

The Role of Universities in the Development of Hockey

Lenard Kotylo
Society for International Hockey Research

On June 4, 2012, at the “Hockey On The Border” conference in Buffalo, Paul Kelly, Director of College Hockey Incorporated for USA Hockey observed that the National Hockey League (NHL) had given \$8 million per year to USA Hockey. In turn the NHL allocated \$1 million to College Hockey Incorporated to attract top hockey prospects to attend universities in the United States. Mr. Kelly also indicated that the NHL funded Canadian major junior hockey league team operators to the extent of \$9 million per year for their development of hockey talent. When Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly of the NHL was asked about those numbers at the Hockey Summit in Toronto in August 2010, he would not confirm that these figures were precise, and indicated that one should talk to Paul Kelly about the subject. Whatever the case, it appears that the NHL is paying College Hockey Inc. and major junior hockey to compete against each other as a way of attracting top hockey talent. The best players would then graduate to the NHL, the pinnacle of the hockey family.

One significant incentive that Canadian major junior teams use in recruitment is university scholarship money. For each year that a junior player plays for his team, he receives about one year of university tuition. The overage player is thus able to get most of his university education paid for. While studying at a Canadian university, the skilled junior player is capable of playing for the university hockey team. Consequently, Canadian university hockey (and education) can lure players to and from major junior

teams. This system enhances the talent level of university teams, while universities assist in attracting players to major junior hockey teams for their development.

The primary role of U.S. and Canadian universities is no longer to provide athletes a higher education, it would seem, but rather to develop hockey talent for the NHL. That is the role of universities today within the hockey family.

This proposition is not far-fetched. Take the example of Adam Oates, a centre developed at RPI University in Troy, New York who went on to a thousand point career in the NHL, playing for various teams including St. Louis and Washington. He became a coach in the NHL with Washington and has been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. Oates is not an isolated case, even on his own college team. Another RPI forward Joe Juneau scored over five hundred points in ten years playing for teams including Boston, Washington and Montreal, while RPI goaltender Darren Puppa had a 15 year NHL career with Buffalo, Toronto and Tampa Bay.

The production of NHL players by U.S. universities developed in earnest in the early 1970s. The creation of the World Hockey Association, (WHA), which operated from 1972 to 1979, meant that more teams required players. The competition for players between the NHL and WHA, and the expansion of the NHL to fourteen teams from six, created opportunities for the use of U.S. college talent. The WHA sought free agents from non-traditional sources, seeking out players who were not locked into contracts with NHL teams and their farm clubs. In the search for players professional teams were increasingly willing to look at college hockey talent. This trend increased as collegiate talent proved successful in pro hockey.

Prior to 1967, Canadian junior hockey teams operated as development farm clubs for NHL teams. Professional teams affiliated with and took the players from specific junior hockey clubs. In those early years only about 5% of junior players travelled to Canadian universities and about 40% of the junior players would graduate to professional hockey. This is no longer the case today when about 90% of the players on university teams have a junior hockey background. Moreover, the transformation of U.S. college hockey into a development base for the NHL was enhanced by the introduction of a rule by the NCAA in the 1970s that major junior hockey teams in Canada were to be considered professional since the junior teams paid their players a monthly stipend. What this meant was that young talented Canadian players had to choose either the U.S. college or major junior pathway. They could not do both. Accordingly, talented players would select U.S. universities instead of the traditional junior teams choice, and colleges began the role of developing hockey talent good enough to reach the NHL.

The development role of universities was not confined to hockey players but included coaches as well. In the 1970's a number of college trained hockey coaches were able to transition to NHL positions. Ned Harkness from Cornell University became coach and general manager of the Detroit Red Wings. Clare Drake from the University of Alberta went on to coach Edmonton of the WHA. Tom Watt from the University of Toronto won the coach of the year award in the NHL with the Winnipeg Jets, and also coached the Toronto Maple Leafs. This pattern has continued. Wisconsin coach Bob Johnson won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

College trained players also became coaches. Mike Keenan, a St. Lawrence University and University of Toronto player, won championships as a coach with the

University of Toronto and Rochester of the American League before he embarked on a lengthy NHL career which led to a Stanley Cup with the New York Rangers. Detroit's coach, Mike Babcock, followed a similar path. He was a player at McGill University, and coached a Canadian University championship with the University of Lethbridge. Harry Neale, a University of Toronto player, coached with Minnesota of the WHA and Vancouver of the NHL. University coaches also brought to the NHL the concepts of set play systems and assistant coaches.

The current university function as a developer for the highest level of hockey competition is a change from the early years of hockey. At the beginning of hockey history, the universities were the highest level of hockey in Canada. McGill University students participated in the first fully recorded hockey game in Montreal on February 3, 1875, formed one of the earliest hockey teams in 1877, and participated in the Montreal Winter Carnivals from 1883 which prompted the exposure of the game of hockey to a wide audience. McGill was the first Winter Carnival winner. Universities, as pre-existing sporting organizations, adopted the game of hockey, and were among the first groups to play hockey in their respective cities. For example, the first Kingston, Ontario hockey game took place between Queen's University and Royal Military College circa 1885.

Universities along the eastern seaboard were the early incubators for hockey development in the United States. Johns Hopkins University played games in Baltimore in about 1895. In 1894-95, Malcolm Chace and Arthur Foote led a touring Ivy league ice polo team which picked up the game of hockey in Ontario and brought it back to Yale and Harvard. An Ivy League of hockey was ultimately formed. This was significant

because the teams supplied players for the St. Nicholas Club and other teams in the New York Metropolitan League. In 1895, the University of Minnesota played Winnipeg.

The longest continuously surviving hockey institution, the Ontario Hockey Association (OHA), was formed in 1890. Three university teams participated in the creation of that league and were among its first teams. During the 1890s university teams dominated the OHA. (Osgoode Hall won the league championship in 1894 and 1898; Queen's University was victorious in 1895 through 1897 and again in 1899.) After the Stanley Cup was introduced for competition, Queen's University challenged for the Cup on three occasions, in 1895, 1899, and 1906, and were Allan Cup champions in 1909. Queen's also went on U.S. tours, introducing the Canadian game of hockey to Pittsburgh in 1896. This was important because Pittsburgh became the centre of the Western Pennsylvania Hockey League (1899-1902), the first league with teams that paid their players. That league was the precursor of the International Hockey League of 1904-07, a prominent professional league.

In the first 25 years of hockey development, then, universities were at the highest level of hockey, providing players, encouraging the spread of the game, and forming leagues to institutionalize hockey from year to year. The following lists demonstrate the place of university hockey in the early hockey family:

Canadian University Leagues

- 1903 -- Canadian Intercollegiate Hockey Union
- McGill
 - Queen's
 - Toronto

- 1910 -- Maritimes Intercollegiate Athletic Association
 - Dalhousie
 - St. Francis
 - King's College
 - Acadia
 - New Brunswick
 - Mount Allison

- 1920 -- Western Intercollegiate Athletic Union
 - Alberta
 - Manitoba
 - Saskatchewan

College Hockey players operated at the highest level of competence and many went on to play for the major Canadian teams. Those who were inducted into the Hall of Fame included:

<u>Player</u>	<u>University Team</u>	<u>Major Hockey Team</u>
Fred Scanlon	McGill	Montreal Shamrocks
Arthur Farrell	McGill	Montreal Shamrocks
Harry Trihey	McGill	Montreal Shamrocks
Graham Drinkwater	McGill	Montreal
Marty Walsh	Queen's	Ottawa
Lester Patrick	McGill	Victoria
Frank Patrick	McGill	Vancouver
Billy Gilmour	McGill	Ottawa
Frank McGee	Ottawa	Ottawa

As incubators and developers, the universities began hockey teams for women at the end of the 19th century. They included:

- McGill (1894)
- Queen's (1896)
- Toronto (1904)

-- Saskatchewan (1913)

The growth of professional hockey leagues during the first decade of the 20th century began to separate universities from the highest level of hockey, although university teams continued to participate in junior, senior and in city leagues for men and women. In junior competition, Loyola College in 1920 and McGill in 1923 participated in the playoffs for the Canadian championship trophy, the Memorial Cup. In 1923 the University of Manitoba was the ultimate winner. University senior teams were very successful in the decade of the 1920's as well, often competing for the national championship trophy, the Allan Cup. In the Ontario playoffs in 1921, for example, the eventual Allan Cup champion University of Toronto defeated a Sudbury team which had five players, including Shorty Green and Redvers Green, who would comprise the core of the future New York Americans of the NHL. In 1923, the University of Saskatchewan lost in the finals to the powerhouse Toronto Granites, who had won the Allan Cup in 1922, and who would win the 1924 Olympic Gold Medal. In 1921, the University of British Columbia won the B.C. Province Senior A Championship, the Savage Cup. In addition to those teams, university teams won the Allan Cup in both 1927 (Toronto Varsity Grads) and 1928 (Manitoba).

The stock market crash of 1929, the development of minor professional hockey leagues and the NHL expansion of 1926, curtailed hockey talent travelling to the university teams. However, occasional Canadian University players did travel to the NHL:

<u>Player</u>	<u>University</u>	<u>NHL Team</u>
Dave Trotter	Toronto	Montreal Maroons

Jack Gelineau	McGill	Boston
Nels Crutchfield	McGill	Montreal
Mike Ridley	Manitoba	Washington
Randy Gregg	Alberta	Edmonton
Al MacAdam	PEI	Minnesota
Steve Rucchin	Western	Anaheim
Bob Berry	Sir George Williams	Montreal

University players have been particularly prominent at the international level. University players have been members of Olympic and World Tournament Teams as indicated below:

- Canada's Varsity Grads Gold Medal 1928
- U.S. Gold Medal 1960
- U.S. Gold Medal 1980
- U.S. World Champion 1933
- Father Bauer Canadian Teams 1964 and 1968
- Dave King's Canadian National Teams 1980's

Universities have also been able to provide a venue for women's hockey, to allow it to continue during periods when few games were played and few teams existed, especially after World War II. On today's international women's hockey teams, most of the players come from college hockey backgrounds. The NCAA Rule, Title IX, required U.S. universities with men's hockey teams to make a women's team available. The universities thus provided a setting for women to play, develop, and advance to the Olympic hockey level.

Where, then, do universities fit in the hockey family? Universities have provided a framework for the continuation of women's hockey. They have produced players for

international competition and serve to develop hockey players for the NHL. University coaches and players have been among the best in the NHL. Universities remain active participants in hockey development, as they were in the 19th century. The hockey World has expanded. Professional teams now feature the highest level of hockey, but the universities contribute players, coaches and ideas which allow professional hockey to flourish.

Select Bibliography:

1. J.W. Fittell, *Hockey's Captains, Colonels & Kings* (Erin: Boston Mills Press, 1987).
2. George King, *Hockey Year Book 1924* (Toronto: George King, 1924).
3. Lenard Kotylo, "The Impact of Junior Players On University Hockey, 1963 to 1990", *The Hockey Research Journal*, Vol. VII, (Fall, 2003) 77-80.
4. Brian McFarlane, *Proud Past, Bright Future. One Hundred Years of Canadian Women's Hockey* (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1994).
5. Szymon Szemberg and Andrew Podnicks, (eds.) *World of Hockey, Celebrating a Century of the IIHF* (Bolton: Fenn Publishing Company Limited, 2007)
6. Scott Young, *100 Years of Dropping The Puck. A History of the OHA* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989).