

Modernizing Junior Hockey in Canada

Supporting Two Junior Development Paths for Canadian Athletes

The British Columbia Hockey League (BCHL) is entering its sixth decade of operation and is the best it has ever been at helping 16 to 20-year-old athletes pursue a junior hockey career in Canada (and beyond). This success has been achieved despite certain systemic barriers that need to be addressed through the revision of the current Canadian Development Model (CDM). The BCHL operates in a system that penalizes elite players for choosing to play college-tracking junior hockey, instead of Major Junior, in their home country.

Our development model penalized players by placing discriminatory regulatory restrictions on their movement and participation in Canada. This forces many players into decisions to leave the Canadian system entirely. While the rules were likely devised with good intentions, they are proving to be unfair to some of our best young athletes, their individual development, and their families. These regulations do not recognize the changing development patterns that have emerged since they were written 17 years ago, including the significant growth of leagues like the BCHL that have invested in an athlete-centric path. This paper outlines where the system has failed and how we can better develop these players in Canada.

It is important to note that the writing of this white paper is not, in any way, related to the recent crisis surrounding Hockey Canada. Our position was tabled with Hockey Canada long ago and has been ignored. However, given the appointment of a former Supreme Court of Canada Justice Thomas Cromwell to perform an independent review of Hockey Canada's governance structure, the BCHL believes its long-held concerns are relevant to this review. Our objective is to have a frank, open and constructive discussion on the future of college-tracking junior hockey.

Hockey Canada should support the path that has been created by college-tracking junior leagues, even though it may not fit the ideals of the CDM. We are calling for a thorough discussion on the state of junior hockey in general and, specifically, supporting the path to college for Canadian athletes.

The BCHL's objectives for this discussion are:

1. To keep elite players at home in Canada by moving college-tracking junior up in relevance as a supported development path under the CDM.
2. To create a tiering strategy for non-pay-to-play college-tracking junior hockey, complete with an additional post-season championship.
3. Most importantly, to have a strong dual-path system in Canada, supported by Hockey Canada and the NHL that creates opportunities for Canadian players to stay at home and be the best that they can be.

