

CHARTING NEW WATERS

By Patrick Donnelly

A LOT CAN CHANGE in 10 months. Never has that been truer than in men's college hockey.

Last November's CHL ruling turned college hockey upside down as programs clamor to add top talent from the Canadian major junior circuits (Ontario Hockey League, Western Hockey League, Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League) to their rosters for this coming season and beyond.

It didn't take long for the arms race to become full force, especially among bigger programs. Plenty of CHL products will be making their marks on college hockey this season for the likes of Penn State, Michigan State, Denver and North Dakota. Locally, schools including Boston University, Maine, New Hampshire, Providence and Vermont will feature former CHL players.

While some teams have moved swiftly, others, like college hockey's six Ivy League programs, have taken more cautious approaches as they wade into the waters.

"It hasn't made our job any simpler," said Yale assistant coach Rob O'Gara. "In the short term, for us, even before the rule change, we had our class for this coming fall pretty much set in stone. ... When it shifted, it wasn't like we were trying to fill holes, so I guess we didn't have to dive right in."

There are more players to scout than ever as the CHL ruling put 61 more rosters into the pool. Those are in addition to the typical feeders of prep school, high school and junior leagues like the USHL, BCHL, NCDC and NAHL.

"I think it's taken a little bit of a step back, trying to get everyone a bird's-eye view of the whole situation," Harvard assistant James Marcou said. "You have more players to look at, so it's just going to become more competitive."

Ivy League programs always have been in a unique position. Rigorous academic requirements in the admissions process are among the foremost differences between Ivies and other college hockey programs, along with the absence of athletic scholarships offered to student-athletes.



Ivy League faces unique challenge with CHL ruling

"We've always had a different niche, right?" Cornell associate head coach Sean Flanagan said.

So far, Harvard, Cornell and Princeton are the only Ivies to have a CHL product on the roster for this season.

The Crimson added Aidan Lane, who spent the previous three seasons with St. Andrew's College and played games in both the USHL and OHL last season. The Big Red brought in goalie Alexis Cournoyer out of the QMJHL's Cape Breton Eagles, while the Tigers added winger Matt Souliere, who spent most of last season in the OJHL but played 10 games for the OHL's Ottawa 67's.

Lane committed to Harvard in 2023, opting for the collegiate path over the OHL before the rule change. Souliere committed to Princeton before the rule change, too. Cournoyer announced his commitment to Cornell this past June.

Like Yale, the Big Red's incoming

class for this season essentially was already set, meaning they couldn't extend their CHL reach far beyond Cournoyer.

"There were a lot of other kids who just missed classes for us," Flanagan said. "They might be able to get into other schools, but they were missing certain classes to get into an Ivy League school. Then there were some who really had great grades and could have worked. We're a different animal in terms of our process. It's usually done a lot sooner."

"Some kids wanted to wait until the late spring, and we just can't get applications in that late for the next year."

Ivy League commitments out of the CHL for future classes already have increased.

Take Harvard, which added Alex Huang (Chicoutimi Saguenéens, QMJHL) to its pipeline, along with Jacob Xu (Kitchener Rangers, OHL), Ryder Cali (North Bay Battalion, OHL) and Luka Graziano (Flint Firebirds, OHL).

Brown landed Sheldon Rioux (Val d'Or Foreurs, QMJHL), while Cornell committed Cole Emerton (Barrie Colts, OHL), and Maddex Marmulak (Newfoundland Regiment, QMJHL).

Meeting academic standards

As major junior and college programs grapple with the new landscape, the academic piece for potential CHL recruits has been difficult to gauge for Ivy League coaches.

Recruiting older players in the CHL might be challenging for Ivies. There's the chance those players missed core academic requirements because they didn't need to potentially plan for college hockey when they initially chose the CHL path.

But coaches have been pleasantly surprised on the recruiting trail, so far.

"There's been a refreshing amount of programs that have their kids go to 'real' school, for lack of a better way of saying it," O'Gara said. "The online schools kill us. Our admissions are not flexible with that, especially for more than one year. ... That's the most difficult thing for us to navigate."

Marcou said, "The online school is an interesting piece, but in Canada and in Europe, there are some strong education systems. So, there are some players who

are a fit academically, probably more than people think. For us, we just have to identify the right kind of player who will be able to have the academic and hockey pieces at a high level. I don't think it's going to restrict us maybe as much as people think."

Along similar lines, Ivy coaches recognize the importance of ensuring that players who might be interested in playing for an Ivy League school are clear about the academic requirements, including grades, test scores and class requirements.

"If they have all those things, then they're certainly a viable candidate for any of the Ivy League schools," Marcou said.

It will be a major point of emphasis for many of the 2010s when communication can begin with high school sophomores on Jan. 1.

"It's important to get that message out there, especially to the families that have the Ivy League potentially on their radar," O'Gara said. "There's a lot of misinformation out there where, 'Hey, so-and-so team does this,' or, 'Just come here and do that with us.' It might close doors. That's been our biggest fight to fight."

Coaches hope the academic standard will rise and become more of a priority for CHL teams. Ivies consistently have brought in players from junior leagues like the USHL, BCHL and NAHL. Those should provide a model for the CHL.

"They had the online schools that, if a kid was still in 11th or 12th grade, they knew they could recruit that kid and have a plan for them if they could do online based upon the college they are committed to. A lot of teams had options to go to a brick and mortar school if a family or a college required that," Flanagan said.

That process is already beginning for some major junior programs.

"I think certainly going forward, there's going to be an emphasis from all programs, all teams on the education piece to make sure that players do stay eligible," Marcou said. "I've seen some major junior team teams try to make sure they have all their academic stuff handled on their end. The USHL does a good job with that, but it's kind of a new thing for maybe some of these major junior teams."

One recent Cornell commit, Declan Wotton (Windsor, Maine), is slated to play with Baie-Comeau Drakkar in the QMJHL this winter after playing 14-U and 15-U hockey with Seacoast Performance Academy.

As Flanagan put it, "We certainly need to know if a kid's going to go play some-



Phillips Andover forward Alex Theodore is committed to Dartmouth.

where, they're going to stay on track academically."

Offering stability

Following the COVID pandemic, a spike in transfer activity on top of fifth-year eligibility created a backlog in junior hockey. As programs added more experienced players to their rosters, incoming recruits' start dates were delayed.

The backlog should have naturally remedied when fifth-year eligibility ended last season, but the influx of talent from the CHL could continue the backlog in junior leagues like the USHL and BCHL. The transfer portal is likely to remain active as well.

"It comes down to the program and how they are recruiting," Flanagan said. "Some teams just pile on commits, and some teams don't. The ones that don't, there won't be a backlog. The ones that do, yeah, there'll be a backlog, and you already see enough of the decommitments, because there's just no room for a kid to come into school when they're ready to go to school."

There's a chance Ivy League programs can use the uncertainty to their advantage.

Ivies might be limited in how extensive their CHL reach might be in a given cycle due to the scrutiny placed on academics. They're also not overly active in the portal, either.

This offseason, Cornell added two defensemen in Michael Fisher (Westboro, Mass.) out of Northeastern and Luke Ashton out of Minnesota State. They're just the third and fourth players the Big Red

have added through the transfer portal during Flanagan's time with the program.

Dartmouth added goalie Emmett Croteau from Clarkson in 2024. Previously, Dartmouth's only other addition out of the portal was John Fusco (Westwood, Mass.), who transferred from Harvard in 2022. Yale's lone exception was defenseman Ryan Carmichael (Greenwich, Conn.), who transferred from Notre Dame in 2021. The Bulldogs have not utilized the portal since.

Brown, on the other hand, has been the exception in recent seasons, with six players on the 2025-26 roster who previously played college hockey elsewhere.

Historically, Harvard and Princeton have never added through the transfer portal. Dartmouth and Yale very rarely have. That's unlikely to change.

"It's based on the institution more than anything," Marcou said. "We'll always look at the portal in the background, but I don't think that's ever something we'll be diving into. That's not going to change for us at Harvard."

Yale, for example, has only seven admissions spots for the roster each season. Going into the portal would mean giving up one of those spots from an incoming first-year.

In O'Gara's eyes, commitments are a two-way street. The onus falls on the player to continue to put in the work, but a given program owes it to a player to work with and develop them, too.

"We're going to bring in seven guys behind you every year, but there aren't go-

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■ **IVY LEAGUE** ▶ *continued from Page 29*



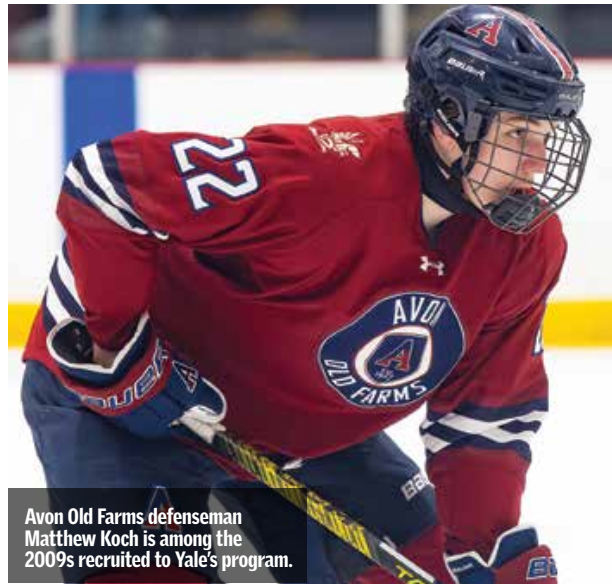
Julius Sumpf

ers snagged Ruohonen 107th overall in the 2024 NHL Draft.

Julius Sumpf

Providence College, 1/11/2005, C, left shot, 6-2/198
Hometown: Munich, Germany
NHL: Chicago Blackhawks

Sumpf was taken out of the QMJHL by the Friars. The German forward was with the Moncton Wildcats for the past two seasons, posting 55 points in his first season and 65 last winter. The Chicago Blackhawks took him 98th overall in the NHL Draft earlier this year.



Rob Rasmussen/P8Photos.com

Avon Old Farms defenseman Matthew Koch is among the 2009s recruited to Yale's program.

Charlie Trethewey

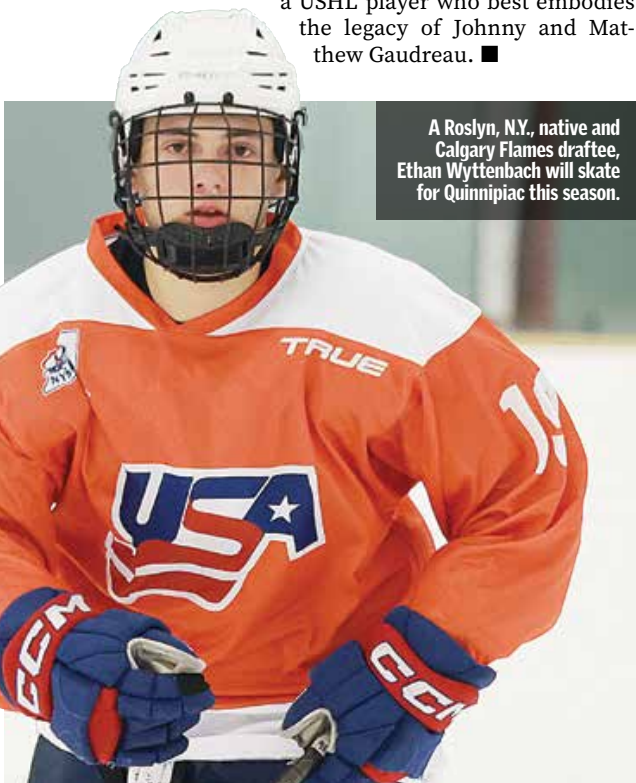
Boston University, 8/2/2007, D, right shot, 6-2/201
Hometown: Ellicott City, Md.; NHL: Pittsburgh Penguins

Trethewey slipped a bit in this year's NHL Draft, falling to the third round (73rd overall) to the Pittsburgh Penguins. That doesn't take away from his two-way abilities as a defenseman. With the NTDP last year, he had six goals and 20 points in 63 games. As a U-17, he notched 12 goals and 35 points in 52 games.

Ethan Wytttenbach

Quinnipiac, 2/10/2007, F, right shot, 5-10/181
Hometown: Roslyn, N.Y.; NHL: Calgary Flames

I've always been a big fan of Wytttenbach's game. After being a standout for the Long Island Gulls, he moved to the USHL's Sioux Falls Stampede last season and dominated, scoring 24 goals and posting 51 points in 44 games. He was also the winner of the inaugural Gaudreau Award, given yearly to a USHL player who best embodies the legacy of Johnny and Matthew Gaudreau. ■



A Roslyn, N.Y., native and Calgary Flames draftee, Ethan Wytttenbach will skate for Quinnipiac this season.

ing to be guys coming over the top, and we're not just going to cast you aside because you didn't pan out in Year 1 or Year 2," he said. "We are fully invested, and I think that means a lot to a lot of the kids that we have coming through."

Putting the admissions, academic and financial hurdles of adding players through the transfer portal aside, the Ivy League's relative lack of activity in the transfer portal offers security to potential recruits.

"I think that continuity just pays off in the long run," O'Gara said. "I mean, there's a reason it's worked for a long time. Some guys need a change of scenery, and I'm glad that they're able to do that. That's how it should be, but for us, it has to be about putting our actions where we told them they'd be, and that's the fun part."

It could be part of the reason that some Ivies have been among the most active teams in the early going of this year's recruiting cycle after rising juniors became eligible to commit on Aug. 1, despite this year's round of commitments rolling in at a slower pace than previous years.

Yale has been active among the 2009s. The Bulldogs landed Salisbury forward Grayson Espenshade, Avon Old Farms defenseman Matthew Koch and Shattuck-St. Mary's forward Bradley Whang.

Dartmouth was also busy early on, whether with '09s or younger 2008s, committing Kimball Union's Rowen Sang, Phillips Andover's Alex Theodore and St. Mark's Will Manchuso. Sang will play for the OHL's Oshawa Generals in 2025-26. Harvard landed Michael Tang out of the GTHL and David Bosco (Winchester, Mass.) out of Belmont Hill.

"The kind of kids we're trying to go after are not looking at just a one-year thing," Marcou said. "We want kids who see themselves at our school and graduating. For them, I think it does help the families a little bit. We're not going to try to use the portal as much as other places where maybe you are in a one-year type of thing."

On top of Wotton, Cornell committed Winchendon forward Charlie Puglisi in late August.

"We have the hockey tradition of winning and players moving on, and all those kids also share the same mentality that they care about hockey, want to play at the highest level, but they also care about school," Flanagan said. "We're different here, and it's a good thing." ■

USA Hockey; Minnas Panagiotakis/Getty Images