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Congress Passes Minor-League Immigration Bill

The House and Senate did pass an immigration bill as they headed for the exits last week — one for minor-league baseball, basketball and hockey players and icecapade skaters.

The bill allows an unlimited number of those athletes to enter the U.S. on the same terms as major-league players and international sports stars. Currently, the minor leaguers enter on H2-B visas, which are good for only six months and are limited to 66,000 a year. That visa category is intended for seasonal workers like crab pickers and ski-industry employees, but as the popularity of minor-league and farm-team sports has spread, entire leagues have become dependent on foreign players.

The Central Hockey League, with 17 teams in places including Shreveport, La., and Prescott Valley, Ariz., says 264 of its 336 players — and all their head coaches — are foreign born. That makes for a ragged start of each season, says Steve Cherwonak, the league's marketing manager: Play frequently begins before all the players arrive.

The measure had been part of a comprehensive immigration overhaul bill passed by the Senate in May. That bill dealt with highly skilled workers like doctors and engineers, with a guest-worker program and with the estimated 11.5 million immigrants here illegally. None of those other would-be immigrants got any relief in the one-week lame-duck session.

After the Senate passed the measure, one of its sponsors, California Democrat Dianne Feinstein, issued a press release saying the "legislation would level the playing field for minor league athletes."
—June Kronholz

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Because we need minor league baseball, basketball, hockey, and icecapades skaters much more than we need roofers, gardeners, hog slaughterers, and meat cutters of course.

Comment by george - December 12, 2006 at [12:11 pm](#)

It's just that congress can relate to any group calling itself "minor league".

Comment by KDM - December 12, 2006 at [12:17 pm](#)

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