

# BCHL to become independent league

May 1, 2023



**...New era opens more doors for players, raises standards and creates an enhanced experience for athletes and fans**

*For more information about the BCHL's announcement, please visit the FAQ [here](#).*

The British Columbia Hockey League (BCHL) has announced a new path, continuing its mission to build a world class college-track junior league for players seeking NCAA and U Sports Scholarships and to establish a tier of hockey that to date has not been seen in Canada.

To grow and create more opportunities for players and more excitement for fans, the BCHL's Board of Governors has voted to not renew the league's agreement with Hockey Canada, meaning its 18 franchises will operate outside Hockey Canada's system as of June 1, 2023. "The BCHL sends more players to NCAA Division I teams than all other junior hockey leagues in Canada combined," said BCHL Chairman Graham Fraser. "During the past season there were 411 BCHL alumni on NCAA rosters, making up nearly a quarter of all Division I college

hockey. That is exciting, but we aspire to do more for players and to provide a higher level of hockey for our fans. Under the current system, that's just not possible.”

“Our owners and governors are proud of how far we have come in recent years and have a strong desire to continue to grow and make decisions that are in the best interests of young players and families,” added Fraser. “Today, we are entering a new era that will eliminate barriers and change the landscape of junior hockey in Canada.”

### **Current system challenges:**

Under the current system, U18 players in Canada making critical decisions about their futures are restricted in their options.

If a U18 player signs with a Major Junior team in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), it disqualifies them from US colleges because the NCAA considers the CHL a professional league.

If a U18 player decides to keep their eligibility and play Junior A instead, they are restricted to playing only in their province of residence (note: this isn't a restriction for players in the CHL and the Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL) which includes players from the U15-U18 divisions.

If a U18 player does not have a competitive junior option in their own province, they are often forced to leave Canada to play in the USHL or NAHL to find better competition, while maintaining NCAA eligibility. Or they must uproot their family at a significant cost to move provinces.

“We believe U18 players should have two development paths in Canada – Major Junior leading to the National Hockey League (NHL) being one and college-tracking junior leading to a US college and then the NHL being the other. Both are important. Both should be supported,” said BCHL CEO Chris Hebb.

## **The new era of BCHL hockey will include:**

**More NCAA and U Sports scholarships:** With a higher level of hockey, the BCHL anticipates more players will earn scholarships to Division I schools in the NCAA and U Sports while playing in the league. With the addition of more elite players, we anticipate creating a higher level of competition that will push our athletes, coaches and teams to be better.

**Exciting new Events:** The BCHL will continue to enhance its series of events, including the potential of a post-playoff tournament that celebrates the skill level of its players. Currently the league hosts a Showcase event, Top Prospects game, Outdoor All-Star Event and a Road Show to help increase the exposure and experience for its athletes.

**Larger player pool:** The BCHL will now be able to recruit U18 players from other provinces, as well as from the USA and outside of North America. In addition, the BCHL remains committed to BC player development. Currently 97 percent of BC-born players who played NCAA Division I hockey last year played in the BCHL. Current roster minimums for BC-born players will not change.

**Higher Standards:** The BCHL will continue to use its new scorecard system with the goal of making improvements that will ultimately benefit all teams and the league as a whole. The scorecard was implemented in 2022 and covers all operating areas, including hockey operations, off-ice business standards and facility infrastructure. As part of the four-year plan, the BCHL will eliminate player fees across the league by year four (2024-25 season).

**League Office Reorganization:** Chris Hebb will move solely into the role of Chief Executive Officer, focusing on the future of the BCHL through bigger picture opportunities and alliances, while Steven Cocker will move into the role of Commissioner, managing the day-to-day operations.

## **Due Diligence**

Becoming independent was a decision made following nearly five years of good faith efforts to find a solution within Hockey Canada's system. BCHL owners, governors, executives, and committees thoroughly explored all options but were unable to establish meaningful discourse with the governing leadership of Hockey Canada.

For the 2023-24 season the BCHL has established a foundation in all operational areas, including risk management, health and safety, education programs, insurance, officials, and governance. This includes an increased commitment under the leadership of former NHL official, and current BCHL Director of Player Safety and Officiating, Brad Lazarowich. In addition, a comprehensive insurance plan for all players, teams, and staff has been created under the guidance of Mark Woodall who has worked with many amateur and professional sports clients including the Canadian Football League.

“Players and families currently in the BCHL can rest assured that we remain committed to player development and the standards of excellence in their day-to-day hockey experiences will not change as a result of our decision,” said Steven Cocker, Commissioner of the BCHL. “In fact, they will have access to even more opportunities for their future success. We are excited to embark on this new chapter and continue building a better league for everyone.”

ORIGINAL ARTICLE CAN BE FOUND AT...

<https://bchl.ca/bchl-to-become-independent-league>

# BCHL FAQ



## **Why did the BCHL not renew its agreement with Hockey Canada?**

By taking this step as a league, the BCHL will have more autonomy and control over its own direction. This will allow the league to make decisions that are in the best interests of players, their families and its 18 teams.

For a comprehensive overview of the challenges, please see the document produced by the BC Hockey League's Executive Committee and League Office outlining various ways to improve junior hockey in our country, entitled: Modernizing Junior Hockey in Canada. It was sent to Hockey Canada, BC Hockey and the Governance Review Committee overseeing the examination of Hockey Canada's structure and leadership.

[Click here](#) to read the full document.

[Click here](#) to read a two-page summary.

## **What restrictions do U18 players face under the system?**

We are a development league. And, under the current system, U18 players in Canada making huge decisions about their futures are restricted in their options.

If a player decides to keep their eligibility and play Junior A, they are restricted to playing only in their defined branch (region) under Hockey Canada (note: this isn't a restriction for players in the CHL and the Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL) which includes divisions U15-U18).

If a U18 player does not have a competitive Junior A option in their own branch, they are often forced to leave Canada to play in the USHL or NAHL, where there are no similar restrictions, to find better competition while maintaining NCAA eligibility.

What we are left with is a system that encourages Canadian U18 players with scholarship aspirations to pursue their junior hockey development in the USA.

“We believe U18 players should have two development paths in Canada – Major Junior leading to the National Hockey League (NHL) being one and college-tracking junior leading to a US college and then the NHL being the other. Both are important. Both should be supported,” said BCHL CEO Chris Hebb.

## **How does this benefit the players?**

This change will allow our league to operate without outdated restrictions. For players, this means they will have the opportunity to stay within Canada if they choose, and still find high level competition to prepare themselves for NCAA Division I or U Sports hockey. With standards being raised across the league, it will also benefit the player experience for all current and future players.

## **How does this benefit the fans?**

The BCHL's mission is to establish a tier of junior hockey that to date has not been seen in Canada, to raise its standards, to provide more opportunities for players, and to increase the excitement level for fans.

In order to continue to build a world class college tracking system for players seeking NCAA college scholarships, we need to be bold and modernize junior hockey in Canada.

### **Why exactly could you not accomplish this plan within the system?**

The regulations within Hockey Canada's system do not allow us to grow the league the way we believe is in the best interest of college tracking players. We were asked to speak on this topic by the recent Hockey Canada governance review and are optimistic that the improvements being made will eventually create opportunities for dialogue. For more information about the Hockey Canada Governance Review by Honourable Thomas Cromwell [click here](#).

### **Is the BCHL still part of BC Hockey?**

With our decision to become an independent league outside of Hockey Canada's system, the BCHL is no longer officially a member of BC Hockey. We have been invited to be part of a junior hockey task group and look forward to continued discussions about the future of Junior A hockey in Canada.

### **Are you open to continuing discussions and coming back to BC Hockey or Hockey Canada?**

We have always been open to a meaningful discussion that provides Canadian athletes with more opportunities. We will always do what's best for athletes seeking college-tracking junior options.

### **Why make this change now?**

Becoming independent was a decision made following nearly five years of good faith efforts to find a solution within Hockey Canada's system. BCHL owners, governors, executives, and committees thoroughly explored all options but were unable to establish meaningful discourse with the governing leadership of Hockey Canada over that period.

### **Why announce this now while the playoffs are underway?**

A change of this significance requires an extensive amount of preparation and planning for all teams and stakeholders. This will be implemented on June 1, 2023 and we had a lot of work to do and needed as much time as possible.

### **Are you still considered Junior A?**

We are simply the British Columbia Hockey League whose primary goal is to develop young athletes for the NCAA and U Sports.

### **Will BCHL players still have the same opportunities?**

They will have all of the same opportunities the BCHL has provided in the past. In fact, they will have access to even more opportunities for their future success. We will also continue to lobby for our athletes to have opportunities at the national level.

### **Will the BCHL recruit players from outside BC?**

Yes, the BCHL will continue to allow all players the choice of where they play, similar to the recruiting process in the NCAA.

In addition, we will also be able to recruit Canadian U18 players from outside of their branch, as well as from the USA and outside of North America.

### **Is the BCHL still committed to developing BC-born players?**

Currently 97 percent of BC-born players who played NCAA Division I hockey last year played in the BCHL and we remain committed to BC player development and roster minimums will not change.

### **What kinds of special events will the new BCHL host?**

The BCHL will continue to enhance its series of events, including the potential of a post-playoff tournament that celebrates the skill level of its players. Currently the league hosts a Showcase event, Top Prospects game, Outdoor All-Star Event and a Road Show to help increase the exposure of its athletes.

### **What higher standards will the BCHL strive for as an Independent League?**

The BCHL will continue to use its new scorecard system with the goal to make improvements that will ultimately benefit all teams and the league as a whole. The scorecard was implemented in 2021 and covers all areas of team operations, including hockey operations, business standards and facility infrastructure.



### **Is the BCHL becoming a pay-to-play league now?**

As part of the four-year plan, the BCHL has already voted to gradually eliminate player fees across the league by 2025.

### **Does the BCHL still have insurance for players?**

Yes. The BCHL's insurance broker is Westland Insurance. Through the process, a comprehensive insurance plan for all players, teams, and staff was created under the guidance of Mark Woodall who has worked with many amateur and professional sports clients including the Canadian Football League.

### **How will this affect on-ice officials?**

The BCHL has committed to increase compensation for its officials and our Director of Player Safety and Officiating, Brad Lazarowich, is working closely with referees and linespeople to recognize their contributions to our league, while not interfering with their ability to officiate other levels of hockey.

### **What due diligence and governance is now in place to support players and the league?**

We are going to implement measures to include a robust concussion management program, criminal record and background checks for all personnel, a comprehensive registration platform and database, education to promote healthy relationships, safe sport, abuse and maltreatment prevention training, emergency medical certification, mental health resources, addiction education, media training, language and inclusivity training, player safety initiatives, coach certification, and officials certification. With such comprehensive measures in place, the BCHL is committed to providing a safe, positive, and inclusive environment for all involved in our league.

### **How will this affect transactions between leagues?**

The BCHL will explore new transfer agreements with similar leagues to allow transactions to take place.