

Pathway from beginner to the Australian Hockey team

Many junior players and parents are not aware of the pathways that hockey offers to players, hence this document. From the outset it is important to note that everyone can find a level in hockey. Nevertheless, parents and players must understand that most times a player will only get out what they are willing to put in, and that in some cases no matter how hard the player works the cards may still not fall the way it is hoped. Quite a few junior players enjoy the challenge of trying to play at a high level and we at Doncaster encourage players to follow their passion as far as they can go. Such players are rewarded with a sense of achievement. The road to Australian selection, like all major achievements, is long and hard for both athlete and parent. It requires some luck, countless hours of training and matches, not to mention a reasonable amount of money to pay for uniforms, travel and accommodation. Nevertheless, several Doncaster players have started in our junior program and gone onto play for the Australian Men's team (e.g. Lachlan Elmer – Olympic Silver medallist, James Elmer – Olympic bronze medallist, Andrew Smith – Champions trophy gold medallist). They are living proof that it can be done!

It should be recognised that the chances of making the Australian, Victorian or even State junior hockey teams are very small (see Table 1). The odds of making a club State League 1 team are also low. Interestingly, VIS hockey coach John Mowat has stated that 95% of all Vikings and Vipers (Vic senior teams) have played for their respective U13 State teams as junior players. Such data indicate that those making it to high levels in Australian hockey display their talents very early just as elite athletes do in all other sports.

Table 1

	% chance of selection (16 players per team)	# of hockey players
Australian Team		<i>In Australia</i>
Mens	0.03%	59,000
Womens	0.03%	47,000
Victorian		<i>In Victoria</i>
Vikings	0.1%	16,600
Vipers	0.2%	7,100
Junior State		In Victoria/ age gp
Boys	2%	1,000
Girls	4%	500
SL1		Per SL1 club
Men	5%	300
Women	6%	200

Given that very few make it to the very top of hockey it is important for players to have as their first priority a love and passion for the game and let the rest take care of itself.

A typical pathway that a player may take to reach the highest level is the following (note: not all steps are necessary). Sometimes players miss being selected at different levels – the challenge then is to stay positive and work hard to address the weaknesses with good coaching advice and get back on track. Continual knock backs from different sets of selectors probably requires a player to take a reality check. They should re-evaluate what level of play is realistic for the level of physical and mental skill plus work ethic that a player displays.

Remember enjoyment of the game should always be the first priority.

Possible Pathway

1. Start playing Hook in2 Hockey about 6 years of age – player needs to display good hand eye co-ordination, good athletic skills, good temperament, enjoys competition, good decision making skills, listens and learns quickly, constantly interested in playing team and ball sports. **Time Commitment– one session per week**
2. Starts playing U9 hockey – is a key player in the team. Constantly practicing skills, understanding simple team structure and use of space. **Time Commitment – two sessions per week**
3. Plays club summer hockey to continue to improve skills. **Time Commitment – one session per week.**
4. Plays U11A grade club hockey– is a key player in team set up (in top 5 players). *Reality check 1 – If playing in grades below U11A then male player is not a top club player at this age group and will have to work harder than most to get into the top group. Top girls may be playing U11PN.* **Time Commitment – two sessions per week**
5. Gets selected for State U12 VPSSA team and performs well. **Time Commitment – Four sessions per week including club and State commitments.** *Reality check 2 – If not selected in U12 State team then player is not in top 16 players in State for age group at this time.*
6. Plays U13A mixed grade club hockey -(girl could play U13PN mixed – not girls competition) – is a key player in team set up (in top 5 players) *Reality check 3 – If playing in grades below U13A then male player is not a top club player at this age group and will have to work harder than most to get into the top group. Top club girls may be playing U13PN mixed.* **Time Commitment – two sessions per week.**
7. Gets selected in U13 Regional team (Red Devils or similar). **Time Commitment – Four sessions per week including club and Devils commitments. Plus State championship tournament.** *Reality check 4 – If not selected in Regional team the player is not a top player within region at this age group and will have to work harder than most to get into the top group.*

Gets selected in U13 State team – performs well. **Time Commitment – Four sessions per week including club and State commitments. Plus National Championship tournament.** *Reality check 5 – If not selected in U13 State team then player is not in top 16 players within the State. 95% of all senior AHL players have been selected in this team.*

Plays summer hockey or indoor competitions to improve skills. **Time Commitment – one session per week.**

8. Plays U15A mixed (if a boy) or U15PN mixed (if a girl). *Reality check 6 – If playing in grades below U15A then male player is not a top club player at this age group and will have to work harder than most to get into the top group. Top club girls may be playing U15PN mixed. Players not in the top club group at this age are unlikely to play high level club hockey (e.g., State league)*
 9. Gets selected in U14 and then U15 Regional team (Red Devils or similar). *Reality check 7 – If not selected in Regional team the player is not a top player within region at this age group and will have to work harder than most to get into the top group.* **Time Commitment – Four sessions per week including club and Devils commitments. Plus State championship tournament.**
 10. Gets selected in U14 and U15 State team – performs well
Reality check 8 – If not selected in U14 and U15 State teams player is not in top 16 players within State for each age group. **Time Commitment – Four sessions per week including club and State commitments. Plus National Championship tournament.**
- Plays men's or women's summer hockey competition at 15 years for boys, 13-14 years for girls. **Time Commitment – one session per week.**
11. Starts to play senior hockey (boys 14-16 yrs, girls - 13-15 yrs) and continues with junior hockey. **Time Commitment – Four to five sessions per week**
 12. Plays U17A mixed or U17A girls and is a key player. At same time is playing in senior second side (pennant A). **Time Commitment – Five sessions per week includes junior and senior training and matches.**
 13. Makes U16 VSSSA side – performs well. May make Australian U16 side.
Reality check 9 – If not selected in U16 State or Australian team player is not in top 16 players within State or Nation for this age group. **Time Commitment – Five to six sessions per week, includes junior club, junior State and all senior training and matches.**
 14. Makes senior State League side (16-18 years of age). *Reality check 10 – If not selected in State League side then player is not in top 14 players within the club at this stage.* **Time Commitment – Five sessions per week, includes junior and senior training and matches.**

15. Makes State U18 side. *Reality check 11 – If not selected in U18 State team player is not in top 16 players within State for the 15-17 year age group.* **Time Commitment – Five to six sessions per week, includes junior club, junior State and all senior training and matches.**
16. Gets a VIS hockey scholarship. **Time Commitment– Five to six sessions per week**
17. Makes State U21 side, selected in Australian U21 team. *Reality check 12 – If not selected in U21 State or Australian team player is not in top 16 players within State or Nation for the 17-20 yr age group.* **Time Commitment – six sessions per week**
18. Makes Vikings or Vipers side (17-22 years old). *Reality check 13 – If not selected in Vikings or Vipers the player is not in top 16 players within the State.* **Time Commitment– six sessions per week**
19. Gets an AIS scholarship
20. Makes the Australian A side. *Reality check 14 – If not selected in Australian A side then player is not in top 40 players within the nation*
21. Makes the Australian Kookaburras or Hockeyroo squad. *Reality check 15 – If not selected in Australian squad then player is not in top 24 players within the nation*
22. Plays in Olympic, World Cup and Champions Trophy teams. *Reality check 16 – If not selected in Australian team then player is not in top 16 players within the nation*
23. Wins gold in all three and then retires - poor but happy!