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Junior Hockey coming to Moosomin

Steelhawks an expansion team in the Prairie Junior Hockey League

BY ASHLEY BOCHEK

Moosomin is welcoming a new junior team for the 2025-26 hockey season.

The Moosomin Steelhawks will be joining the Prairie Junior Hockey League (PJHL) in the Junior B as the sixth team in Southwest Saskatchewan.

Blake Martyniuk, the franchise owner, from Saskatoon is looking forward to the team's upcoming season in Moosomin.

"I've been playing hockey since I was very young. I was born and raised in Ontario, I played AAA hockey my whole life, junior hockey, a little bit of minor professional hockey, and then naturally just got into the player development and coaching side of things."

50 years since junior hockey in Moosomin

Martyniuk says he was shocked along with others of the PJHL that Moosomin didn't have a junior hockey team.

"We couldn't believe there wasn't junior hockey in the community of Moosomin. According to our research, we knew you guys had the Junior Rangers I believe in the '70s so it has been about 50 years since you had junior hockey and just the people we know and the digging we have done—Moosomin is for sure a hockey town and there are a lot of people very excited about what we are doing—it does add a little extra pressure to be good out-of-the-gate, but we definitely take that pressure in a positive way and it motivates us to try to make that happen."

Martyniuk explains the Prairie Junior Hockey League is Saskatchewan's Junior B League.

"We are playing in the Prairie Junior Hockey League (PJHL), a very good and respectable league. Obviously, Saskatchewan has the Western Hockey League (WHL), and the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League (SJHL)—which is a level of hockey just above us—but our league is still very good hockey, and very respected. You will see players still moving on from the league, not just as a senior, but to other opportunities.

"Our big plan is we want to run this to the best of our ability like a Junior A and SJHL team. We want players that have those goals of developing, then if we can send a kid to Melville or Estevan in the SJHL or Virden in the MJHL (Manitoba Junior Hockey League), we are happy to see players go and climb that ladder to pursue their hockey goals."

Martyniuk says he plans to be the general manager and head coach of the Steelhawks.

"I am set to be the general manager (GM) and head coach of the team. I am very excited about it. Right now, for the sake of the team—if there is somebody who has more experience than myself I am willing to consider letting somebody else do that if it is for the better of the team. I can't stress it enough—if I end up in the role—I am very excited, I love coaching, I love managing teams, but for the sake of the longevity and this doing well in the community—if there is somebody better than myself, willing and able to the job then that will be considered as well."

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MacLeod Elementary School students were outside Tim Hortons in Moosomin encouraging people to buy Smile Cookies last week. Proceeds of Smile Cookie Week go toward MacLeod Elementary this year for a playground project.







PJHL action will be coming to the Mike Schwean Arena in Moosomin this fall.

Junior Hockey coming to Moosomin

Steelhawks an expansion team in the Prairie Junior Hockey League

☞ *Continued from front*

Largest community in Saskatchewan without junior hockey

Martyniuk says they knew the Town of Moosomin would be a perfect fit for the new expansion team.

"We identified that Moosomin was the largest community without junior hockey. I know Meadow Lake is a little bit bigger, but they are in the northwest and the way the league is currently structured they had six north teams and only five teams in the south. I have been to Moosomin a few times in the past and I like the community and I know it is a town of under 3,000 people, but it is a very nice place, everybody I have bumped into are very welcoming people. If I am the GM or head coach I would be living in Moosomin or within the area and it is always nice if you are in a comfortable place while doing that."

Next steps

The next few weeks are going to be busy recruiting players and building the team Martyniuk says.

"It is a very busy time, there is a lot of work to do, and we are very excited about it. We already have players reaching out, but we need a really good team—we want to do that right out of the gate. Within the league rules—and we definitely respect that—you can't sign players until June 1 so we are able to have conversations without putting pens to paper. The biggest thing is starting to reach out to respected players to try and put that really strong team together, and then looking within the community in terms of setting up billets for some of these players coming from elsewhere. We will definitely need a volunteer base to help with the operations side of things, and another big one for us too is we are not really looking for kids who are still in high school that could still be technically playing U18 AAA or AA, we want the kids outside of high school so we can get them a part-time job—they are obviously here to play hockey and that is their passion, but being in the community that way then is kind of a win-win situation for everybody.

Building a roster

Martyniuk says they are beginning to recruit players for the Steelhawks.

"It comes down to recruiting at the end of the day. We already know a few players, but again, we want the best team that we can put on the ice. We also want some local talent as well, there will be local players of course, but people understand around the town that if we were to take just kids from Moosomin area we may not necessarily be competitive on a league scale so we may have to bring in a player from Manitoba, Alberta, Ontario, or possibly elsewhere with the connections that we have. It comes down to a balance at the end of the day because we want local kids of course, but we also want to be competitive and I don't think anybody in the community will be complaining the day when we hopefully win a championship someday—that is the goal anyway."

The team will be reaching out and updating the community on their plans through social media.

"We believe that the most efficient way in 2025 is reaching out to the community on social media and other forms of media where word travels rather quick. Just with the way the league AGM worked out, we just found out a few days ago that we were going to be an expansion team. As soon as we found out early on at the meeting when they said that we were accepted, then it was like we have to get going here because we can start signing players on June 1 and ultimately we want to have as many players lined up as possible for that actual signing day."

Behind the logo

Martyniuk says his dad researched and created the name for the team while travelling through Moosomin last fall.

"My dad and I were travelling and oddly enough we were in the Best Western in Moosomin and he happened to grab some pamphlets at the front desk and he was reading about the community and we all knew this was kind of in the works, but we had to wait for the meeting to hear the go-ahead of course, but we were throwing around different names and we love the Rangers obviously all the minor and then the Senior Rangers—they all historically have been strong teams for the most part and it was definitely a consideration, but we wanted a brand to stand out in the community and be something a little bit different and communicating that to my dad, he did a little bit of research on those pamphlets and the internet and found that the town of Moosomin was basically built because of the railway there. So, the steel part made sense and I really liked it and then I had my wife's sister do the logo and I think she did a great job."

The idea for the new expansion team began last fall.

"I would say at the beginning of this past hockey season it was talked about maybe even last summer and there is a lot that has to go into this," Martyniuk said. "We want to make sure that everything is going to be right. It was several months, if not over half a year before we were actually able to sit down at the meeting and we were accepted enough to at least get us into the meeting, then there was a few more preparations from there, and then it came time for the meeting, and we are very fortunate that we were accepted."

Martyniuk explains the team and league will be similar to Junior A organizations.

"In our program we are trying to mimic Junior A to the best of our abilities although the PJ is a Junior B league and with that there are some slightly different aspects, and the main one that I can think of is we are actually allowed a couple 21-year-olds—two per team—whereas the SJ (Junior A hockey) is only allowed eight 20-year-olds and no 21-year-olds. We are a bit of an older league in that sense and we are fortunate that it just gives us that extra year to recruit for players. We are able to carry extras on our roster because if we want a good team and a player is able to jump up and go play in the SJHL then it is one of those bittersweet moments that we unfortunately lost a good player, but it just looks good on the organization that we are a developmental team where we will push players toward their goals and the next levels they are trying to get to."

Future community involvement

The Steelhawks will eventually be involved within the community through different events.

"It is admittedly a down-the-road thing, but anything that you see the Weyburn Red Wings do—any SJHL team—that is what we are trying to mimic. We are a different level than them and we recognize that, but nothing is stopping us from operating our organization in the same way as them and other Junior A teams. There are significantly more important things right now to focus on, but once the season gets underway, then we will look to see at what the future looks like for the organization."

Martyniuk says, "We are still working out the details. We will be putting things out on social media in the coming days or weeks talking about what we need at this time such as volunteers, billets, players, and sponsorships will be one of those, but we want to go out and prove ourselves and then we will feel a lot more confident in approaching businesses and looking at what we brought to Moosomin, and the standard we are trying to set as an organization moving forward and then we will need community support in order to carry this on for hopefully decades to come, but we believe right now building a good team is our number one thing, and then we will worry about other details a little bit later on."

Goals as new team

Martyniuk explains the organization's goals as the new addition to Moosomin.

"The Senior Rangers are the biggest team in town and they are always very successful—I have watched a few of their games and it is a great environment and something to look forward to on the weekend and we hope we can essentially just be another team like the Senior Rangers for local Moosomin hockey players, families, and any hockey fans to come out and take a game in, and even people from surrounding communities to come out, and have a good brand of hockey to enjoy throughout the season."

He says he is beyond excited to begin planning and organizing camps for later this summer.

"I would say 11/10 that is how excited I am. It is a very good league it is certainly respectable and players move on whether it is Junior A or other opportunities. It is good hockey and we believe Moosomin is definitely a hockey town.

"I will feel a whole lot better when we hopefully have a very strong roster. We have to give all the time we have right now to recruiting players and making sure they are the right fit for the team. We want a good culture where they are good hockey players on the ice and respectful people within the community off the ice as well."

