



NCRHA
c/o Mike Burke
10000-A Old Providence Way
Cockeysville, MD 21030
www.ncrha.org
info@ncrha.org
516.322.7111

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Rebecca Breitel Reports on

The Coming Out of Collegiate Roller Hockey

Between the years of 1994 and 1998, as both a player and an administrator, I witnessed the sport of inline hockey take on what I honestly believe to be the largest youth expansion ever seen in a sport in the past 30 years. I knew a day would come when this growth explosion would have a huge impact on the future direction of inline hockey. As far as I am concerned, that day is finally here.

We have actually given these youths tags attributed to the age classifications that were instituted by the inline tournament and league structures. Most of the youths of inline hockey are referred to today as "85s", "86s", "87s", all the way up to "99s" as well as incorporate years into their team names to celebrate things such as "age cut off years" and the year that they began playing with a more serious interest. However, these players are now growing up. With such a high concentration on the development and participation of youths specifically, where do the now 17 and 18 year olds go? This is the situation I am currently challenged with.

Hopefully all these players pack their bags, say bye-bye to mom and dad and go off to college! Well, O.K., so maybe some never actually leave the home, but they do enroll in local schools and continue their education.

With these young adult hockey players now entering the next chapter in their lives, it conveniently coincides with a major explosion in college roller hockey. Hopefully, most of these college bound kids will end up participating in the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association (NCRHA). The member organizations of the NCRHA have been feeling this onset strongly for the past two years but I anticipate that the next 2 to 4 years will be NCRHA's major "coming out years"; the age of "Collegiate Roller Hockey". We now work vigorously to prepare our organization to accommodate this growth.

Thanks to the leadership efforts of Mike Burke, (former youth player, tournament player, NCRHA graduate, and currently NCRHA's Director of League Operations), the NCRHA currently provides program manuals that focus on player and team development and offers concise information on how to get involved with college roller hockey. These manuals are downloadable on the Development page of the NCRHA website, located at www.NCRHA.org. These guides provide great insight into the college inline experience and are kept current with new information annually.

Thomas Ames, NCRHA's Director of Development and I have put together the following list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), as a brief introduction to the NCRHA development manuals. Though the FAQs should not be used as a substitute for full research, they aim to give brief answers to some of the most common inquiries that the NCRHA receives on a daily basis.

Some of the chapters in the NCRHA Development Manual include:

- *Getting it off the ground*
- *Laying the groundwork*

- *Budgeting for success*
- *Funding essentials*

The full manual is fun, easy reading and can be downloaded through www.ncrha.org. Here are two excerpts from the manual.

“How do I start a college roller hockey program at my school and ensure that it survives after I am gone?”

Although it may appear as though starting a club, gaining acceptance (and hopefully some funding!) from a university, and most importantly, assembling a team are huge feats to accomplish, it’s not as hard as one might think. In fact, some clubs in the NCRHA were formed in mere weeks! Unfortunately, not all schools are as receptive to a fledgling roller hockey team as would be desirable. More often than not, roadblocks make the process more difficult than is necessary, but a little bit of dedication and legwork almost always guarantees a successful program that will thrive under sound leadership.

The meeting should outline the club’s goals and future. First and foremost is to establish that incredible hockey skills are NOT required to be in the club. Although you may intend to develop an intercollegiate travel team, start slow. Outline how much it will cost players to participate (see Chapter 3). Explain that there are two major levels of involvement in the club, intramural and intercollegiate.

The NCRHA is the blood, sweat and tears of the future of this sport. As a not-for-profit program, we are an organization formed by players themselves and volunteers who have had first hand experience with the sport and continue to contribute to its future. We need your support. I invite you to explore our organization, attend our events, check out our website, visit our message boards, and by all means contact us directly.

Thank you,

Rebecca Breitel
 Advisor for the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association
<http://www.ncrha.org/>

Contributing writer: Thomas Ames, Development Director for the National Collegiate Roller Hockey Association

FAQs:

- Q) I want to play roller hockey in college. What do I do? Where do I start?
 A) This is probably the most frequently asked question that we get and therefore is the FAQ with the longest answer. First of all, by reading this FAQ you’re already on the right track! If you follow every step on the list below, it eventually won’t seem too overwhelming. Start by reading everything here so that you have a good feel for the collegiate inline community. Motivation is very important when finding the answer to this question and understanding how to proceed. There is some homework involved by the student and his/her parents.

While we only wish to encourage you to pursue roller hockey, you must have realistic goals along with your dreams and hopes. You may also only get out of it what you put into it, unless you find a school with a very established program. In NCRHA there are some very established clubs but there are also teams who are still just developing. These different stages of advancement can and do affect how the school supports the club.

- 1) Find a school based on academic interests. Some go to school for academics and the perk is they get to play roller hockey there. An amazing evolution is that now the tables are turned and students who otherwise would show no interest in going to college now want to go just to PLAY roller hockey! The revelation is that being able to play inline hockey may now incubate a desire to get a college education.

- 2) Set goals for what you want to do specifically with inline hockey. Basically ask yourself, at what level do you want to play and how much are you willing to put into it to get it to that level, as both an individual and a team player. This also will help establish how much interest that you have in building a team in the case that you go to a school where a club does not yet exist. Students enroll in all kinds of schools from 4 year universities to 2 years technical colleges. The NCRHA allows all higher education institutions. Some schools already have an established club or the student will build a club when one does not already exist. In this way, the NCRHA was initially founded 100 percent by students themselves.
- 3) Our national website (www.ncrha.org) lists all the currently active teams and schools. Additionally, not listed, are dozens of teams at schools that float in and out of the league and are just developing. You can also weed out schools by selecting a geographical area. The National organization is geographically divided into 8 regions. These regions are listed on the website and are also called NCRHA Member Organizations.
- 4) Sign up on the collegerollerhockey.net forums and post your name, hockey experience, and academic interests immediately. Teams are trying to recruit and they look at the messages. They will also give helpful information and new perspectives, as well as their own experiences. Parents are welcome to sign up and post also! Look specifically in the forum called "Scouting Report".

Once you can narrow your choice of schools NCRHA will further put you in touch with the team representative (which may be the captain, coach, or club president).

Once you have done some homework, you should e-mail the NCRHA Director of Development, Thomas Ames, at development@ncrha.org explaining your interest, your location, and your goals. From there, he will be able to recommend you to some universities that may interest you, or if you already have a university in mind, then he can give you the contact information for the school and answer further questions. In the meantime, take a look around the NCRHA website and look at the universities that already exist. Once Thomas gets back to you he will help you in whatever capacity you need.

Q) Is college roller hockey an NCAA sport?

A) The simple answer to this question is: "No". Teams in the NCRHA are recognized by their schools as "clubs" and "student organizations". This is also a requirement that a team must fulfill in order to be a full member of the NCRHA. NCRHA is still exploring options and research with the NCAA but for now remains an independent organization with relationships to other inline hockey-related organizations.

Q) Are there scholarships to play in college?

A) Indeed, there are, but not too many! Only a few high school inline leagues offer scholarships, and even fewer universities offer any form of scholarship to play inline hockey. The NCRHA has tried to maintain a central listing of all known scholarships for inline hockey. Please see our website for the listing and if you know of additional ones not listed, please contact us with the information.

Q) Where do I find the list of schools that have teams?

A) An entire list of teams in the NCRHA can be found by using the search feature on the NCRHA website. Directions: On the NCRHA homepage, click "Schools" which is located on the left side of the page. Once the search feature is fully downloaded, instructions for its use are located at the top. In order to see every team in the NCRHA, do not put any information in the search fields and then click "Search!" Keep in mind though that this feature only lists clubs who are full members of the NCRHA. There are many schools with developing teams that are not listed.

- Q) What school should I go to and who has the best team?
 A) The NCRHA is a national organization that represents every team equally so we will only give out facts about teams and advice on academics. The term “best” means different things to many people as well as the “best team” often changes from year to year. We always encourage each student to pick his or her university based on education first, then on inline hockey. If you need help choosing a university we recommend contacting the NCRHA Director of Development Thomas Ames at development@ncrha.org . He keeps in constant contact with universities and will be able to point you in the right direction for both your academic and hockey interests.
- Q) Who do I contact to get in touch with the team or the coach?
 A) The NCRHA Director of Development Thomas Ames at development@ncrha.org .
- Q) Do schools send out scouts? How do I get someone to come see me play?
 A) Even after many years, the experience of college roller hockey is still very new and therefore teams are still establishing leadership within their own clubs as well as finances. It is therefore very challenging for a club to actually send any type of “scout” out on a regular basis and many teams do not proactively search for players but rather hope that players will seek them out. Nonetheless, there are club members who will attend high school events or come out to see a player once contacted! It’s all just a matter of communicating with the clubs and the clubs’ own ability to arrange this.
- Q) Who pays for all of this?
 A) While the ultimate hope is to have a student alleviated of all costs to play inline hockey in college, the reality is that students are still paying for parts of the cost to participate in NCRHA. With each club’s individual relationship with their school as well as the different stages of the clubs development, the support and aid given to the club from their school varies across the country. Support from the schools is also offered in different forms, from money to the use of school vehicles or a practice facility at no cost. NCRHA research has shown that some schools are still unsupportive of inline hockey, while others offer as much as \$40,000 in funding for their clubs.
- Q) What about college inline hockey for women?
 A) Women have played and currently play in the NCRHA alongside the men. Unfortunately separate all-women divisions have not done well due to the distance between teams, but NCRHA has not given up. We encourage every person regardless of gender to play collegiate inline hockey. There are still women’s clubs springing up across the country.
- Q) What are games like? Is there checking? Do you play 4 on 4?
 A) The NCRHA supports no-checking in our organization. We have a national Rulebook that can be downloaded from our website and is most similar to the rules used by USA Hockey Inline. Games are 4 on 4 with no icing and no off-sides rule. Most Member Organizations of the NCRHA hold “hockey weekends” where a team may play about 3 games in a weekend, sometimes having to travel. Regular game formats are currently three twelve-minute stop-clock periods or extended formats for exhibition games.

Remember, when choosing a university you should choose it not on the talent level of the college's team, but the reputation of its education. At this point in time, it is best to decide upon a university based on education and not hockey. Many of our members chose their universities without knowing about their inline teams, and some universities did not even have teams at all so they build them. This was the birth of the NCRHA as well as the ongoing lifeline of the organization.

NCRHA traditionally has been a program fostered by the actual participants. We advise that groups of students network within their university to gain strength in numbers and committed players before approaching their university for support. There is not a lot that NCRHA is able to do without the actual committer players. Please contact us if you have a dream about playing inline hockey for your university or if you would just simply like to help with the NCRHA mission!