

BCHL announces finalized franchise agreements and integration with five Alberta-based teams

February 1, 2024

The BC Hockey League (BCHL) has announced that five Alberta-based teams have signed franchise agreements and are now officially members of the league, as of yesterday.

Prior to this, the teams had agreed to terms on a framework of what joining the BCHL would look like.

Effective immediately, the Blackfalds Bulldogs, Brooks Bandits, Okotoks Oilers, Sherwood Park Crusaders and Spruce Grove Saints are members of the BCHL.

“We are pleased to officially welcome these five franchises into the fold as members of our league,” said Chris Hebb, Chief Executive Officer of the BCHL. “All five are strong organizations from great communities and we look forward to the immediate boost they will give our league. We were encouraged by their belief in our model and think that adding these teams will strengthen the development of all our players.”

The five teams will engage in competition with each other for the remainder of the season and will eventually crown an Alberta champion. Following the conclusion of the BCHL Playoffs, there will be an opportunity for the champion from Alberta to meet the champion from B.C. in a year-end competition.

“With the unfortunate situation the Alberta teams have faced in recent weeks with having games cancelled in their previous league, it was imperative to us to get these players back on the ice in meaningful competition,” said BCHL Commissioner Steven Cocker. “This five-team schedule and postseason will give these athletes the chance to get in a full set of games for the remainder of the year, which is the most important thing to us.”

BCHL-Alberta FAQ

Why not wait until the end of the season to make this announcement?

The BCHL and the five Alberta-based teams wanted to be as transparent as possible once we had come to terms. The Alberta teams did not want to act in bad faith towards their former league mates by withholding the information that they intended on joining the BCHL.

Why did the BCHL make an announcement related to this on Jan. 20?

When the information that this was happening got out to the public, we felt we needed to be transparent with our decision.

Were the Alberta teams caught off guard by the repercussions from their former league?

The Alberta teams were not surprised that there was a negative reaction, but since they were members in good standing until the end of the hockey season, they believed they should have been able to proceed with the season as scheduled. That being said, the teams are looking forward to getting back to meaningful competition within the BCHL.

Is the BCHL recruiting teams from other leagues to join them?

In this situation, all five Alberta-based teams reached out to the BCHL to communicate interest in joining the league. The BCHL has not initiated any conversations with teams from other leagues on this subject.

How does this move benefit the BCHL?

Adding five teams of this calibre that are already well-established in their communities is an instant benefit for the league on and off the ice. These programs attract high-end players already and the move to the BCHL should only help in that regard.

How does this move benefit the Alberta teams?

This was about the players. The BCHL is the biggest producer and developer of NCAA Division I players in Canada and has more Division I committed players than all other Canadian junior leagues combined. These teams now have the benefit of operating outside of the Hockey Canada system and are no longer restrained by their roster regulations.

With five new teams from out of province, has the BCHL abandoned its commitment to B.C. born and raised players?

The BCHL will ensure that any athlete from B.C. that has the potential to play college hockey will come through our league. We currently have a minimum of five homegrown players per team and this has not changed since we were under Hockey Canada.

What will the roster regulations be for the Alberta teams?

This will be announced ahead of the 2024-25 season.

What will the divisional alignment look like with the five Alberta teams?

This will be announced ahead of the 2024-25 season.

Is the BCHL looking at adding more markets in Alberta, other provinces or in the United States?

As of right now, there are no immediate plans to add any other teams.