

# ATC Article Series – Article #1



## Future hockey options - where to play?



Many parents and athletes often ask me, "What is the best route for my son/daughter to take in hockey?" The answer is not a simple one as there are many questions to factor in when making this decision. Does your son/daughter want to continue with their education or do they want to make hockey a career or do they want both? Did your son or daughter physically develop earlier than most other athletes their age? Has there been Western Hockey League (WHL) interest? Are they drafted by a WHL team? Have they played on elite summer and or winter teams? Are they willing to leave home at a young age? There are two major pathways that an athlete can choose with the first being playing JR A hockey and the second option being playing in the WHL. So let's examine the two (2) choices in a little more detail.

The first choice is to play JR A tier 2 hockey (I.E. BCHL/AJHL). This option does not close any doors on advancing your hockey career or your education. Playing JR A gives you exposure to NCAA schools, WHL scouts and NHL scouts as well. There are no rules about playing in the WHL after you play JR A. The game and practice schedule are not as demanding in Jr. A so there is a better opportunity to put more emphasis on education. Jr. A is definitely the safer route to travel and it leaves all your options available to you.

The second choice is to play Major JR Hockey (WHL). This option prepares you the best for playing pro hockey. The travel, schedule and off ice demands mimic a typical professional season. The WHL allows you great exposure to the NHL and to CIS (Cdn Univ. schools) and with the educational program that the WHL has in place you still have the ability to go to school after you are done your JR career. The WHL is not for the faint hearted, it is very much a business. The risk/reward ratio is very high in the WHL; I have seen this league help careers springboard to the next level as well as nosedive into a distant memory.

The best decision that I ever made was to finish my degree while playing at the University of Lethbridge (CIS). Everyone wants to play in the NHL but very few actually get to, life after hockey starts much too soon for many athletes and as the old adage goes, "**failing to prepare is preparing to fail!**" The pro hockey world was waiting for me with open arms AFTER I finished my Bachelor of Arts Degree (it is hanging on my wall today!). The fact that I finished my degree and that I was a little older and more mature helped me focus on hockey and play very well. Every athlete is going to take a different route to their own destination, make sure your choices support your strengths as an athlete and as a person. The game of hockey has taught me how to be a well rounded integral part of society. I owe most of my off ice success to the fact that I played competitive hockey at a very high level; even after the last game is played hockey will impact your life in a positive manner off the ice.

You may not have a clearer picture of what you want to do after reading this but at least you will have more information that will help you make your decision! Just remember to take your time and do what is best for you, not anyone else!

Until next time,

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