

News Release

Men's Hockey Returns as Member of American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA)

By Shawn Smith on Friday, January 31, 2020

The University of Minnesota Crookston has officially announced they are bringing back men's hockey as a member of the American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA). The Golden Eagles will compete in ACHA Division II in the Central Region beginning with the 2020-21 season. Minnesota Crookston will play their home games at the Crookston Sports Center.

The ACHA was established in 1991 and currently boasts three men's divisions with over 500 teams from across the nation representing 49 different states.

In addition, the Golden Eagles announced the man they have chosen to lead the program. Minnesota Crookston will be led by one of the top junior hockey coaches of all-time, and a familiar name in the national hockey community, Steve Johnson. Johnson has been a NCAA Division I assistant coach, and has led USHL teams to the Clark Cup four times, with two Clark Cup titles. Johnson was a three-time USHL Coach of the Year. In addition, Johnson was an all-time great hockey player for the University of North Dakota, helping UND to a national title in 1987.



"We are very excited to bring back men's hockey at a very competitive level in the ACHA," said Director of Athletics Stephanie Helgeson. "We believe we have found the perfect coach to lead us in Steve Johnson. Steve has established himself as a premier coach at both the junior and collegiate levels with a great resume of developing talent and helping lead his players to success on and off the ice. We are very excited to welcome Steve to the Golden Eagle family."

"I am very excited to get back into coaching and I am thrilled for it to be at Minnesota Crookston," Johnson said. "I remember a lot of my friends and my brother playing for Minnesota Crookston teams and competing for National Championships. They played at a high level and established a great tradition of success at Minnesota Crookston. I can't wait to build on the success of those past teams and reinvigorate a great tradition of talented hockey players at the ACHA level."

Johnson comes to Minnesota Crookston after most recently serving as the Hockey Director for Grand Forks Youth Hockey. Prior to returning to his hometown of Grand Forks, N.D., Johnson served as an assistant for the 2012-13 season at the University of Nebraska Omaha for Dean Blais, where he helped the Mavericks to a 19-18-2 mark.

Before making the move to Omaha, Johnson was an assistant coach for two seasons at St. Cloud State University. While with the Huskies during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons under current University of Minnesota Head Coach Bob Motzko, Johnson helped the Huskies to a 22-25-10 mark.

Prior to joining the collegiate ranks, Johnson etched himself as one of the best hockey coaches in United States Hockey league (USHL) history. During the 2009-10 season, he took over a Fargo Force team from his former assistant coach at UND, Blais, and led them to the 2010 Clark Cup Finals with a 37-17-6 mark. He also served as team General Manager.

Johnson made a name for himself in the USHL with the Lincoln Stars, as in the program's inaugural season in 1996-97 he led the team to a Clark Cup title with a 40-13-1 mark. Johnson would spend 11 seasons behind the bench with the Stars, guiding the team to another Clark Cup title during the 2002-03 season. Additionally, Johnson led the team to three regular-season USHL titles, as they claimed the Anderson Cup during the 1999-00, 2000-01, and 2002-03 seasons. His Lincoln Stars won 30-or more games in nine seasons and reached 40 or more wins four times.

He got his start in the USHL with the Fargo-Moorhead Bears during the 1995-96 season, leading the team to a 27-18-1 record earning USHL Coach of the Year recognition. As a USHL coach, Johnson accumulated a 470-223-54 marks, ranking fourth in league history for career wins.

As a player, Johnson was a stand-out on the ice for UND recording 191 careers points in 153 games. Johnson ranks seventh all-time in career points. He also remains tied sixth in assists all-time with 121. He helped North Dakota to the 1987 NCAA Championship under Gino Gasparini. Johnson was a Hobey Baker Finalist as a senior, scoring 85 points in 42 games. He was also selected as a Division I All-American and was named WCHA Student-Athlete of the Year in 1988.

Johnson was a 1987 draft pick of the Vancouver Canucks and played professionally for two seasons in the International Hockey League with the Milwaukee Admirals and the Phoenix Roadrunners. In addition, Johnson helped lead USA hockey to a silver medal at the Goodwill Games in 1990.

Johnson is married to Nancy and has a daughter Ellie, 27, who is a recruiter for the University of North Dakota. His son Luke, 25, plays hockey for the Minnesota Wild and played for UND. His son Max, 19, plays for the Nipawin Hawks of the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League.

The Minnesota Crookston hockey program is a competitive travel club hockey program competing in the ACHA, and will be run out of the Golden Eagle athletics department.

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