



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • September 2, 2026

The News & Observer

Hurricanes' run to the Stanley Cup was economic boon for Wake County

By: Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes relentless run to the 2026 Stanley Cup proved to be a huge economic boon for Wake County.

The total economic impact of the march to the Cup, including 10 home games at the Lenovo Center, was \$48.1 million, it was announced Tuesday by the Hurricanes and the county's destination marketing arm, Visit Raleigh.

The financial figures also include the massive championship celebration in downtown Raleigh that brought nearly 200,000 people to the area, plus the watch parties during the playoffs at Lenovo Center, Red Hat Amphitheater and Moore Square.

The economic breakdown:

- \$23.1 million from the seven home games in the first three rounds of the playoffs against the Ottawa Senators, Philadelphia Flyers and Montreal Canadiens.

- \$13.6 million from three games in the Stanley Cup Final against the Vegas Golden Knights and the watch parties.

- \$11.4 million from the downtown celebration and parade.

The watch party inside the Lenovo Center for Game 6 of the Cup Final, played in Las Vegas, was a sellout and thousands more gathered in the plaza outside the arena as the Canes clinched the Cup.

The crowd for the downtown celebration on June 20 was estimated at 192,000 and that figure could have been higher.

"It was an amazing spring and summer to see the way that our state galvanized in support of our team," Hurricanes CEO Brian Fork said in a statement. "From the first tailgate in April through the parade in June, the greater Raleigh community was featured on an international scene like never before. We are grateful for the governmental and corporate partners and all of the fans who helped to make it such a memorable experience for our team."

The playoff games, watch parties and the parade brought an estimated 439,000 to the area, generating an estimated 30,539 room-nights in Wake County. It generated \$1.18 million in local tax revenue.

The Canes swept both the Senators and Flyers in four games, playing two games at home in each series. They played three games at Lenovo against both the Flyers and Knights.

"The Canes' historic playoff run, which included 10 home games and the many ancillary events that went along with it, generated a massive economic impact for Raleigh and the region," Scott Dupree, executive director of the Greater Raleigh Sports Alliance, said in a statement. "It was an unforgettable two-month stretch that not only provided a huge boost for local businesses, but also electrified the market and brought Caniacs together from Apex to Zebulon and everywhere in between. It culminated with a championship celebration in downtown Raleigh that was the largest one-day gathering of people in the city's history."



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Hurricanes announce more broadcast details—with a lot still unknown

By: Al Hood

It was probably not a coincidence that at the exact four week mark when the puck drops on the new season, the Canes sent out a post with news on how fans will be able to watch the other 72 games that aren't on national TV this year.

The local entity broadcasting the games will be called the Hurricanes Hockey Network. It was also announced everyone that Hurricanes fans had come to enjoy on screen will officially be back for the 2026-27 season. Mike Maniscalco and Tripp Tracy had been announced prior, but the release made official that Shane Willis and Hanna Yates would also grace the screen during the broadcasts.

That Willis is back isn't a surprise as he was a Hurricanes employee already. Yates, however, is the news as prior to this season she was actually an employee not of the Hurricanes but of the entity that broadcast the games—Main Street Sports, last known by FanDuel Sports Network. For her to continue to appear on the broadcasts, she would have had to become a Hurricanes employee—something that was up in the air as Tom Dundon is known for being, shall we say, thrifty when it comes to the number of people he'll hire when he has to.

That said it isn't that much of a narrative changer for Dundon. The release mentions that VP of Communications Mike Sundheim will add managing "all aspects of production, distribution, sales and marketing for HHN, in coordination with the National Hockey League." In short he'll still do all the work he did before and add more to his plate. Yates also will be doing more than just appearing on the broadcast as she added digital host to her title, so it's possible we'll see her a lot more on the official team videos that are sent out across social media platforms.

Unfortunately in terms of news, that was it for the communication and that leaves unanswered a huge question: how to watch? The only acknowledgement of how fans would be able to watch this new Hurricanes Hockey Network came at the bottom of the release:

The Hurricanes Hockey Network (HHN) is the exclusive local television home of Carolina Hurricanes hockey. Owned and operated by Hurricanes Holdings, the organization oversees all aspects of production, distribution, sales and marketing for the network, in collaboration with the National Hockey League. The network provides fans with live coverage of games, as well as comprehensive pregame and postgame shows. HHN will be available throughout the

Hurricanes' regional broadcast territory via cable and satellite providers and as a direct-to-consumer streaming subscription to be announced at a later date.

The last part was emphasized by myself, as it doesn't really let us know which cable and satellite providers in the area had agreed to sign on to host HHN. That would usually lead one to believe that they don't have agreements with any of these entities yet.

One of the holdups may have been signaled on Monday by a reporter from the DLLS site. While the main function of the report was stating that the Dallas Stars would be leaving their distributor Victory+ for Amazon Prime, the same reporter had posts indicating that the Stars were not the only team headed to Amazon Prime

Half of his report has become official as Victory+ announced on Tuesday they were dissolving. It's worth noting that the other clubs mentioned in that post are either using the NHL Production services like the Hurricanes, or are now former Victory+ teams like Anaheim. There hasn't been a comment from the Canes on this report—Joe Ovies reported reaching out to them on Monday to get the no comment—but the release on Tuesday again highlights the more traditional cable and satellite model that most fans have gotten used to.

Note at this point we reach the land of speculation and conjecture

It is worth mentioning again that the current NHL broadcast contract ends after the 2027-28 season, and they will be the first of the non-NFL leagues that will have the opportunity to directly negotiate the ability of centralizing local broadcast rights into one hub within the framework of a new deal. With the consistent collapse of the RSN structure, the central NHL production was seen as the first step to try and get as many local broadcast rights under the wing of the NHL that they can turn around and negotiate as part of the next broadcast deal. The theory is the NHL gets the money from a company like Amazon or Disney to be THE app fans go to when they want to watch their local team play. If those broadcasts end up on a cable, satellite, or streaming service like YouTubeTV, then it would basically be at the discretion of that service.

Thus it's notable that Amazon is trying to already to be that hub. The report for the Stars is that Amazon Prime subscribers in the Dallas market would get Dallas Stars games as part of the service and not have to pay extra. It would be available to them just like the NFL, NASCAR, and



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the NBA is. However, if you are a Stars fan living in California, you'd still need the Center Ice or Power Play package from ESPN Ultimate in order to watch their broadcasts.

What that means for the Canes is anyone's guess. As Ovie noted, just because Tuesday's release mentioned cable and satellite doesn't mean that's set in stone. If Amazon insists on exclusivity except for the separate and offers the team a significantly good price to do so, would anyone be surprised if the Canes took it? It's also possible that as advertisement revenue would go to the Canes, they would want the

broadcasts to be seen by as many people as possible—thus they may take less from Amazon to allow them to get the games elsewhere.

The first broadcast on the HHN—presuming they don't do some sort of pregame for Opening Night before ESPN takes over—is going to be October 2nd when the Washington Capitals come to town. So, the good—if frustrating—news for fans is we still have over four weeks to find out how games will be available to the masses and what the price of the stand alone streaming service will be. Hopefully the information will be out well before that.

LINKS

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The Athletic / Ranking the NHL's top 20 Calder Trophy candidates for the 2026-27 season

By Scott Wheeler, Corey Pronman and Harman Dayal

Sept. 1, 2026 Updated 12:25 pm EDT

Welcome, for a ninth straight season, to The Athletic's annual look at the NHL's incoming rookie class.

This year, Scott Wheeler and Harman Dayal are joined by Corey Pronman for our quarterly Calder Trophy ranking, beginning with this preseason look at the top 20 rookies (plus honorable mentions) heading into the 2026-27 NHL season.

This list differs from Wheeler and Pronman's own prospects rankings in that it's only about predicting and projecting their rookie seasons, and not their careers. While the players' profiles remain an obvious factor, external factors — potential linemates, power-play opportunities, roles, usage, etc. — are also uniquely relevant in handicapping the Calder Trophy race.

This ranking is also designed as a bit of a tutor for fantasy hockey managers, ideally helping to fill in the gaps that Dom Luszczyszyn and Shayna Goldman's fantasy projections find difficult to model for new players.

Among the potential rookies we discussed but didn't make our top 20 were defensemen Theo Lindstein, Luca Cagnoni and Ryan Ufko, forward Victor Eklund, and camp wild-cards like Nikita Klepov, Caleb Desnoyers and Trevor Connelly.

Note: The NHL's Calder Trophy criteria for rookie status says that "a player cannot have played more than 25 games in any single preceding season nor in six or more games in each of any two preceding seasons" and "must not have attained his 26th birthday by Sept. 15 of the season in which he is eligible."

The Sharks have the NHL's best prospect pipeline

Corey Pronman and Max Bultman

1. Porter Martone — RW, 19, Philadelphia Flyers

Martone's tremendous showing in the NHL at the end of last season has to position him as the Calder favorite heading into this year. He didn't just look like he belonged, he looked like an immediate impact player and potential needle-mover for the Flyers' ceiling. If you presume Trevor Zegras and Travis Konecny are two of the forwards on the top power play, there are only two spots for Martone, Matvei Michkov, Tyson Foerster, Owen Tippett and Christian Dvorak, with the other three forming the nucleus of PP2. Smart money has to be on Martone being at the top of that pecking order for one of the available PP1 spots. And if he is, there shouldn't be anything preventing him, with his combination of size, power, skill and playmaking, from having the kind of season needed to earn a Calder nomination (typically in the 50-point range) or potentially win it (typically the 60-plus point range) if he can stay healthy and get some puck luck. — Wheeler

2. Ivar Stenberg — LW, 18, San Jose Sharks

Stenberg is viewed as the more complete player for the NHL at this stage compared to Gavin McKenna, and has already proven himself against pro competition in the SHL and NHL competition in a top-line role for Sweden at men's worlds. The X-factor in the point total he can reach will likely be determined by whether he gets to play with Macklin Celebrini and Will Smith, or whether that role goes instead to a veteran like Mason Marchment, or another youngster like Collin Graf or Igor Chernyshov (who've both already played with Celebrini a little). I'm less worried about



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him getting a PP1 job. Even if he starts on PP2, I don't imagine it's long until he's playing on PP1 this season. — Wheeler

3. Gavin McKenna — LW, 18, Toronto Maple Leafs

McKenna is the rookie best positioned in this year's class to collect cookies. He's going to play on a top-six line in Toronto from Game 1 with some combination of Auston Matthews, William Nylander and John Tavares. He's going to play the flank on PP1 with those guys plus Matthew Knies and Darren Raddysh, and make some pretty plays and also some five-foot passes that lead to assists. From a pure on-puck skill standpoint, he stands alone in this class as well. There are two questions with McKenna though: Will he and his body hold up to the rigors of a physical 84-game schedule, and will he be a drag defensively to offset some of the offense he's bound to produce? If he withstands those challenges, he'll be well-positioned to win the thing. But there's also a scenario where he has a rookie season reminiscent of Jack Hughes, who played at a 28-point pace. — Wheeler

4. Cole Hutson — LHD, 20, Washington Capitals

It's harder for young defenseman to play in the NHL and thus harder for rookie D to play their way into the Calder mix if you're not an outlier (Matthew Schaefer, Lane Hutson) or uncharacteristically polished at an early age (Brock Faber, Moritz Seider). After posting 10 points in his 14 NHL games late last year, though, Hutson showed he was already capable of producing at the NHL level. There are going to be some ups and downs for him over an 84-game season, but that production could carry him even if it regresses a little. John Carlson's departure also opens up opportunities to play in key offensive-zone settings, both on the power play and at five-on-five, which is crucial. Playing his way onto PP1 over Jakob Chychrun (or a Chychrun injury) will probably be needed for him to truly stay in the mix, though. — Wheeler

5. Roman Kantserov — LW/RW, 21, Chicago Blackhawks

Kantserov is the reigning KHL goal king and was one of the top players outside the NHL last season. While Anton Frondell is the bigger name and showed he could produce in the NHL last year, Kantserov will likely play with Bedard on the top line at five-on-five on top of sharing a spot with Frondell on PP1. With his speed, skill, shot and sneaky strength, he's positioned to make an immediate impact offensively. — Wheeler

6. Konsta Helenius — C, 20, Buffalo Sabres

Helenius is a bit of a sleeper pick in this year's rookie class. Jiří Kulich's return lowers his likelihood of a top-six/prominent power-play role, but the Sabres are going to have three legitimate lines up front, two legitimate power plays, and between his play in the NHL late last year and at men's worlds, he looks like he has really taken a step. The Sabres are hoping he's ready to contribute with guys like Kulich, Noah Östlund and Zach Benson to replace the offense lost from the departures of Alex Tuch and Bowen Byram. As things tend to go with the Calder, his role and/or opportunity on the power play will determine his realistic hopes, so that's worth monitoring in camp and early into the season for fantasy purposes. The Sabres have more than eight power-play-capable forwards. — Wheeler

7. Anton Frondell — C, 19, Chicago Blackhawks

Frondell surprised some, this writer included, with his 9-in-12 start and just how much he looked like he immediately belonged in the NHL in the spring. Doing that over 84 games is something else altogether, especially as a center — though I've always liked him better on the wing and have heard he quietly prefers the wing too. His size, stick and shot have always carried him and will continue to do so in the NHL, enabling him to crank one-timers on the power play and score around the net and occasionally from distance at five-on-five. His pace, playmaking and general inconsistency have troubled him at times over the years and will likely produce some up-and-down stretches through his rookie season. Still, it wouldn't surprise anyone if he scored 20-30 goals as a rookie with that shot of his. — Wheeler

8. Jacob Fowler — G, 21, Montréal Canadiens

Fowler's elite talent, tools, and dominant statistical track record make him arguably the best goaltending prospect in hockey. The 21-year-old won the Mike Richter Award as the NCAA's best netminder in 2024-25, and his transition to pro hockey last season was seamless. Fowler posted a .916 save percentage in the AHL, but even more impressive is how impactful he looked during his brief NHL opportunity last season. He

didn't just hold his own; he significantly outperformed his defensive environment — he notched a rock-solid .908 save percentage and saved 9.3 goals saved above expected in 17 games. There's every reason to believe Fowler is gifted enough to have a Dustin Wolf-esque rookie season, but the biggest roadblock for his Calder candidacy will be getting a sufficient number of NHL starts. Jakub Dobeš was lights-out through the second half of last season and the playoffs, which makes him the clear-cut No. 1. And if Sam Montembeault isn't traded before the season starts, there's a chance Fowler could start the season in Laval. Fowler's clearly better than Montembeault at this stage, but he's waivers-exempt and the organization may view consistent, high-volume AHL time as more beneficial for his long-term development. — Dayal

9. Ilya Protas — C/LW, 20, Washington Capitals

Protas' rocket-ship development trajectory deserves more league-wide hype. The younger brother of Aliaksei Protas, he scored 66 points in 69 AHL games as a 19-year-old last season, which was one of the most productive U20 performances in AHL history. He looked sharp during an end-of-season NHL call-up too, scoring four points in four games. The behemoth 6-foot-6 center's skating is a work in progress and may limit how dynamic his game looks early on, but his bulldozing net-front style and high-end puck skills should pay immediate offensive dividends. Protas should be a key middle-six contributor from day one, but the Capitals are so deep up front that it'll be challenging for him to get as much ice time and prime power-play usage as the forwards higher on this list. Ryan Leonard, for instance, averaged only 14:25 per game during his rookie campaign last season despite looking incredible, which ultimately capped how many points he could produce. — Dayal

10. James Hagens — C/W, 19, Boston Bruins

With a creative, free-flowing offensive toolkit and a decorated NCAA scoring profile, Hagens has all the ingredients to eventually develop into a legitimate top-six difference-maker. However, when you're only 19, you need to be a truly special talent to make an immediate, high-end NHL impact, and that's where it could take Hagens some time to find his stride. Hagens showed some flashes once he signed his ELC at the end of last season, but he didn't hit the ground running like Martone did, scoring one point in five games between the regular season and playoffs. He's far more likely to play in the middle six and on PP2 than he is to ride shotgun with David Pastrňák. Perhaps his rookie season winds up looking similar to Logan Cooley's — at 19, Cooley struggled in the first half of his rookie year, especially at five-on-five, but found his footing down the stretch and finished in the 40-point range. — Dayal

Does James Hagens have a future at center in the NHL?

Max Bultman and Corey Pronman

11. Carter Yakemchuk — RHD, 20, Ottawa Senators

Yakemchuk is a hard-shooting, big-bodied offensive defenseman coming off a respectable AHL campaign, scoring 40 points in 54 games from the back end. His long-term upside is very intriguing, but the Senators will likely shelter his NHL usage for a variety of reasons. Ottawa's top-four defense is already very strong on paper, and he'll likely begin this season as the third RHD on the depth chart behind Artem Zub and Jordan Spence. Jake Sanderson is also the undisputed PP1 quarterback, which will hurt Yakemchuk's chances of putting up the gaudy point totals required to be in the Calder conversation. — Dayal

12. Viggo Björck — C, 18, Winnipeg Jets

The Jets will give Björck a legitimate opportunity to be the club's full-time second-line center this season. Björck is one of the most NHL-ready prospects from this summer's draft — he excelled playing against men in the SHL, shined at men's worlds a few months ago and plays a tenacious, responsible two-way game that should earn an NHL coaching staff's trust. However, he's only 18 and won't get PP1 opportunity, and while his offensive skill set is impressive, he isn't a natural game-breaker. Björck could have a Ben Kindel-like rookie year where he scores 35-40 points in addition to driving precocious two-way underlying numbers. — Dayal

13. Sebastian Cossa — G, 23, Utah Mammoth

Acquired from Detroit in exchange for a first-round pick this summer, Cossa will join forces with Karel Vejmelka to form Utah's goaltending tandem. Cossa is unproven at the NHL level, with only one career game under his belt, but he has a strong pedigree and his AHL numbers



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(between .911 and .915 in each of the last three years) are promising. He's an intriguing bet for the Mammoth, but if Vejmelka stays healthy, it's unlikely Cossa will play enough games to make serious noise in the Calder conversation. — Dayal

14. Sergei Murashov — G, 22, Pittsburgh Penguins

Murashov's path to a potential No. 1 role is easier to envision than Fowler's or Cossa's because Pittsburgh's current starter, Artūrs Šilovs, is also young and unproven. The challenge, though, is that the Penguins are often loose and shaky defensively (ranked bottom-10 in five-on-five expected goals against per 60 last season) which is a tough environment for goaltenders to excel in. Murashov has loads of talent and potential, but even if he plays well, it'll be difficult for him to post the kind of raw save percentage that would garner meaningful Calder attention, unless Pittsburgh tightens up in its own zone. — Dayal

15. Tij Iginla — C/LW/RW, 20, Utah Mammoths

Iginla had a massive season in the WHL last year, dominating with Kelowna to the tune of 90 points in 48 games. He is a highly talented offensive player who generates a ton of chances with the puck on his stick. His stickhandling displays stand out constantly. While his pure playmaking doesn't pop quite as much as his shot, he works hard and gets to the inside. After proving all he can at the junior level, the 2024 No. 6 pick is expected to make a strong push for a full-time NHL role out of camp this season. — Pronman

16. Bradly Nadeau — LW/RW, 21, Carolina Hurricanes

Nadeau has been excellent as a pro, proving to be one of the best young wingers in the AHL last season as a top player on a strong team. He boasts a lot of offensive talent, coupling very good individual puck skills with legit NHL speed. He's highly dangerous in transition, backing off defenders with his pace before using his high-end shot. After dominating the AHL, the expectation is he steps into a full-time middle-six NHL role at least to start the season while Seth Jarvis is sidelined. — Pronman

17. Alex Bump — LW, 22, Philadelphia Flyers

Bump made the jump to the pros last season, putting up solid numbers in the AHL before making a positive impression during his stint with the Flyers. He relies on his intelligence and soft hands to generate offense, showing the ability to slow the game down and find seams. The major question mark remains his skating; he has a heavy stride that lacks ideal NHL pace. However, given his size, compete level and finishing touch, he is expected to push for a permanent bottom-six NHL role. — Pronman

18. Michael Brandsegg-Nygård — RW, 20, Detroit Red Wings

Brandsegg-Nygård had a big season in the AHL, showcasing his maturity and strength against men. He plays a highly projectable, pro-style game. He's a tenacious competitor who wins a ton of puck battles and boasts a heavy, accurate shot. He's not the flashiest offensive player but he has enough speed and skill to project to be able to tilt the ice at the next level. He's expected to push for a full-time spot in Detroit this season. — Pronman

19. Sandis Vilmanis — LW, 22, Florida Panthers

Vilmanis had a very positive season last year, showing quite well in the AHL, playing for Latvia's senior team and earning extended looks with Florida. He's a fast, competitive winger who contributes effectively at both ends. He wins puck battles and consistently puts himself around the play. Though he lacks high-end creativity, he attacks in a direct, translatable manner. He should push for a bottom-six spot even in a loaded Panthers lineup. — Pronman

20. Caleb Desnoyers, C, 19, Utah Mammoth

There's likely only one spot in Utah's top nine for Iginla or Desnoyers, but whoever wins it will be in a prime spot to contribute. Desnoyers is a two-way forward who can score and play with pace while being physical. — Pronman

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The Athletic / On Team Trans, no rhetoric, only athletes, hockey and 'a break from all of it'

By Rebecca Tauber

Sept. 1, 2026 6:00 am EDT

BOSTON — On a Saturday in August at the Boston Bruins' practice facility, Mason LeFebvre put on his goalie gear and headed out to the ice.

LeFebvre grew up playing girls hockey in New Hampshire. For years, his mask, pads and chest protector were a form of armor.

"When I would put it on, I wouldn't feel like the boy trapped in a girl's body so much because I could just be me, the goalie," said LeFebvre, 32, who came out as transgender shortly after he graduated from college.

That weekend in Boston, no one had to hide. It was the one time a year members of Team Trans, an all-transgender rec hockey team, gathered from across the country for a series of friendlies.

They came from Wisconsin and New York, California and Maryland and Arizona, with rainbow-taped hockey sticks and custom jerseys, some in their 20s and some in their 40s, some with decades of hockey experience, others with just a few years. They came to banter in a locker room and play with teammates without worrying about strange looks or transphobic comments or any of the national discourse.

Less than two months after the Supreme Court upheld state bans on trans athletes, and while WNBA players and fans protested and counterprotested trans policies in sports, a group of trans hockey players got together and just played.

Team Trans was born from an idea hatched at a bar in Manhattan after a game between Boston Pride Hockey and the New York City Gay Hockey Association, two all-gender LGBTQ+ hockey organizations. From there, a Facebook group of trans hockey players across the country turned into a team of 16 that traveled to Massachusetts in 2019 for a friendly against Boston Pride Hockey.

"For months I couldn't figure out how to talk about it, because it was just such a different experience," LeFebvre said. "Family is the word I usually come back to."

Since then, Team Trans has organized annual friendlies and sent teams to rec tournaments across the country. While states and professional leagues have moved away from trans athlete policies based on hormone levels and age of transition and toward outright bans, Team Trans has only grown — as have other LGBTQ+ hockey leagues. This year, the all-gender team fielded 41 athletes for three games against Boston Pride — novice, intermediate and advanced — in Team Trans' first return to Boston since the inaugural game. The NHL donated \$10,000, which went toward travel and accommodations for players in need of financial aid, and the Bruins donated the ice time.

"A lot of people want to have that experience and didn't necessarily get to have it as a kid ... or had it as a kid, maybe they grew up playing hockey, but then they came out and stopped playing," LeFebvre said. "Now they're starting to hear about Team Trans and queer hockey organizations and stuff and starting to come back to the sport. We've got a lot of players who had entirely quit hockey until they learned about us."

Getting ready for faceoff during an August game between Team Trans and Boston Pride Hockey. (Hannah Carpenter via Boston Pride Hockey)

On the bench at Warrior Arena in between periods, Team Trans' novice squad, down a few goals to Boston Pride, strategized. They were doing a decent job in front of the net, their coach said, but needed to be stronger on defense.

"We're here to have fun, but we're also here to win," someone said in the huddle.

A few trans players who typically compete for Boston Pride had switched over to Team Trans for the weekend to play with other trans athletes.

"This is my home team, and I need them to know we're better than them," another said.



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The third period began, and they headed back out onto the ice. Team Trans managed a few more shots, but ultimately lost, 3-2. The advanced team suited up for the next game.

The recreational level, especially in LGBTQ+ leagues, is one of the few places trans athletes can often just show up and play. Few are trying to go pro; they're not aiming for Olympic medals. They have a variety of opinions on how they think leagues should legislate trans athlete participation at the professional level, about what fairness should look like without banning the trans community outright.

But during this weekend, no one was there to debate. Playing rec hockey, on teams divided by skill level rather than gender, they sought only what most want out of casual sports: camaraderie and good competition.

For Team Trans' first return to Boston since the inaugural game in 2019, the NHL donated \$10,000 and the Bruins donated the ice time. (Hannah Carpenter via Boston Pride Hockey)

"It definitely affects us, but we try really hard to keep it at bay," LeFebvre said about the news cycle. "We're going to try not to sit here and talk about it with each other because that's not what we're here for. It kind of gives us a break from all of it."

But politics have made their way to beer leagues, too. In January, USA Hockey approved a policy in which athletes can only participate on gendered teams "based on their sex assigned at birth." USA Hockey said it implemented the rule in response to directives from the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, but it also affects the rec level, since many rec leagues affiliate with USA Hockey for insurance purposes.

For Team Trans and other LGBTQ+ hockey teams, the rules mostly mean they have to find new insurance providers for events like the one in Boston. But some athletes worry about what the new rules mean for their rec teams at home.

There is no LGBTQ+ rec league where Jaylynn Johnstone lives in Maryland. Instead, she plays for a local women's league and referees at various levels for USA Hockey. Johnstone's name has appeared on an anti-trans website tracking trans women who play sports. Once, a woman said "f---k you" to her in the handshake line after a game.

"It can really feel like there's no real way out of this, honestly," she said.

That won't stop Johnstone from officiating, a skill she has honed since she was a 12-year-old growing up in Anchorage, Alaska. She refuses to take the trans pride sticker off her helmet.

"It can feel like, at times, just isolating," she said. "You try and find glimpses of joy like in these tournaments, to just help remind you that this is just a very normal experience in life... It fills your cup, especially in dark times."

Laur, who typically plays on Team Trans' novice and intermediate teams, was on the bench coaching Team Trans' novice team at the Boston series because of a knee injury. They declined to give their last name to protect their privacy.

They had always wanted to play hockey, but never had a chance to learn until adulthood. When they started questioning their gender, they wondered if they were "trans enough" for Team Trans. The group welcomed them with open arms. They met their partner at the tournament in 2021, and a year later, surprised her with a proposal on the ice.

"You don't have to worry about, 'Oh, how am I presenting here? Do I need to bring a set of clothes to change into, out of, et cetera?'" Laur said.

With Team Trans, they continued, "It is the exact opposite, where here, I'm excited to be myself."

At home, they play on a women's team, where they feel like they have to hide part of their identity. In recent years, their fear has grown.

"Fear of, can I be my true authentic self at my home team locker room?" Laur said. "Can I risk going to a series where there might be news stories about folks?"

Team Trans is a place to let loose. Brooke McGinley grew up playing boys hockey in Medford, Mass., in locker rooms that she said often

featured homophobic rhetoric. Sometimes, she felt players were checking her harder on the ice. That wasn't the case at Warrior Arena.

"This is a very healthy environment. It's very accepting," she said in the locker room before the series. "People can literally let their hair down."

The next day, Team Trans players would board trains and flights home, some to teams and communities where they could be themselves, and others to places where they might have to worry about changing their driver's licenses or accessing healthcare. In the days to follow, the controversy in the WNBA would only heat up.

But for one weekend in August, athletes could check their fears at the door.

"It's really important to show that we aren't going anywhere," LeFebvre said. "We're still here, we've always been here, and we're going to keep being here."

On the ice for the last game of the day, LeFebvre lost count of the number of shots he blocked; Team Trans ultimately lost three close games to Boston Pride. But none of that really mattered. Spirits high, it was time to hit the bar.

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Sportsnet.ca / Top 10 teams most likely to make the playoffs after missing last year

Justin Arenburg

The Stanley Cup Playoffs never look the same twice in a row.

Since the NHL moved to a 16-team playoff format in 1979-1980 – excluding the 2019-20 COVID-shortened season – we've never seen the same 16 teams that made the Stanley Cup Playoffs the previous season, make it again the following year.

Talk about a league with parity.

Of course, there will be playoff teams from 2025-26 that will take a step back. The Anaheim Ducks, Los Angeles Kings, Pittsburgh Penguins and Ottawa Senators, just to name a few potential candidates.

But more importantly, there are always organizations that bounce back after one rough season or young teams emerging into the playoff mix. Plus, every year we usually get one team that shocks everyone and makes the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

So, here are the top 10 teams we think could make the playoffs in 2026-2027 that didn't in 2025-26.

For an organization that finished with 91 points last season, discovered a potential superstar defenceman with rookie Matthew Schaefer, got Vezina Trophy worthy goaltending from Ilya Sorokin and jumped the market to hire arguably the best coach available in Pete DeBoer, you would think they would be higher on this list.

Let's face it, last season the New York Islanders over achieved with an aging core (outside of Calum Ritchie and Schaefer) finishing eight points out of a playoff spot. Considering the Islanders finished tied for 25th in goals for with 2.79 per game and 30th on the power play, which operated at 16.5 per cent, it's safe to say they relied a lot on Sorokin to bail them out, which he did most of the time.

Unfortunately for Sorokin, it seems that will be the strategy again for the Islanders this year.

With only \$6.18 million in cap space heading into free agency this past summer, the team made no notable signings and lost Carson Soucy along with their former captain Anders Lee. While other teams on this list in the Eastern Conference, more specifically the Metropolitan Division, made moves to get better.



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With Chris MacFarland now at the helm as president and general manager of the Nashville Predators, it's clear he wants this team to compete, and compete now.

Unlike the Islanders, the Predators in 2025-26 couldn't get a save, finishing with a 3.26 goals-against average, 26th in the league. Despite that, they only finished four points out of the last wild card spot in the Western Conference thanks to big rebound seasons from Ryan O'Reilly, Steven Stamkos and Roman Josi.

While MacFarland is definitely hoping for the same type of rebound season from Juuse Saros in 2026-27, he also made a lot of changes in just his first off-season trying to make the playoffs again. He traded for Mavrik Bourque, Ross Colton, Jack Drury and Ilya Lyubushkin, while signing Alexander Kerfoot to help bolster their lineup.

Even with all those moves, the Predators aren't a slam dunk to make the playoffs. But, in a weaker conference, they could be a team to just sneak in.

Talking about sneaky good, next up are the St. Louis Blues, who also finished tied with the Predators in 2025-26 with 86 points.

The Blues' off-season might be one of the more underrated ones. Sure, they shipped out Jordan Kyrou, but in return they got Connor McMichael, who has recorded 45 points or more in the past two seasons, Milton Gastirin and Maddox Dagenais.

They also picked up 2021 third overall pick Mason McTavish and Brandon Carlo in two trades during the NHL Draft.

With core forward pieces Jimmy Snuggerud, Dylan Holloway and Jake Neighbours expected to keep growing, the Blues could be in line to take a step forward this season. However, success will depend on what version of Jordan Binnington we see.

There is no sugar coating it, this ranking totally depends on whether or not Connor Hellebuyck is on the Winnipeg Jets roster come opening night for the 2026-27 season.

As we now know, the three-time Vezina Trophy winner recently made his private trade request public as NHL training camps are set to begin in a couple weeks, leaving the Jets in a unique spot.

If the Jets are to grant his request and trade him, it's been reported that he's willing to waive his no-move clause to more teams than other trade requests we've seen in the past few months. This would help the Jets out in making a good deal for the organization, but it's unclear whether the team values picks and prospects or roster players in return – making it hard to rank them on this list.

However, if the Jets decide they're not getting enough value for him and want to keep him since he's only entering year three of a seven-year extension, this team could make some noise.

Last season was bad. But we're just two years removed from this team winning the Presidents' Trophy and really the only notable player not on the roster from that team is Nikolaj Ehlers. The biggest factor for the Jets to make the playoffs (other than Hellebuyck) will be health. If this team can have a run of health they have a good chance of making the playoffs again.

We're going to find out how much the Blue Jackets care about losing in 2026-27.

Even though it feels like a lifetime ago, Rick Bowness' rant after the Blue Jackets final game of the 2025-26 regular season has to be front of mind coming into this season.

"If I'm back, I'm changing this culture," Bowness, the interim head coach at the time, told reporters on April 14. "These guys don't care. Losing is not important enough to them; it doesn't bother them."

Two days later, the Blues Jackets gave Bowness a one-year contract.

With all the off-season trade rumours surrounding Zach Werenski settled, the addition of Valeri Nichushkin and Ryan Lomberg, and expected bumps in play from Adam Fantilli, Denton Mateychuk and Jet Greaves, the Blue Jackets should be right in the mix to contend for a playoff spot.

We're officially at the point in the list where if these teams don't make the playoffs, it will be a disappointing season.

The New Jersey Devils in 2025-26 started so well, rolling out to a 16-7-1 record through 24 games, good for third in the league. Then, the injuries came. First and most importantly, it was Jack Hughes in a freak hand accident at a team dinner that kept him sidelined for six weeks. From there, things just unravelled for the Devils, who finished with just 87 points.

Looking at the roster additions for 2026-27 with Anthony Mantha and Evan Rodrigues, the Devils should be able to make the playoffs. All of that will depend on two things though: Health, obviously, and whether or not 36-year-old Jake Allen can hold up as a No. 1 goalie if they don't trade for Hellebuyck.

Just like Gavin McKenna said, teams that usually have the first overall pick the previous year aren't pushing for the playoffs the following year.

But thanks to some lottery luck and some big moves in the off-season to acquire talent like Sergei Bobrovsky and Darren Raddysh, the Toronto Maple Leafs look like an anomaly after just missing the playoffs for the first time since 2016.

Just like other teams on this list, the Maple Leafs also need a good bill of health this season. Especially when it comes to their captain Auston Matthews, who has missed 37 games in the last two years.

Even if Matthews is only able to play around 60 games again this season though, the team is talented enough for new head coach Jim Hiller to make the playoffs.

Talk about a team entering the conversation.

The San Jose Sharks would've been high on this list even without making any off-season moves or getting some draft lottery luck because of the jump their young core, led by superstar Macklin Celebrini, made between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 seasons. The team went from 52 points in 2024-25 to 86 in 2025-26, missing the playoffs by four points along with the Blues and Predators.

But since they got some draft lottery luck, moving up to second and drafting Ivar Stenberg along with adding Mason Marchment, Jacob Trouba, Darnell Nurse and Michael Kesselring via free agency or trade, this team is primed to take another big step forward this season.

Whether Washington Capitals general manager Chris Patrick knew Alex Ovechkin wasn't going to retire after last season or not, the moves he made this off-season certainly helped make the decision to come back easier.

After finishing last season with 95 points and missing out on the playoffs by three points, the Capitals made their forward group one of the best in the NHL by adding Alex Tuch and Kyrou, two elite wingers that will produce 60 points each at least. The Capitals also grabbed Boone Jenner from free agency, a perfect fit at centre on the third line.

Not to mention, in 2026-27, they will get full rookie seasons from Ilya Protas and Cole Hutson, who made their NHL debuts last year.

Sorry, but come on, this one is too obvious.

After reaching the Stanley Cup Final three straight years, including winning two in a row, the Florida Panthers' core either ran out of gas or got injured during last season. Before the season even began they lost their captain Aleksander Barkov to a torn ACL during a practice session. As a result, the team missed the playoffs.

But there's always a silver lining, right? Well for the Panthers, they had two silver linings. First, everyone got a full off-season to recover. Second, they ended up with a top 10 pick in the draft.

And we all know who that pick helped bring to Florida — Brady Tkachuk, now paired with his brother Matthew. It's not only Brady though, the Panthers also traded for Jacob Markstrom, Radko Gudas and Garnet Hathaway.

This team won't just make the playoffs in 2026-27, they have the potential to win the Atlantic Division and the Prince of Wales Trophy, before capping it off with their third Stanley Cup in four years.

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Sportsnet.ca / One player who has to deliver for each Pacific Division team

Courtney Jacobsen

A new hockey season is on the horizon, and the possibilities are endless.

Of course, there are the betting favourites and the perennial contenders — on paper, though, all teams are behind the starting line, each chomping at the bit for the chance to etch their names onto the Stanley Cup.

But there is always a group of players who come into the year with an extra jump in their step, a chip on their shoulder and something to prove. No truer is that than in the Pacific Division — historically, the weakest among the four NHL sects — where teams and players alike are itching to break out, snap a slump or demonstrate their worth.

With that in mind, let's take a look at one player from each Pacific Division team who has extra motivation to deliver this season.

For a very publicized, very brief moment this off-season, 21-year-old Leo Carlsson was the highest-paid player in the NHL.

Although he no longer carries that mantle, the five-year, \$92-million pact with the Ducks still comes with a healthy side of raised expectations.

Since he was selected second overall at the 2023 Draft, Carlsson has been at the centre of what has been a successful rebuild for the Ducks. Three years into his career, he's managed to elevate his game each season and finished the 2025-26 campaign with 29 goals and 38 assists in 70 games, adding 11 points in 12 playoff games. There is no question Carlsson will be a huge factor as the Ducks' contention window opens.

He also accounts for 17.31 per cent of Anaheim's salary cap this season, and his whopping \$18-million cap hit significantly hinders Ducks general manager Pat Verbeek's ability to lock down RFA Cutter Gauthier and 2027 RFA Beckett Sennecke.

Given the circumstances in which Anaheim now finds itself, Carlsson has to show he can be that guy — or the Ducks could be in big trouble.

The 2022 second-overall pick, Simon Nemec never quite lived up to his draft pedigree with the New Jersey Devils.

The 22-year-old defenceman bounced between the NHL and AHL for his first two seasons, before earning a regular slot in the lineup last season. He was confined to the third pairing, though, and his numbers reflected that — 11 goals, 15 assists in 68 games. Nemec struggled to carve a place for himself on the Devils, sliding in behind the likes of Luke Hughes and Dougie Hamilton on the depth chart.

Enter the Flames, who acquired Nemec with the hopes the puck-moving blue-liner can complement their young and budding D-corps. The Flames are in the early stages of their rebuild, so the door is wide open for Nemec to establish himself as a top-four defenceman, and with the ink dry on a brand-new five-year contract, he's got the time to do so.

The Flames bet on Nemec — now it's up to him to prove it was a good one.

The Tristan Jarry experiment didn't get off to the best start last season.

The Oilers acquired the goaltender from the Penguins in on Dec. 12 in the hopes that he would provide an upgrade on Stuart Skinner, who they sent the other way to Pittsburgh. Instead, Jarry lost his starter's job by March and finished the regular season with an .858 save percentage in 19 games — dismal, even after accounting for the league-wide dip in save percentage.

But it's a new season, and the 31-year-old has a clean slate with a chance to change hearts and minds. He'll be aided by the Oilers' three-goalie rotation, where Jarry will split starts with newly acquired Frederik Andersen (once healthy) and Devon Levi to help mitigate the workload.

Jarry has two years remaining on his contract with a cap hit of \$5.375 million — by far the most expensive of the Oilers' tendies. He doesn't have to be Connor Hellebuyck 2.0 — nor is anyone expecting him to be — but Jarry should be looking to demonstrate he can at least be a reliable choice in the blue paint.

Alex Turcotte is proof that development looks different for every player.

It was two years into his professional career before he scored his first NHL goal, and three years before he got any consistent playing time. He appeared to be on the brink of figuring it out in 2024-25, but has yet to truly take that next step. There's certainly potential still to be tapped, but the runway for him to reach his best hockey isn't never-ending, and he could be running low on chances — that alone should motivate him to find a new level to his game.

It's also a contract year for Turcotte, which packs on the pressure for the 2019 fifth-overall pick. In addition to fighting for a lineup spot, the season now becomes one long tryout, after which GM Ken Holland will determine whether Turcotte is part of the future of the Kings.

At just 25 years old, Turcotte likely has more to give at the NHL level, and he's got the 2026-27 season to show that.

After years of slumming it in the NHL's basement, the Sharks finally look like they're ready to contend. The pieces are there and a path to the Stanley Cup Playoffs exists in a comparatively weak Pacific Division, and while the Sharks are taken care of up front thanks to Macklin Celebrini, it's the man between the pipes who can make or break their success this season.

The Sharks traded for Yaroslav Askarov back in 2024 with the hopes that he would be the No. 1 netminder they needed to complete the rebuild. Although he saw a starter's workload last season, he finished the year with a less-than-ideal .884 save percentage and 21-20 record.

It's entirely possible that Askarov was just experiencing growing pains and Year 2 as the No. 1 will produce better results, but the time is now for the Russian to step up, especially if the Sharks hope to level up this year.

Even more reason to elevate his game: It's also a contract year for Askarov.

The mushy middle is arguably the worst place to be in the NHL, and with the exception of one year, that's where the Kraken have resided for most of their existence.

One of the few bright spots has been the emergence Jared McCann, who exploded for career highs of 40 goals and 70 points in 79 games in 2022-23. Since then, though, his production has tapered and he finished with 20 goals and 20 assists in an injury-shortened 2025-26.

The Kraken need their offensive cornerstones to produce at an elite level if they want to claw their way to relevance. McCann has proven that he has the tools in his toolbox and coming into training camp fully healthy, the 30-year-old should, at the very least, be aiming for that 30-goal plateau again.

Sure, there is an obvious answer here, but suggesting that Elias Pettersson needs to deliver for his team is not new nor is it groundbreaking analysis. So to avoid the low-hanging fruit, let's turn our focus to a different Swede who is still looking to make his mark on the team.

Jonathan Lekkerimäki was the first Round 1 pick by then-Canucks general manager Patrik Allvin and there was real hype around the 15th-overall selection. He has a lethal shot and a goal-scoring prowess the Canucks, who finished 30th in goals last season, are in desperate need of.

The 22-year-old has yet to play a full season, however, or score more than three goals in a campaign, so there are still question marks as to how his game will translate to the NHL level in the long term.

Development isn't linear and Lekkerimäki is still young, but with where the Canucks are in their tear-down project (which is to say, very early), getting the reps in and capitalizing on the opportunity a rebuild presents will be crucial in cementing his place in Vancouver's future plans.

There was a time during the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs that Brett Howden was a Conn Smythe frontrunner. The 28-year-old led the post-season goals tally with 14 in 22 games — comfortably ahead of teammate Mitch Marner, who had 10.

This offensive outburst came as a shock to most as Howden has scored more than 10 goals only twice in his career, in either the regular season



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or the playoffs. He scored 12 goals, two fewer than his playoff total, in 58 regular-season games last year.

For better or worse, Howden has raised the expectations, and the pressure is on to carry some of that momentum into this season.

Is it likely that he's going to be shooting 34.1 per cent in the regular season? No. But if nothing else, Howden will be eager to prove his ability to score wasn't a total fluke.

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