



NATIONAL

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

— THE PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S HOCKEY LEAGUE GETS UNDERWAY



Enthusiasm is mounting as players, coaches, and prospects pack up for November training camps. They're readying for the January 2024 launch of the **Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL)**.

The league will have six teams. Three franchises will operate in Montreal, Toronto, and Ottawa. The other three will be U.S.-based. They are Boston, Minnesota, and New York.

The first season will have 24 games. Seasons will expand to 32 games in the future. Players will strut their stuff on everything from NHL-sized rinks to ice in minor hockey venues.

"This is an extraordinary opportunity to advance women's sports," said tennis legend and women's sports **advocate** Billie Jean King, who backed the

league's creation. She will help run it and says it will inspire a new generation of players.

LITTLE TIME TO PREP

The PWHL is working overtime to get the show on the road by January.

The to-do list is a long one. Team names and logos need to be chosen. Transportation must be organized. Schedules have to be set. Equipment must be readied.

"The thought of standing up one team in an existing league in six months is kind of nuts," said Stan Kasten, of the PWHL's advisory board. "Here we are trying to stand up six teams in a new league. Yet, we're going to do it. I've never felt more confident... that we are going to have our first games in January and our first season in 2024."

FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS

The formation of the league ends a period of instability in the pro women's hockey circuit. It's also a **testament** to the determination and grit of women who stood their ground.

DID YOU KNOW?

The PWHL unveiled its logo on October 24. It features crossed hockey sticks that help form a "W" against a purple background.

The PWHL can trace its roots back to the Premier Hockey Federation (PHF). It founded the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL) in 2015.

The NWHL was the first female hockey league to pay players. It lured many stars away from the Canadian Women's Hockey

DEFINITIONS

ADVOCATE: a person who supports or speaks in favour of somebody or of a public plan or action

PROFESSIONAL: describing the situation when someone is paid to participate in a sport or activity

TESTAMENT: something that serves as a sign or evidence of a specified fact, event, or quality



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League (CWHL), which didn't offer salaries. The CWHL folded in 2019 after 12 seasons.

Then, in its second season, the NWHL asked players to take a salary cut. That angered many of the women in the four-team organization. As a result, 200 top female players declared that they wouldn't take part in any North American league until they were properly paid. They also demanded necessary resources. They created a **union**, the Professional Women's Hockey Players' Association (PWHPA), to help push for these changes.

The tactics worked. Last June, new owners bought the PHF and its asset, the NWHL. The players' union hammered out an agreement with them. It guarantees minimum salaries of \$35,000 (US). Players also receive travel expenses, health insurance, pregnancy and parental leave, and other benefits.

THE FUN BEGINS

With these issues settled under one new league, the future appears bright for professional women's hockey.

The PWHL **draft** got underway in September and free-agent picks were announced. Fans eagerly followed the action.

Some big names? On the Canadian side, Ottawa asked Becca Gilmore to attend camp. Ms. Gilmore won a world championship with the U.S. national team last spring. And she scored six points in 11 games for the Boston Pride.

Ottawa also invited Mikyla Grant-Mentis. Ms. Grant-Mentis earned 21 points in 24 games with the Buffalo Beauts. As for goaltending, Toronto drafted Team Canada gold medallist Kristen Campbell.

TIME TO GET TO WORK

PWHL training camps start in mid-November after the Canadian and U.S. national teams compete in a Rivalry Series. It's one of the best match-ups in sport. USA Hockey and Hockey Canada started the Rivalry Series in 2018.

Training will likely run for several weeks to bring the 180 players attending up to speed. Many haven't played since the spring. It will be the first time the new coaches will get to see their developing teams in action.

THE BEST FROM AFAR

The new sports organization is not only drawing North America's best female players.

It's also attracting premier talent from Europe and Asia.

Dominika Lásková, a Czech national drafted by Montreal, is among them. She hopes to be a model for others in her country.

"I think it's great for the little girls back home to see that there is a possibility for them to play [alongside] the best players in the world," she said.

American forward Hilary Knight says she expects these players to change the game.

"I'm giddy about it just from a fan's perspective," she says. "We see it on the men's side. [But] you've never seen the hockey minds meet from different countries on the women's side."

SEEING THE ACTION

For now, PWHL games will just be streamed, but the league is hoping for regular TV coverage eventually. Teams will play some games outside their home cities, in NHL arenas in neutral territory or in cities without NHL franchises. Wherever they'll play, fans can't wait to see them.

"This is another step forward for the women who play professional hockey and the girls who dream of it every day," said league rep Johanna Boynton. ★

DEFINITIONS

DRAFT: a system for sports teams to choose new players

UNION: an organization of workers formed to protect the rights and interests of its members