



Program Philosophy

U18 is the final stage of minor hockey. At this level, the pathway is designed to support players who are pursuing elite junior opportunities as well as those who are playing for the social and competitive enjoyment of "Hockey for Life."

The U18 level is the "Training to Win" stage. While development never stops, the focus shifts toward advanced team systems, high-level tactical execution, and leadership. For many, this is the culmination of their minor hockey career; for others, it is a stepping stone to Junior (A, B, or C) or Collegiate hockey.

The Community Tiering & Elite Structure

The U18 structure is the most diverse in minor hockey, offering three distinct streams:

- **Elite Stream (U18 AAA) NWCAA:** Governed by the Alberta Elite Hockey League (AEHL). This is the highest level of minor hockey in Canada. Teams play a 38-game regular season with full provincial travel.
- **Competitive Stream (U18 AA) NWCAA:** Also governed by the AEHL. This acts as the primary "feeder" for AAA and Junior programs.
 - Elite Tryouts typically begin in late August, prior to Community evaluations in September.
 - SMHA players trying out are required to pre-register with SMHA as well
 - If a player is released from Tryouts, they are asked to return to their community club
- **Community Stream (Tiers BC/NBC):** Managed by local associations like Springbank. This stream is further divided into:
 - **Body Checking (BC):** Tiers 1, 2 and 3 allow body checking.
 - **Non-Body Checking (NBC):** Tiers 1 and below (and specific NBC leagues) focus on competitive play without intentional body checking.

Player Pre-Skates (Aka Hockey Canada's Pathways Program)

- SMHA must offer open, no-cost pre-evaluation skates for all players as a part of Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development Model called Pathways.
- This program is designed to create a positive experience and to allow all players equal access to pre-evaluation ice times to prepare for SMHA's Player Placement Program (PPP) (evaluations).
- These pre-skates are optional, and all players are sorted into groups the week prior to PPP. These are planned sessions where the player will experience and practice the drills used at our PPPs
- At no time during these sessions will our players be evaluated.
- Please visit the Springbank Website under the Registration tab to see the program timeline
- Note: no ice times will be booked over the Labour Day long weekend (Friday to Monday)

SMHA Player Placement Program: PPP (aka Evaluations) & TEAM FORMATION

- U18 PPPs usually start after the Quadrant lease date published on Hockey Calgary's website (important dates)



- Please visit the Springbank Website under the Registration tab to see the program timeline and more information
- SMHA relies on volunteers to run our evaluations.
- Players must attend ALL evaluation skates they are assigned.
- The player will be assigned 4-5 sessions
- Players will be assigned a pinnie to wear and are required to check in at every session to receive it
- Players will now be evaluated in their designated position: goalie, forward and defence
- Players will be evaluated in their designated contact stream BC or NBC - note players will not be permitted to redesignate once evaluations have begun.
- Focus will be on gameplay as the primary evaluation metric
- U18 teams are tiered, where players are assessed during the evaluation process, so players are grouped with similarly skilled players
- U18 teams are tiered BC 1-3 and NBC 1-5 (Hockey Calgary Tiering system).
- U18 tiers usually have one team per tier, but the Hockey Calgary Grid dictates this tiering system in accordance with individual Association registration numbers, and some tiers may be doubled up, resulting in “sister teams.” A balancing game will be hosted prior to team announcements to ensure sister teams are balanced against each other
- As U18 teams are tiered based on skill, friend requests cannot be accommodated
- U18 teams begin practices within a few days after U18 PPPs have finished – usually early October

PRACTICE SCHEDULE

- No set schedule – will vary week to week during the season, usually between 1.5 per week and take place on weekdays and weekends
- Weekday (Monday to Friday) times can start as early as 6:00 pm, but most often weekday practices will start as late as 9:45 pm
- Weekend (Saturday & Sunday) times, while on occasion starting as early as 11:45 am, typically in the early afternoons or early evenings.
- Curfew for this age group to be off the ice is 11:00 pm week and weekend nights
- The general ice scheduling rule is that the younger age groups receive the earlier ice times and the older age groups receive the later ice times.
- There are many factors involved in ice scheduling, and we do our best to release the team schedules as far out as possible during the season
- U18 teams will be scheduled to have full ice when the ice demands allow, sharing with another U18 team when necessary; U15 and U18 take precedence for any full ice practices.
- Practices are scheduled at Springbank Park for all Seasons primarily, but can also be scheduled at the Edge and surrounding City of Calgary arenas

GAMES/TOURNAMENTS

Games

- All Hockey Calgary-sanctioned games are scheduled by Hockey Calgary in collaboration with SMHA Operations



SMHA U18 PROGRAM INFORMATION

- Details of the U18 Season Structure and Game Play are outlined in the annual [Hockey Calgary Season Structure and Game Play guidelines](#)
- Games are scheduled One for One: one game during the week, one game on the weekend, curfew to be off the ice on weekdays is 11:00 pm
- Home games are scheduled at Springbank Park for all Seasons primarily, but can also be scheduled at the Edge and surrounding City of Calgary arenas
- At the U18 level, the three-official system (one referee, two linespeople) becomes common in higher tiers to manage the increased speed and physicality of the game.
- SMHA U18 teams play city-wide and are no longer in the North/South system like the younger age groups

Tournaments

- Springbank provides all U18 teams with a “Home Away tournament.”
- Please visit the SMHA website for more information
- Away Tournaments are arranged and scheduled at the team level

TEAM CASH CALLS

- Requested by the team on a team-by-team basis
- Usually at the beginning of the season
- Average ranges from \$200-\$350 per player (but not limited to)
- The purpose is to cover team-related expenses such as exhibition games, tournaments, dryland training, team social events, team apparel, additional coaching equipment, etc.
- If affordability is a concern, please talk directly, in confidence, with your coach/team manager to work through options and/or a payment plan

COACHES

- Coaches are all Springbank volunteers, usually a parent of the players on the team, and we could not run our programs without them!
- Teams are permitted 5 coaches per team
- “On-ice help” is not allowed; only rostered coaches are permitted on the ice with the team
- Assistant Coaches must have at a minimum a valid Respect in Sport- Activity Leader certification and a valid Criminal Record Check (Police Information Check)
- Head Coaches are required to have the Hockey Alberta qualifications. These qualifications can be found on the [Hockey Alberta website under the Coach tab](#)
- All SMHA coaches must have the Hockey Alberta Safety qualifications, as per our internal policy
- All interested coaches must fill out an SMHA coach application form found on the Springbank website under the Coach tab.

OTHER VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- Volunteer roles are also available at the team level every season and can include manager, treasurer, tournament coordinator, jersey parent social coordinator, and official box coordinator, to name a few



- Note: “On-ice help” is not allowed; only rostered coaches to your player’s team are permitted on the ice with the team.

PLAYER EQUIPMENT

- Hockey Calgary’s equipment & care information:
<https://www.hockeycalgary.ca/resources/equipment-care>
- Used hockey equipment can be purchased at Play It Again Sports in West Hills
- New equipment can be purchased at various sports/athletic stores; however, Adrenalin Source for Sports, located at 9309 Macleod Trail South, is Springbank’s approved apparel provider and provides Springbank families with a discount

TEAM EQUIPMENT

- Springbank will provide every player two game jerseys (Home and Away), and players will need to receive one set of SMHA matching socks each season – additional or replacement socks can be purchased if needed
- All SMHA jerseys
 - Are SMHA property, and no name bars are allowed
 - NOT to be worn at practices
 - Are for games only
 - The Jerseys are to be handled by a parent volunteer, “Jersey Parent,” where they are handed out at the beginning of each game and retrieved at the end of each game.
- Jersey replacement cost is \$125 per jersey
- Team puck bags and first aid kits are available as well