



The Minnesota Way

By Tom Gullen

Saturday night the college hockey season ended with UMass taking home its first National Championship. This was impressive considering the best player in this recruiting class, Cale Makar, now makes his living playing quite well for the Colorado Avalanche.

However, what was more impressive was the makeup of the four teams in the Frozen Four: three teams from Minnesota: St. Cloud State, Minnesota State, and Minnesota-Duluth. A fourth Minnesota team, University of Minnesota, was eliminated in the quarterfinals by Minnesota State. Of the 80 players in The Frozen Four, 55% (45 players) were from Minnesota.

Starting with the 16 teams in D1 College playoffs over 110 players were from Minnesota. While many came from big "Hockey Towns" like Edina, Minnetonka etc., five came from the small town of Hermantown, a "suburb" of Duluth.

How do they do it?

- Of those 110, 104 were multi-sport players
- 5 of the last 6 teams in playoffs are Minnesota colleges
- 3 of the 4 Frozen Four teams are from Minnesota

Between periods of the Minnesota vs. Minnesota State game, the announcer asked the head of Minnesota youth hockey what the secret was? He said:

- Minnesota offers cost effective community-based hockey all over the state
- In many cases there isn't a charge for younger kids to play in their community
- High school hockey is huge in the state and kids aspire to play it
- High school state finals draw 18,000 spectators
- Almost all kids play multiple sports
- Kids play with their classmates
- Minnesota has coaches who have played the game and they come back and coach teams for free
- Our players give back

Here in Illinois, and in most of the United States, youth hockey does not follow the Minnesota Hockey community-based model. Kids in Minnesota play for the program where they reside. However, there are exceptions and the WHC is one of them.

Back when the club was started, our founders were clear that the club would serve our area: Winnetka, Glencoe, Northfield, and Kenilworth. This would be what was then called our "district" with the Amateur Hockey Association of Illinois (AHL). The goal was to provide area High Schools (at that time New Trier East and New Trier West) with players. Every hockey club had a district to draw its players from. Later AHL changed this rule in favor of an open geography model.

However, the WHC stayed true to that original mission. We continue to provide New Trier with the majority of its players. This year's State Championship team featured 15 Winnetka players that played here through the end of their Bantam years.

We think listening to our neighbors in Minnesota provides our club with a model that will provide well-trained, well-rounded hockey players than can go on to successful High School careers. While the landscape of youth hockey has changed significantly, debatably not for the better, we have stayed true to what our founders envisioned 50 years ago.