



COLLEGE HOCKEY DIRECTORY

Find Your Opportunity To Play College Hockey

NCAA VS. ACHA

Unlike many other collegiate athletics, college hockey programs compete in two different leagues - the NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association), and the ACHA (American Collegiate Hockey Association).

Since playing hockey at the college level is a goal of many young players, it is helpful to sort out the differences and similarities of the two leagues so that you can pursue your college hockey career with the right goals in mind. In truth, both leagues provide quality opportunities and the chance for hockey players to compete at the intercollegiate level, but they share a few major differences which should be addressed as you determine the best choice for you.

The fundamental differences between the NCAA and ACHA are simple and concise: NCAA schools can provide athletic scholarships for hockey, and these schools are also the most competitive. While the prospect of scholarship money beckons many athletes, there are not many NCAA teams in this country. The reason is two-fold: Fielding an NCAA team is costly and team coaches and recruiters face many restrictions and team guidelines. There are a total of 220 NCAA college hockey teams, and only 93 of those offer men's and women's athletic scholarships. Due in large part to the increased interest and participation in American ice hockey during the last two decades, the ACHA has grown exponentially and gives talented athletes a second option to compete at the collegiate level.

Another major difference between the two leagues centers around the player development process. The majority of NCAA hockey players have spent at least one year playing on Junior Hockey teams or as a post-graduate student in the prep school ranks. True freshmen are less commonly found on NCAA hockey rosters these days. In reality, most high school seniors that plan to attend college immediately after graduation will find they have a much better chance of earning a spot at an ACHA program than an NCAA program.

Recently, many ACHA Division 1 teams have increasingly started recruiting players with Junior Hockey experience. This is a trend which is likely to continue.

Another distinction between the two leagues is that the NCAA programs are considered varsity sports within the school's athletic department and must be funded completely by the institution. On the other hand, ACHA programs are considered student organizations or "clubs" and are only partially funded by the university, requiring students to pay a portion of the program cost. As noted, there are many more ACHA programs in this country; 401 total men's and women's teams, which is almost double the number of teams competing in the NCAA.

Some schools actually offer both NCAA and ACHA hockey programs, such as Adrian College and Northeastern University. They are just two examples of the multiple schools that offer both options. It is uncommon for player movement between rosters or leagues during the season, although it does happen on occasion. The NCAA and ACHA leagues are both members of USA Hockey and each crown a National Champion for their respective divisions.

If you are hoping to continue your hockey career in college, it is best to understand the options and research schools in both leagues in order to find the best fit. You will find that both the NCAA and ACHA leagues have quality hockey programs that provide challenging and competitive experiences players will value after graduation.