

Americans now part of AWHL

By Tribune Staff

Junior A hockey in Great Falls has been rekindled, and now the former league that the franchise used to call home has been resurrected.

The Great Falls Americans will be playing this fall in the American West Hockey League, it was announced on Monday. The Americans, led by owner Jim Keough, were re-established several months ago and originally were to play in the Northern Pacific (NORPAC) League.

But last weekend at the USA Hockey meetings in Colorado Springs, Colo., it was decided that the AWHL, which was originally formed in 1992 and disbanded in 2003 when it merged with the North American Hockey League, was being certified.

Besides the Americans, the league will include the Billings Bulls, Bozeman Icedogs, Helena Bighorns, Missoula Maulers and Gillette (Wyo.) Wild. Billings, Bozeman, Helena and Missoula all played in the NORPAC last year, and Helena won the national championship in Tier III of Junior Hockey.

Play in the AWHL, which features a 44-game schedule, is slated to commence in October. The NORPAC includes teams in Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, plus Butte and Whitefish in Montana

"We made a commitment to play the NORPAC teams located in our footprint," said Keough in a statement. "It will present a good opportunity to alleviate travel costs for the NORPAC and will provide a chance to have some spirited competition within the two leagues."

The AWHL web site (theawhl.com) is several days away from completion. A scheduled release on the precise date of the launch will be forthcoming.



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