were drafted in the 1st two rounds of their OHL draft, 28 were traded.

Players choosing the NCAA route are able to choose the high school and university that fit their academic and athletic needs. For the most part, and for sure once a player is in university, he can't be traded and his education jeopardized.

6) Travel and missed school

An NCAA exhibition/regular season runs from October 1 to March 3 and consists of 35-40 games.

A CHL exhibition/regular season runs from September 1 through to March 18 and consists of 68 games.

Less games means more time for school.

7) Education Consultants

NCAA schools have to make sure their student-athletes pass. If students don't pass they can't play hockey. The commitment, dedication and seriousness in this issue shows with an 84% university graduation rate.

CHL teams have said for 30 years that they have education consultants yet their university graduation rate is 16%.

Don't be fooled.

8) Guaranteed CHL school packages

The CHL would have every recruit believe that because the CHL offers negotiated guaranteed education packages, that every CHL player will get a university education.

If that were true, all 1475 of the current CHL players would obtain a university education. In fact, 1239 never get a university degree.

9) Conflict of Interest

NCAA teams that offer scholarships are under pressure to make sure their student-athletes do not fail out of school. If hockey players do, they get penalized with a loss of scholarship money.

On the other hand, if CHL players fail out of school or do not go onto university the CHL teams increase their profits because they do not have to pay the guaranteed education packages. If the current yearly guaranteed CHL education package is \$7,500, and a player has that for 4 years, and 1239 CHL players are not using their school package that means over a 4-year period the CHL is saving over \$37,000,000.

Conclusion

The CHL and NCAA Division I hockey both have 59 teams. Over a 4-year period the NCAA will have 1387 university graduates and the CHL will have 236 graduates.

Fancy brochures, websites and words don't replace facts. Numbers don't lie about who cares about education.

* CHL statistics derived and taken from www.ontariohockeyleague.com, www.hockeydb.com, and www.universitysport.ca/e/m_icehockey/index.cfm. NCAA statistics taken directly from NCAA hockey schools and verified at www.hockeydb.com.

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