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HEADLINE: My hockey, my life;  
Keeping the balance

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For as long as I can remember, hockey has been a part of my life. I first put on skates at the age of three and I have been wearing them ever since. The past three seasons have been the most enjoyable in my career. For the past three years, I have played in the Winnipeg High School Hockey League (WHSHL).

The WHSHL is comprised of high school hockey teams in Winnipeg and the surrounding area. There are 32 teams across the league's three divisions, with each team having a minimum of 17 players.

At the highest level, the Winnipeg Sun Division, high school hockey provides an excellent alternative to AAA hockey. In past years, numerous AAA hockey players switched to playing high school hockey, further strengthening the caliber of high school hockey. For many of the stronger players, there is a good chance to move on to other leagues, including the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, the Western Hockey League and U.S. college hockey. WHSHL players -- including current Brandon Wheat Kings player Ryan Reaves -- have also been drafted by National Hockey League clubs.

There are many other advantages to playing in the Winnipeg High School Hockey League. Playing in this league allows players to focus on academics and other activities that help to develop good, all-around people. With most teams having three to five ice times per week, players can commit themselves to other extra-curricular activities. Adding to this is the fact that the games are usually held in the afternoon or early evening, so players can still fit other activities into their evenings, including studying and doing homework, as well as socializing and playing other sports. If you want to play competitive hockey, but also live your own life, then the WHSHL is the right choice for you.

The philosophy of the WHSHL is that "the athletic arena is a classroom with moral and education obligations," with the obligation of promoting "high standards of courtesy, respect, fair play and sportsmanship between players, coaches and referees."

Additionally, playing in the high school league allows you to play with friends and classmates, which is a reason why a number of AAA players made the switch to high school hockey. The high school teams develop a special kind of camaraderie, especially since the vast majority of the players on the team have gone to school together for years and are often friends who have played pick-up hockey for many of those years.

Throw in some school spirit for good measure and that can be the making of a very strong team.