

Alphabet Soup

The ABC's of Illinois Hockey

Hockey in Illinois, and across the nation, is often described by an acronym. 3-letter, 4-letter, you name it, hockey has it. Let's try to decipher what each one is and what it means as they pertain to Illinois Hockey.

Tier 1 Hockey (AAA)

Highest level of youth hockey at Squirt, Pee Wee, Bantam, and Midgets offered in the United States. Illinois has 4 Tier I Associations. They play in one of two leagues:

HPHL: (High Performance Hockey League): This league was formed a few years ago by three Illinois AAA Associations (Team Illinois-TI, Chicago Young Americans-CYA and Chicago Mission) and three Associations from the Detroit area (Little Caesars, Compuware, and Honeybaked).

Tier I Elite League: This league is a national league covering over 25 AAA Associations from all over the United States. The Chicago Fury is a member of this league.

Tier II (AA/A)

Commonly known as "Travel Hockey" in Illinois.

NIHL: Northern Illinois Hockey League. This is a Tier II league and encompasses all of the Tier II associations in Illinois as well as a few from Indiana and Wisconsin.

CSDHL: Central States Developmental Hockey League. This league includes Associations from Wisconsin, Illinois, Missouri and Minnesota. Many NIHL Associations place their AA teams at the Squirt, PeeWee, Bantam and Midget age levels in this league. Some Associations further divide into Major and Minor aged teams at Bantam and Pee Wee in this league. Major being second year skaters and minors being first year skaters at each age level.

Tier III (B)

Commonly referred to as "House Hockey".

NWHL: Northwest Hockey League. Many NIHL Associations also have a Tier III component to their Association. These house teams mainly play in the NWHL. Additionally, there are many Associations that are pure Tier III clubs, Franklin Park for example.

SSHL: South Suburban Hockey League. SSHL is also a Tier III House league and encompasses some NIHL Associations' Tier III teams as well as others from the southern suburbs.

The main difference between Tier II and III is that Tier II teams tend to travel a bit more, have a few more ice slots per year, and typically cost a bit more than Tier III.

High School

CCHL: Chicago Catholic League. As the name indicates, this is a league made up of private catholic high schools: Benet, Fenwick, Providence Catholic, St Rita, Brother Rice, Notre Dame, St. Ignatius, Marist, Mt. Carmel, and St. Viator. The championship is known as the Kennedy Cup.

IHSHL: (North, Scholastic, George Hayes Suburban, and West Divisions). The IHSHL is a newly formed high school hockey league encompassing all of high school hockey outside of the catholic league. Formerly known as **Metro** and **ISHL** (Illinois Suburban Hockey League), The IHSHL is made up of several divisions which are geographically located. Some schools are “pure teams” in which all players come from one high school; others are “combined team” in which several high schools join to form a combined team. These teams play for the Blackhawk Cup.

Juniors

Junior hockey is typically a move a player will make in order to advance their hockey career to the next level. Junior hockey is a buyer beware proposition. Not all Junior teams are created equal, so be sure to do your homework, talk to those that have been through the process before sending your teenager off to parts unknown.

Tier I USHL: (United States Hockey League). The USHL is the only Tier I Junior League in the United States. Teams in this league cover all expenses for the player. Teams spread from Ohio to the west. This is the prime breeding ground for the leap to Division 1 and 3 college hockey.

Tier II NAHL: (North American Hockey League). The NAHL is the only Tier II Junior hockey league in the United States. This league covers all expenses except billeting fees for your player. The NAHL is also a prime place to be scouted for college play. Many kids from the NAHL also move to the USHL as a stepping stone to college.

Tier III: There are numerous Tier III leagues throughout the United States, and each league has its pros and cons. All Tier III is pay to play, similar to AAA. Recently the Tier III landscape has changed drastically especially out east. Some Tier III leagues are considered higher quality than others. The USPHL (see below) and the EHL have solid reputations for moving players to the next level.

NA3HL: (North American 3 Hockey League) which comprises teams from Michigan, Missouri, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Kansas, Minnesota and Iowa. The NA3HL is a Tier III feeder league for the NAHL and other higher level Tier II/III leagues. It is also an excellent place for kids that have aged out of youth hockey and want to keep playing prior to college. Many players from this league can advance to higher level juniors or move on to Division 3 or college club hockey. The Chicago Bulldogs play in this league.

MNJHL: (Minnesota Junior Hockey League). The MNJHL has two Divisions, Minnesota Teams and Great Lakes Teams (Wisconsin/Michigan/Indiana/Missouri). Similar to the NA3HL, it is a great local option for Illinois kids trying to break into Junior hockey.

NPJHL: (Northern Pacific Junior Hockey League) comprises teams from Washington, Montana, Wyoming and Vancouver. The NPJHL is a small five team league in the northwest. This league is similar to the NMJHL.

MJHL: (Metropolitan Junior Hockey League). The MJHL is a mid-level Tier III league in the northeast that includes teams from Maine, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, District of Columbia, New Hampshire and Connecticut. Another great stepping stone to higher level juniors.

AWHL: (American West Hockey League) fields teams from Wyoming and Montana. The AWHL is a seven team league in the northwest. A mid-level Tier III league similar to NPJHL.

EHL: (Eastern Hockey League) comprises teams from Maine, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and the District of Columbia. The EHL is a multi-team league in the northeast with access to 50-100 college programs in that part of the country. It is a mid-level Tier III league.

USPHL: (United States Premier Hockey League) has teams in Maine, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, New Hampshire, Georgia, North Carolina, Virginia and Maryland. Formerly the **EJHL** (Eastern Junior Hockey League) and the **AJHL** (Atlantic Junior Hockey League), the USPHL is considered the premier Tier III league in the country. It has several levels within the league, Premier, Elite and Empire, with the Premier being the top team for each club (think of it as AAA, AA and A at the youth level). This league also absorbed teams from the southeast into the league to create a complete league up and down the eastern seaboard.

Other Acronyms

AHAI: Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois. This is the USA Hockey affiliate for Illinois. AHAI governs hockey in Illinois and provides developmental opportunities for our kids to gain exposure at the national level.

IHOA: Illinois Hockey Officials Association. This is the organization that administers the on-ice officials' certification and training, coordinates scheduling officials and oversees all our referees.

USAH: USA hockey is the governing body for hockey in the United States.

NTDP: National Training Development Program. Based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, the NTDP is the organization that selects teams from a variety of age-levels to represent the United States in world competition. Additionally, it houses a U18 and U17 team that lives in Ann Arbor year-round and plays in the USHL. These kids are the best of the best, many are drafted into the NHL and most have Division 1 college commitments already.

ADM: American Development Model, www.admkids.com, is the site where you can find out all about the ADM. Also the AHAI newsletter has regular features on the development program for mites to midgets based on Long Term Athlete Development (**LTAD**) principles designed to develop players of all skill levels. The ADM is the national development model for our skaters.

CEP: Coaching Education Program. This is the certification program that all coaches have to complete before they are allowed to coach a team. It is managed by USA Hockey and delivered by AHAI.

HIFE: Hockey Is For Everyone. This is a program here in Illinois, as well as nationally, that allows those that otherwise cannot afford it to have a chance to learn our great game of hockey. Equipment is provided and ice time is free to the players for learn to skate programs. More information is available on the AHAI website.

GLASA Falcons: Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association - Sled Hockey team that skates in Waukegan, Illinois at Hotshots Ice Arena.

AHIHA: American Hearing Impaired Hockey Association

RIC (Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago) Blackhawks Adult Sled Hockey Team competes in the competitive Midwest Sled Hockey League