



MIND THE NET GOALTENDING

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What are your hockey options?

Almost every elite hockey player has gone through several stages in their hockey career. Many of these stages are based on the age of the player while others are based on skill level. Although you may have a dream of playing in the NHL there are several different ways to accomplish that dream. Not many people make a straight line to the NHL. Here is a quick review of the different levels of hockey that any one goaltender may progress through. Each review will give the pros and cons associated with each. level

- **Midget “AA”**
 - Pros: -still a good level, good option for the first year Midget goaltender
 - stay at home, finish education
 - more skill development, less pressure
 - more playing time
 - Cons: -less skill, many of the athletes play other sports as well
 - less scouting
 - less structure
 - less quality coaching
- **Midget “AAA” (SMAAAHL)**
 - Pros: -more scouting
 - some better coaching
 - more structure, more professional atmosphere
 - more practices, almost every day
 - save on equipment, some teams provide some equipment
 - Either: -press
 - pressure
 - travel
 - Cons: -away from home, less social life away from hockey
 - the cost is higher
 - education may lag if you let it
- **Junior “B” (PJHL)**
 - Pros: -older players, many have played Midget “AAA” or higher
 - higher level(South)
 - cost is low
 - save on equipment
 - some affiliation to Jr. “A”
 - corporate sponsors
 - some better coaching

- more fun
- Either: -press
- trades
- Cons: -not heavily scouted
- bad influences
- bad organizations
- coaching is not always good
- less structure
- schooling
- **Junior “A” (SJHL, BCHL, AJHL, MJHL, SIJHL)**
- Pros: -costs even less money, may get paid
- great hockey
- link to WHL, college, and pro
- coaching
- travel/life experiences
- improve communication
- well structured
- scouting
- more developmental, teams play 60+ games/season
- teams pay for university classes
- Either: -press
- pressure
- trades
- Cons: -schooling is harder to finish with a busy schedule
- influences(drinking, girls, peer pressure)
- less social life. Sacrifices
- treated as a commodity
- **Major Junior (WHL, CHL)**
- Pros: -quickest way to the NHL
- players get paid
- better training
- professional structure
- college incentive
- reffing
- highly scouted
- excellent coaching
- 70+ games/season
- Either: -press
- pressure
- Cons: -loss of NCAA elig.
- distance from home
- schooling is hard to keep up with busy schedule
- treated like a commodity
- developmental pressure

-external influences(drinking, girls, peer pressure)

Looking at post Junior:

- **College (ACAC)**

Pros: -mix of technical or grad schools
-high level hockey, can still move on to university or minor pro
-less academic penalties
-eligible for 4 years
-schooling is generally good
-less travel
-set schedule
-less entrance requirements
-can get some scholarship money
-some funding for equipment

Cons: -less academic penalties
-less funding than university or NCAA
-lower than top CIS, NCAA teams
-no full scholarships
-expensive to live in big cities and go to school
-must manage time well
-less teams

- **University CIS**

Pros: -equal or better than some minor pro
-great education
-better scholarship money
-more funding
-set schedule
-lots of travel
-excellent coaching
-treatment of players is good-excellent
-5 years eligibility
-equipment paid for
-stay in Canada!

Cons: -almost no full scholarships, except RMC
-time management must be mastered
-academic penalties
-stricter entrance requirements
-less parity between teams

- **NCAA**

Pros: -partial to full scholarships
-set schedule
-lots of fan/media support
-lots of travel
-a lot of pro scouting, increasing NHL interest

- treated like royalty, lots of funding
- schooling is generally good
- Cons: -still expensive if you are not on a full scholarship
- more academic surveillance
- schooling can be sporadic
- time management is always an issue
- must take SAT, and register with NCAA Clearinghouse
- external pressures

While it is nice to make it to as high a level as possible, goaltenders need to make a decision, on where they will play, that is well thought out and informed. Your playing level, age and the level you wish to play at will determine where you should play. You need to ask yourself some tough but important questions. What will the living arrangements be? What will this do for my education? What will be the cost? How much ice time will I get? Among many other questions

Many young goaltenders have made the jump from Bantam or one year of Midget into Junior "A" or the WHL. Sometimes it is better to stay at a lower level to insure that you get more playing time. You need to ask whether practicing and hardly playing with the big boys is as good for your development as staying back a level and getting a lot more ice time. There are always developmental concerns when jumping up a level of elite hockey ahead of your age bracket. Even if a coach "promises" a spot or lots of ice time you need to examine the situation as fully as possible. Not all experiences are created equal. In the end, you need to know what your options are for goal setting and in case of any setback.

Remember: One setback does not end a hockey career. Perseverance is a virtue all goalies need to embrace.