



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bemidji Named as Host Community for World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series Presented by Delta Dental of Minnesota Ahead of 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship

Bemidji, Minn. – The Sanford Center is proud to announce that Bemidji has been named as one of Minnesota's host communities for the World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series presented by Delta Dental of Minnesota. Several exhibition games will be played throughout Minnesota as part of the exciting lead up to the 2026 International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) World Junior Championship which will take place Dec. 26, 2025 – Jan. 5, 2026, in the Twin Cities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis.

Bemidji joins Mankato as official host communities for World Junior pre-tournament exhibition games, with the potential for additional cities to be added. Details regarding exhibition game schedules, tickets, and related events will be announced in the coming months.

"Hockey is as much a part of Bemidji as its pine-studded forests, and we are thrilled to bring the World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series to this passionate community," said **Wendy Williams Blackshaw**, president and CEO of Minnesota Sports and Events, the state's regional sports commission and tournament host in partnership with USA Hockey. "These exhibition games will showcase tomorrow's NHL stars on Bemidji's home ice, creating unforgettable experiences for fans while highlighting Bemidji's deep hockey roots and celebrating the area's important Indigenous culture. We invite everyone to join in the excitement of hosting the 50th edition of this iconic international hockey tournament in Minnesota."

"Delta Dental of Minnesota is proud to support the World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series across Minnesota's passionate hockey communities," said **Tamera Robinson**, President, Delta Dental of Minnesota. "Delta Dental of Minnesota believes in helping communities thrive and promotes oral health and overall well-being, so we are excited to celebrate Minnesota's rich hockey heritage while bringing the game's future NHL stars to local rinks across our state."

This announcement is a phenomenal gain for Bemidji, showcasing the city's ability to host world-class sporting events. The World Juniors pre-tournament games will attract hockey fans from near and far, driving economic growth and highlighting Bemidji as a premier destination in Northern Minnesota for tourism and sports. The Sanford Center, along with Country Inn and Suites and Visit Bemidji, will play a key role in welcoming tourists and locals during this exciting opportunity.

"Visit Bemidji is excited to roll out the buffalo plaid carpet to welcome the World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series to the 'First city on the Mississippi,'" said **Josh Peterson**, executive director at Visit Bemidji. "We are proud to show the world what Bemidji has to offer. Featuring everything from our great outdoors, warm hospitality to being the 'First City of Lights,' hockey is entrenched in Bemidji's history and culture, and we welcome everyone to experience and share their 'Great Moments' while in Bemidji."

(more)

Bemidji is a quintessential hockey hotbed, where generations of players and coaches have built a legacy of excellence both at Bemidji State University (BSU) and Bemidji High School. The remarkable achievements of coaches like R.H. Bob Peters and Tom Serratore, who together amassed over 1,100 wins, have cemented BSU's reputation as a formidable hockey program. With national championships, Frozen Four appearances, and the development of dedicated athletes who - like BSU Women's Head Coach Amber Fryklund - often remain in the community as coaches and mentors, hockey is more than just a sport in Bemidji, it's a cultural cornerstone. The transition of players from youth associations to the Lumberjacks to the Beavers highlights the strong connection between the university and the town, creating a hockey ecosystem where passion for the game unites residents and fosters a sense of community pride that extends far beyond the rink.

"We are very excited to be a part of such an amazing event," said **Bobby Anderson**, general manager of The Sanford Center. "This is an incredible opportunity for Bemidji and a great example of ways to drive economic impact in Northern Minnesota. I'm grateful to all those in our city that have come together to make this possible."

"You can't think of the State of Hockey without thinking of Bemidji. Hockey is part of our Northwoods identity, and to bring international talent to our home is a fantastic way to embrace and show off what we offer here," said **Brittany Lauritsen**, director of athletics at Bemidji State University. "We have incredible local partnerships that enable us to host events of this scale and a community that will bring the energy to these exhibition games. Bemidji State is grateful to be a partner to the World Junior Championship."

The 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship showcases the world's best men's hockey players under age 20, with 10 nations competing for gold at Xcel Energy Center in Saint Paul and 3M Arena at Mariucci in Minneapolis.

This marks the seventh time the U.S. has hosted the World Junior tournament and a return to where it all began: Minneapolis/Saint Paul first hosted in 1982, followed by Anchorage (1989), Boston (1996), Grand Forks, North Dakota (2005), and Buffalo (2011, 2018).

Along with the pre-tournament series host communities, Minnesota Sports and Events is proud to partner with USA Hockey to host the 50th edition of World Juniors in Minnesota, along with the Minnesota Wild, Xcel Energy Center, University of Minnesota, Visit Saint Paul and Meet Minneapolis.

All-session and group play ticket packages for the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship in Minnesota are on sale now at 2026.worldjunior.hockey. For more information visit WorldJuniorsMN26.com or connect on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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About Visit Bemidji

Visit Bemidji is the tourism marketing arm for the community. Visit Bemidji's mission is to strengthen the region's economy through the promotion of travel and tourism. Visit Bemidji proudly promotes the natural beauty of the region, spirit of the community, and the unique attributes that Bemidji, the "First City on the Mississippi" and home of Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox, can offer the visitor.

About The Sanford Center

The Sanford Center is the home of Bemidji State University men's and women's hockey; the facility has enabled Bemidji to attract a variety of civic, convention, and entertainment events while enhancing its position as a regional center for Northern Minnesota. Providing a gathering place for cultural, recreational, educational, and entertainment events, The Sanford Center, overlooking Lake Bemidji, offers unmatched, flexible space for all needs in our community.

About the IIHF World Junior Championship

The IIHF World Junior Championship is international hockey's premiere tournament where the world's best men's ice hockey players under 20 years of age compete for the gold medal. Hosted by Minnesota for the second time since 1982, the tournament will showcase hockey's future stars from 10 nations in front of thousands of passionate hockey fans at Xcel Energy Center in Saint Paul and 3M Arena at Mariucci on the University of Minnesota campus in Minneapolis from December 26 - January 5, 2026. For more information, visit WorldJuniorsMN26.com.

About Minnesota Sports and Events

Minnesota Sports and Events is an independent 501c6 organization designed to bring significant economic, reputational, and social impact to the region through the attraction, promotion, and execution of world-class events. MNSE also advances community initiatives associated with each event with a focus on underserved communities and statewide engagement. For more information, visit www.mnsportsandevents.org.

About Delta Dental of Minnesota

Delta Dental of Minnesota is an independent, nonprofit health services company that serves the oral health needs of Minnesota and North Dakota residents. Since 1969, Delta Dental of Minnesota has accomplished this mission by providing the best access across the state to oral health care through affordable dental plans. Delta Dental of Minnesota is an authorized licensee of the Delta Dental Plans Association of Oak Brook, Illinois.