

February 9th, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Kathleen Leipsic and I am the mother of National Hockey League player Brendan Leipsic of the league-leading Las Vegas Golden Knights.

Seven years ago, our family packed up Brendan (our oldest, 16 at the time) and sent him to Portland, Oregon to become a member of the Portland Winterhawks Hockey Club of the Western Hockey League. Throughout his childhood we knew Brendan was an exceptional talent and, like most parents, we wanted him to have the best chance possible to attain the highest level of success. Although he was smaller than the usual hockey player we felt with the right environment and training, Brendan had an outside chance of becoming an NHL player.

The ascension of elite hockey players to the NHL is different than the sports of football and basketball. In those sports, being an amateur athlete through the college system is the primary road to becoming a professional at the NFL or NBA level. In hockey, the NCAA has a hockey system (primarily in the east coast), but the existence of the Western Hockey League provides an alternative for the amateur player to learn the skills and receive the training that gives them the greatest chance to become a professional. Our family debated between Portland and the NCAA but, at the end of the day, we clearly saw the advantages of the Winterhawks and Western Hockey League system as a route for achieving the greatest level of success.

Before Brendan joined the Winterhawks, 100% of all the expenses associated with Brendan playing hockey fell on our family. It is normal for families of elite hockey players to pay tens of thousands of dollars every year for necessities such as gear, ice time, travel etc. What a relief it was to get to a place where those expenses fell on the Winterhawks instead of our family. In addition, Brendan was given housing with a great family and, had he not gone on to become a professional, the Winterhawks would pay a year of college expenses for every year he played for the Hawks.

Having said all this, imagine the idea of having your 16-year-old move away from home to city thousands of miles away. As a mother, I was comforted by the great care the Winterhawks (and all Western Hockey League teams) provided the boys that play in this league. From the billet families, to the education directors, to the educational tutors, to the trainers and coaches, it is incredible how well they essentially raise our children from boys into men during their formative late-teen years.

Finding the best way to nurture our child's development is a very daunting task for parents blessed with such gifted and driven athletes. If it weren't for the Portland Winterhawks and the great work they have done over the last 40 years, so many young men would have never reached their full potential. Fortunately for our family, Brendan's time with the Winterhawks led him to be drafted into the NHL where he now has achieved his most important life goal, playing in the National Hockey League.

This success is all due to the existence of the amateur athletic system in its current form and to the exemplary way in which the Winterhawks and the WHL conduct their programs. Without this system, we feel strongly that Brendan would have had a much more difficult, if not impossible, time getting to the NHL. Our son achieved his dream, for that we are ever grateful.

Thank you and best regards,

Kathleen Leipsic