

Teams vote for NCHL's best

❑ *Crossroads This Week compiles opinions on who and what teams think are best*

Crossroads This Week commissioned a poll of all 10 North Central Hockey League teams to get their opinions in 17 different categories.

Of the 10 teams, only the Virden Oil Kings failed to respond.

We thank the coaches and managers of the nine teams for taking the time to take the poll, which asked them to vote for three players in each category. They could not vote for their own team. The results were then tabulated using three points for first, two points for second, and one point for third.

We hope you enjoy the first of what we hope to be a yearly exercise.



Luke Stokotelný

Best Player

1. Luke Stokotelný, Grandview
2. Danny Johnston, Foxwarren
3. Ryan Halliday, Oak Lake

We asked this question because the result may have differed from the player the teams chose when voting for the North Central Hockey League Most Valuable Player this season. As it turns out, the best player may not necessarily be the most valuable player.

MVP to his team

1. Danny Johnston, Foxwarren
2. Curtis Gardham, Miniota-Elkhorn
3. Kaine Morran, Grandview

There was no surprise here as Johnston, who was earlier selected as the NCHL's MVP, took seven of the top eight first place votes.

Best Goaltender

1. Mike Nichol, Oak Lake-Brandon
2. Ian Chipelski, Foxwarren
3. Danny McDonald, Grandview

The NCHL does not recognize the best goaltender, just the team that has the best goals against average during the regular season. While the Grandview tandem of McDonald and Andy Puchailo has the best goals against, the teams believed Nichol, who played with the WHL's Brandon Wheat Kings, was by far and away the top puck stopper.



Kaine Morran

Best Offensive Defenceman

1. Kaine Morran, Grandview
2. Riley Day, Oak Lake-Brandon
3. Jason Roblin, Reston

Morran finished the season with 10 less points than Day, but was an overwhelming choice for the honor.

Best Defensive Defenceman

1. Shaune Draper, Kenton
2. Ken Mott, Oak Lake-Brandon
3. Keith Spencer, Shoal Lake
3. Jason Roblin, Reston

Shaune Draper has always been a rock on the blueline for the Kenton Cougars, and the NCHL teams recognized his steady play game in, game out. Mott, who played 121 games in the MJHL, was second, followed by a tie between Spencer, who played 43 games in the WHL, and Roblin.

Best Pure Goal Scorer

1. Luke Stokotelný, Grandview
2. Danny Johnston, Foxwarren
2. Curtis Gardham, Miniota-Elkhorn

No surprise here as the former Dauphin Kings sniper, who led the NCHL with 32 goals, was picked as the best pure goal scorer. Johnston with 24 goals and Gardham with 28 goals tied for second in the poll.

Best Defensive Forward

1. Brett Ewanysyn, Grandview
2. Kent Schiltroth, Reston
3. Devron Jakeman, Roblin

Often overlooked on a team is the role of a forward that takes care of business in his own end of the rink. All three players were also among the top 12 league scorers.



Riley Day

Toughest Player

1. Riley Day, Oak Lake-Brandon
2. Mike Pitman, Grandview
2. Steegan Stoski, Grandview

A total of 15 players received votes in this category, but in the end Riley Day, the former Brandon Wheat King defenceman, received the nod for toughest in the league. The votes for Pitman and Stoski, who tied for second, prove why Grandview is such a tough team to play against. As a matter of interest, Day had just one fighting major, while Stoski had two. Pitman didn't fight this season.

Most Intimidating Player

1. Riley Day, Oak Lake-Brandon
2. Mike Pitman, Grandview
3. Shaune Draper, Kenton
3. Kaine Morran, Grandview

It goes without saying that if you are tough, you can also be intimidating as Day edged out Pitman again in this category. Draper, a tower on skates, and Morran, who is both physical and speedy tied for third in voting.

Best Hitter

1. Kaine Morran, Grandview
2. Keith Spencer, Shoal Lake
3. Aaron Chipelski, Foxwarren

Morran got a couple of votes for toughest player, but earned votes on seven ballots as the league's best hitter. Spencer, known for his thunderous open ice hits, and Chipelski, who has long been under-rated in Foxwarren, rounded out the top three. All three play defence for their respective clubs.



Robby Memryk

Most Irritating Player

1. Robby Memryk, Shoal Lake
2. Riley Day, Oak Lake-Brandon
3. Kurtis Callander, Reston

No contest. Memryk, who seems to delight in engaging in a lively debate with referees, and players, coaches and trainers from just about every team in the league, received either first or second place votes from all nine respondents. Way down the pack of the 13 irritating players who received votes were Day and Callander.

Best Referee

1. Randy Kalynuk
2. Bob Blad
2. Ron Thiesen

Teams thought that veteran referee Randy Kalynuk, who also serves as the NCHL referee-in-chief, was the best zebra. Tied for second were two lesser-known officials, but obviously talented according to the teams. Perhaps surprising (or not) is the veteran officials not chosen by the teams.

Toughest Rink to play in

1. Grandview
2. Miniota
3. Kenton

An intimidating team led by Morran, Pitman and Stoski, combined with a vocal crowd make the GACC in Grandview a tough place to play in according to the results of the poll. For anyone who has never been to the arena, it is a must visit. You have to assume that Miniota and Kenton are tough to play in because they have less than regulation size ice surfaces.

Best Ice

1. Roblin
2. Foxwarren
3. Virden

The ice in Roblin was judged to be the best in the NCHL. Despite playing in an old arena, teams thought Foxwarren had the second best ice, followed by Virden. The arenas receiving the least amount of votes were Oak Lake and Shoal Lake. The ice in Shoal Lake, which has always been good, has been terribly soft since the beginning of the year.

Best Uniforms

1. Roblin Northstars
2. Virden Oil Kings
3. Grandview Comets

The other teams admire the duds worn by the Northstars' players as they came out on top of the list. It was tight for second place, with the Oil Kings' version of the NHL's Columbus Blue Jackets uniforms just edging out the Comets' hybrid version of the Boston Bruins and Calgary Flames. Honourable mentions went to Oak Lake and Reston.

Surprising Team of the Year

1. Foxwarren Falcons
1. Shoal Lake Eagles
3. Miniota-Elkhorn C-Hawks
3. Roblin Northstars

The Foxwarren Falcons, who returned to the NCHL this year after a one-year leave of absence, tied with the Shoal Lake Eagles as the most surprising team. The Falcons, who only had Trent Tibbatts for 14 of their 22 games, finished in fifth place with a 12-8-1-1 record, while the Eagles finished with an identical record to last season, 11-7-3-1, but came back from a 2-0 playoff series deficit to eliminate Miniota-Elkhorn in the first round of the playoffs. Miniota-Elkhorn and Roblin tied for the third most number of votes. Minnedosa received a vote from one team for being "surprisingly bad".

Team with the best outlook for the future

1. Grandview Comets
1. Shoal Lake Eagles
3. Miniota-Elkhorn C-Hawks

Grandview and Shoal Lake tied in this category, but the Comets received more first place votes. No doubt the teams felt that Grandview's solid lineup bodes well for the future, while Shoal Lake's relatively young squad showed a lot of potential this season. Miniota-Elkhorn, who also boast a young team featuring many former Yellowhead Midget Chiefs' graduates, was solidly in third in the voting.

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