



Santa Clara Valley Hockey Association

# BLACKHAWKS

February, 2015  
www.blackhawks.org

## Hockey Talk

Q&A with the Blackhawks Director of Hockey Operations



The January 2015 edition covered the topic of Junior hockey at the highest levels... the chat continues....

**Q: So the top Juniors leagues in North America are the USHL, OHL, WHL and QMJHL. Are there other tiers of Junior hockey?**

A: Yes. Second Tier (Tier II) US Juniors is represented by the North American Hockey League (NAHL), which operates a 24-team league throughout the Midwest, with some reach into Texas, the Northern Plains, and all the way to Alaska. The NAHL competes with its Canadian counterpart "Minor Junior" or "Junior B" hockey, and is essentially provincial hockey. Junior B in Canada is made up of the British Columbia Hockey League, the Alberta Hockey League, the Saskatchewan Hockey League, etc. Some of these Junior B leagues are very strong. Typically, the NAHL would fit right about in the middle of the various Canadian Junior B provincial leagues. The goal of the typical NAHL player is to get to the USHL, where substantial opportunity usually waits for College and Pro hockey. NAHL alumni in the NHL include Thomas Vanek, John Scott, Brandon Saad, George Parros, Craig Anderson, Ben Bishop, and former Santa Clara Blackhawks Ryan Miller ('80).

The next level of Junior hockey in the US is the Tier III, where it gets a bit crazy. There are currently 8 USA Hockey-sanctioned Tier III leagues in the country, and a couple more pretty popular leagues operating outside of USA Hockey. Tier III leagues include the NA3HL, which is a large league covering the Midwest and the northern Great Plains and feeds directly into the Tier II NAHL; the Minnesota Jr. Hockey League, which receives massive input from Minnesota High School Hockey; the Metropolitan Junior Hockey League, which covers the Atlantic states; the Eastern Hockey League, which covers New England; and the North Pacific Hockey League, which covers the Pacific Northwest. These Tier III leagues range from 6 teams to several dozen teams per league, and the quality of hockey ranges from just below that of Tier II, down to what might be very, very, very top end Beer League hockey.

The Tier III US leagues that we probably hear most about locally are the USPHL, and the WSHL. The WSHL operates a 29-team league ranging across the entire Western US with

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## One Timers



- **Peewee A** went undefeated in round robin play at the Arizona Cactus Cup over MLK weekend and made it to the semi-finals in the President's Day tournament in Littleton, Colorado. The team is working hard towards earning a playoff berth in NorCal.
- The **Midget 16A** Team headed down to San Diego for President's Day weekend for the CA State Winter Games. In January the team worked on team building at Sunol Paintball...highly recommend it, everyone had a blast! Last month the team also beat Oakland 6-1 pushing us into a contender position for the Norcal Playoffs. The team is aiming to hold on to it!
- **Squirt B** headed to the Cal State Games in San Diego for President's Day weekend and have a 11-3 record on the season losing only to Lake Tahoe. The team is waiting to participate in the future sharks intermission shootout at the SAP center.
- **Peewee AA** competed well against some tough Canadian teams at the Arizona Cactus Cup over MLK weekend and went 2-1 in their final CAHA weekend to finish 3<sup>rd</sup> in the CAHA standings out of 14 teams.
- **Bantam AA** traveled to Minnesota over the MLK weekend and, in their final CAHA weekend went 2-0-2 to make the Top 8 out of 19 teams.
- The **Mites** recently to Lake Tahoe for exhibition games and had fun doing some team building events at Lakeland Village.



Squirt B Team

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6 California teams including some tied to local youth clubs including the San Diego Gulls (Jr. Gulls), Valencia Flyers (Jr. Flyers), and the Fresno Monsters (Jr. Monsters). The WSHL rosters read like a who's-who of California youth hockey alumni. Our own Doug Gutierrez ('95) plays for the Southern Oregon Spartans of the WSHL and was named Player of the Week in the WSHL earlier this season (see Junior Player Profile)! The WSHL hosts a huge showcase in Vegas each season with the goal of advancing players to the Tier II NAHL.

The USPHL is other Tier III US league of local interest, though its based on the East Coast. The United States Premier Hockey Leagues (USPHL) are a dizzying array of Tier III Junior leagues. The interesting west coast tie-in with the USPHL is they also run youth hockey leagues at the Midget 16 AAA and 18 AAA levels that are meant to help conduit youth players directly to Juniors. The Jr. Sharks 16 AAA and 18 AAA teams participate in the USPHL as a youth teams. Former Blackhawks Alex Lofink ('97) plays for the Jr. Bruins in the USPHL.

So, to recap: In general, the USHL (Tier I) is a ticket to D1 College hockey, and all the various Tier III US Junior leagues are possible routes to D3 College hockey. Tier II NAHL sits in between. Vertical movement through US Juniors can be both upward or downward, and hopefully players can land themselves a College or Pro opportunity by the time they age out of Juniors at age 21.

### **Q: How does a player get to play Juniors?**

A: Getting to Juniors occurs via formal drafting at the higher levels or simply direct contact from Juniors coaches. A player's first shot at getting drafted is at the end of the Bantam Major season (2<sup>nd</sup> year Bantam) into the WHL (Canadian Major Junior). This is the youngest a player can be drafted into Juniors and is pretty lofty territory for California kids as the WHL drafts 90%+ Canadian

players. Former Blackhawks Robby Jackson ('97), Patrick Khoderenko ('98), and Dylan Dix ('98) were all recently drafted by WHL teams. The next shot for youth players wanting to move to Juniors are the USHL and NAHL drafts, which are first available for players completing their first year of Midget 16s. These two leagues continue supplemental drafts of 17 and 18 year-olds after they finish the draft of 16 year-olds every season. The WHL and USHL draft picks tend to overlap quite a bit, with the emphasis much higher on US-born players for the USHL. Not surprisingly, Robby, Patrick, and Dylan were all drafted into the USHL also.

Some of the Tier III leagues like the NA3HL will draft and snatch up handfuls of players from NorCal and SoCal 18 AA and AAA teams every year. Other Tier III leagues like the WSHL and USPHL will directly recruit Santa Clara Blackhawks 16 AA and 18 AA players after watching them play. Alex Lofink was directly recruited to the USPHL from our Blackhawks 16 AA team, and Doug Gutierrez actually started out with our 18 AA team before being asked to make the jump to the WSHL. Last December, Justin Alonzo, our Director of Coaches and 18 AA coach, took his 18 AA team to a tournament on the East Coast and we got an email a couple weeks later from a USPHL coach who had scouted our 18 AA games and wanted contact info from two of our 18 AA players that impressed him.

Bottom line regarding transitions to Juniors - If you're good enough, someone will ask you to play Juniors. You don't need a former NHL player as a coach, or a heavy 5-figure bill for a season of hockey if you're good enough. So who will the Blackhawk '99 players be that will make the jump to Juniors? Which '00s? '01s, '02s, '03s....? It will be exciting to see! For now, if you have a young player, put them in a Santa Clara Blackhawks jersey and tell them to go out and work hard on their skating at practice and good things will happen at Juniors.



# SUMMERHAWKS 2015 SPRING HOCKEY

- 6-week Spring Program (mid-April – Memorial Day)
- Squirt through Midget
- Skill Development & Strong Fundamentals
- Game Reading Ability
- Valuable Tournament Experience

## **Coaches will include:**

Shaun Collins, Eric Pane,  
Jorge Murillo, Elliot Chung,  
Steve Gutierrez, Randy Stewart,  
Mike Mendez

## Summer Team Tryouts March 22, 2015

Times/Location to be announced



Junior Player Profile



Doug Gutierrez played with the Blackhawks starting as a PeeWee Major, and his team won the NorCal Championship. He played his Bantam years on Blackhawk teams that won back to back State Championships. He played on the Blackhawks as a Midget AA at 16 and 18. Doug was drawn to Juniors because he wants to play college hockey. In talking with college recruiters it was recommended that he play a year or two of Junior hockey. He tried out and was offered a spot last season with the Fresno Monsters. In the middle of the season he was traded to the Southern Oregon Spartans. This season the Spartans hired a new head coach who had watched Doug play last year and offered him a spot on this year's team. The current team was formed based on recruitment and they did not have a tryout. Doug's father, Blackhawk's Bantam coach Steve Gutierrez states he wasn't a fan of Junior hockey primarily because he didn't know much about it. Now that he knows more about it, he sees the benefits and offers the following advice for parents interested in going down this path: "Educate yourself. Talk to Junior coaches but mainly try to talk to parents of Junior players. Every league and every team has good things and drawbacks. Make sure the teams you are talking to are the right fit for what the player wants to do, whether it be to play in college or play higher level hockey, etc."



**2015-16 TRYOUTS**

**Tier II - May 15-18**  
**Travel A/B - June 5-7**

**Congratulations to the following Blackhawks Tier teams for making CAHA Playdowns!!**

**Pee wee AA**

**Bantam AA**

**Midget 18AA**

*Pee wee AA and Bantam AA Playdowns will take place at San Jose. Midget 18AA will play in Simi Valley. Check out the schedules here:*

<http://caha.com/view.pl?p=playdown/2015/index.htm>



**Did you know?**

*The top 8 teams of each Tier II division make it to Playdowns for a chance to compete for the State Championship.*

*In 2012-13 the Blackhawks PWAA were State Champions!!*



Mites



Pee wee AA



**Bantam Checking Clinics!**

**Dates & Times Announced Soon**



**Spirit Wear Coordinator (2 year term)**

Duties include: handling sales at tryouts and Tahoe; keeping inventory and ordering ; Create and update ordering forms.

Contact Amber Baer ([baerftn@aol.com](mailto:baerftn@aol.com))

