

→ By Tom and Jerry Caraccioli

Advanced Degrees Of Learning

IN 1917, HOLYOKE, MASS., native Pierce George “Gerry” Geran was the first-ever American to suit up for an NHL roster as a member of the Montreal Wanderers. Geran made his way north of the border to the NHL via Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H.

While the precedent of attending a U.S. college or university en route to the NHL was established earlier in the century by Geran, it wasn’t until the mid-1970s and, especially the 1980s following the United States “miracle in Lake Placid,” that kids in the U.S. could look at NHL rosters and see more of their countrymen playing. Many sprinkling the lineups of NHL teams were the most notable college players from hockey hotbeds in Minnesota,

Michigan, Boston and other Northeast regions.

Twenty years ago, one in five players in the NHL—including those from the U.S., Canada and Europe—had college-playing experience. In the past three years, that number has jumped to approximately one of every three players, per College Hockey Inc. With that growth, an argument can be made that college hockey is the fastest growing path for developing future NHL players.

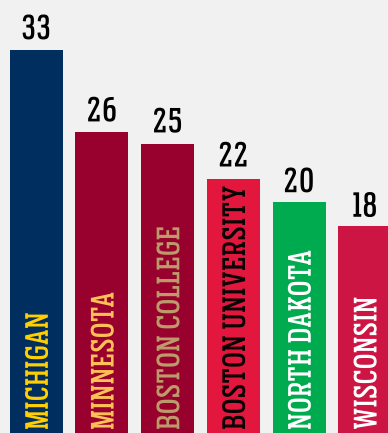
Today, more than 80 percent of U.S.-born players in the NHL played college hockey. In the last 15 years, NHL Drafts have featured an average of more than 60 current or future college players and

teams continue to scour the NCAA ranks for free agent signees as well. Players like Jack Eichel (Las Vegas Golden Knights/Boston University), Jake Guentzel (Pittsburgh Penguins/University of Nebraska-Omaha), Johnny Gaudreau (Columbus Blue Jackets/Boston College), Trevor Zegras (Anaheim Ducks/Boston University), Kyle Connor (Winnipeg Jets/University of Michigan), K’Andre Miller (New York Rangers/University of Wisconsin) and teammate



→ George Gerry Geran was the first American to play in the NHL.

NCAA Programs With Most NHL First-Round Draft Picks



Source: College Hockey Inc./NCAA



→ **Adam Fox** concluded his three-year career at Harvard University by leading the nation in 2018-19 in points per game by a defenseman (1.45 points).

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→ **Johnny Gaudreau** led the country in goals (36), assists (44) and points per game (2) during his junior year at Boston College in 2013-14.

Adam Fox (New York Rangers/Harvard) are not only on NHL rosters but a new breed of stars in the league.

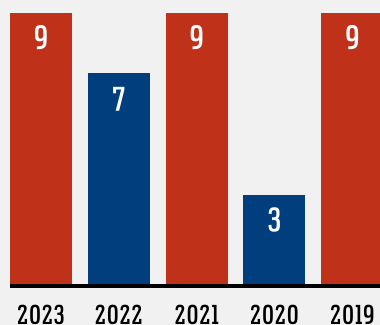
Bob DeGregorio, who recently retired as commissioner of the Atlantic Hockey Association, said it has been rewarding to see the growth of college athletics as a pipeline to professional hockey.

“One of the benefits of having a long career in collegiate athletics—especially hockey—is seeing and experiencing the rise of the level of U.S.-born talent developed for the NHL,” DeGregorio said. “Having played college hockey in the era when a playing career pretty much ended after your three or four years, it is great to see the many opportunities men and women have today to continue playing professionally.”

The growth of those with college roots also extends into other areas of an NHL organization. Front offices and benches are filled with past U.S.-born collegiate stars who went onto fruitful NHL careers.

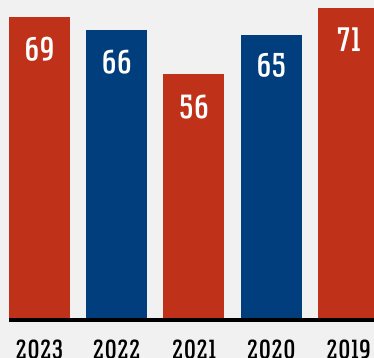
One example is Craig Conroy. Conroy attended Clarkson University before playing in over 1,000 NHL games in 16 seasons.

NHL First-Round Draft picks who played/will play college hockey



Source: College Hockey Inc.

Collegians in the NHL Draft



Source: College Hockey Inc.

come a long way since the days of Gerry Geran. What was once a road less traveled, today college hockey has become one of the NHL's busiest superhighways of U.S. talent on and off the ice. ★

Tom & Jerry Caraccioli are the authors of *STRIKING SILVER: The Untold Story of America's Forgotten Hockey Team*.

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