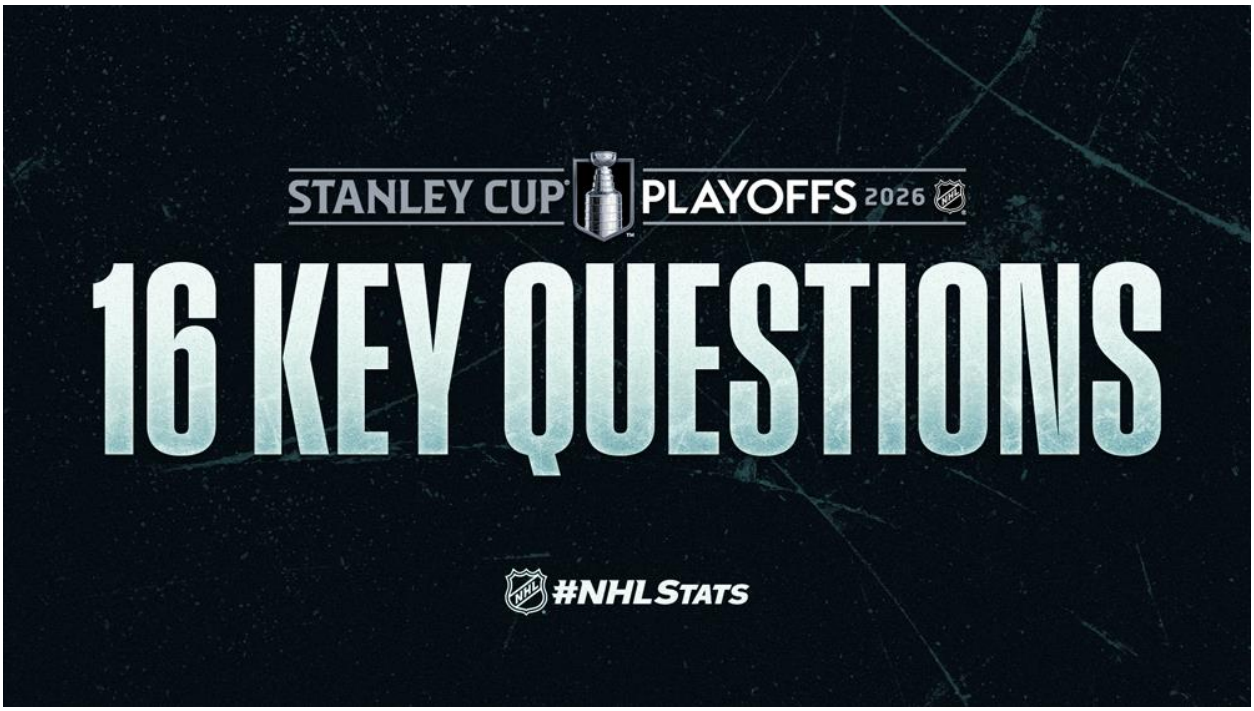


An action-packed regular season went down to the wire with 16 teams set to begin a new quest and compete for the Stanley Cup. It'll take 16 more wins to hoist hockey's most prestigious trophy, so here are 16 key questions – and answers – that you need to know heading into the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

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It seems like there are a lot of new teams in the playoffs. Is this the biggest year-over-year turnover in Stanley Cup Playoffs history?

The 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs feature six teams that did not qualify for the postseason last year (ANA, BOS, BUF, PHI, PIT & UTA). That's one shy of the largest year-over-year turnover in NHL history (7 in 2020-21, 2017-18, 2016-17 & 2014-15).

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With so many new teams in the playoffs, is it likely that we'll see a first-time Stanley Cup winner?

Four of 16 teams in the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs are in search of their first-ever championship: the Sabres, Senators, Wild and Mammoth.

The past eight Cups have been won by six different teams, with four of those being first-time winners: the Panthers in 2024, the Golden Knights in 2023, the Blues in 2019 and the Capitals in 2018.

And for the first time since 2015, the Stanley Cup Playoffs are guaranteed to finish with a new champion year-over-year.

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Speaking of the Sabres, who are back in the playoffs for the first time since 2011, how do teams generally fare in the postseason following long droughts?

Among the four other teams that snapped playoff droughts of nine-plus years, the Hurricanes (2019; 9 seasons) and Devils (1988; 9 seasons) each advanced the Conference Finals, the Oilers (2017; 10 seasons) reached the Second Round and the Panthers (2012; 10 seasons) got to Game 7 of their opening series.

* * *

Head coach Lindy Ruff led the Sabres to their last series win in 2007. Has any coach ever gone 10-plus years between series wins with a franchise?

Should he lead the Sabres to the Second Round, **Lindy Ruff**'s 19-year gap between series wins with one franchise would be by far the largest in NHL history.

Only two other head coaches have gone 10 years between series wins with one team: **Claude Ruel** (11 years from 1969 to 1980 w/ MTL) and **Harry Sinden** (10 years from 1970 to 1980 w/ BOS).

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The Mammoth are set to skate in their first postseason ever. Historically, how do teams perform in their first-ever playoff run?

The NHL's two newest teams before the Mammoth – the Kraken and Golden Knights – each won at least one round in their first playoff run. Like Utah, Seattle also finished as the first Wild Card in the West before defeating the Central Division-leading Avalanche in the 2023 First Round. Vegas advanced all the way to the Stanley Cup Final in 2018.

Going back to the 1990s, the Ducks won a round in their first playoff run in 1997, the Panthers reached the Final in 1996 and the Sharks upset the Red Wings in the opening round of the 1994 postseason.

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The Penguins are back in the playoffs and looking for their fourth Stanley Cup in the Sidney Crosby era. How rare is that?

The Penguins trio of **Sidney Crosby**, **Evgeni Malkin** and **Kris Letang** have won three Stanley Cups together since 2009 and can help Pittsburgh become the first team to win four championships in 20 years (or fewer) since Detroit won four from 1997 to 2008 – a span of just 11 years.

Crosby, Malkin and Letang can also join their former teammate **Chris Kunitz** (3 w/ PIT, 1 w/ ANA) as the only skaters to win four Stanley Cups since the turn of the millennium.

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The NHL's two highest-scoring rookies, Ivan Demidov and Beckett Sennecke, will be in the playoffs. Do rookies tend to make an impact in their first postseason?

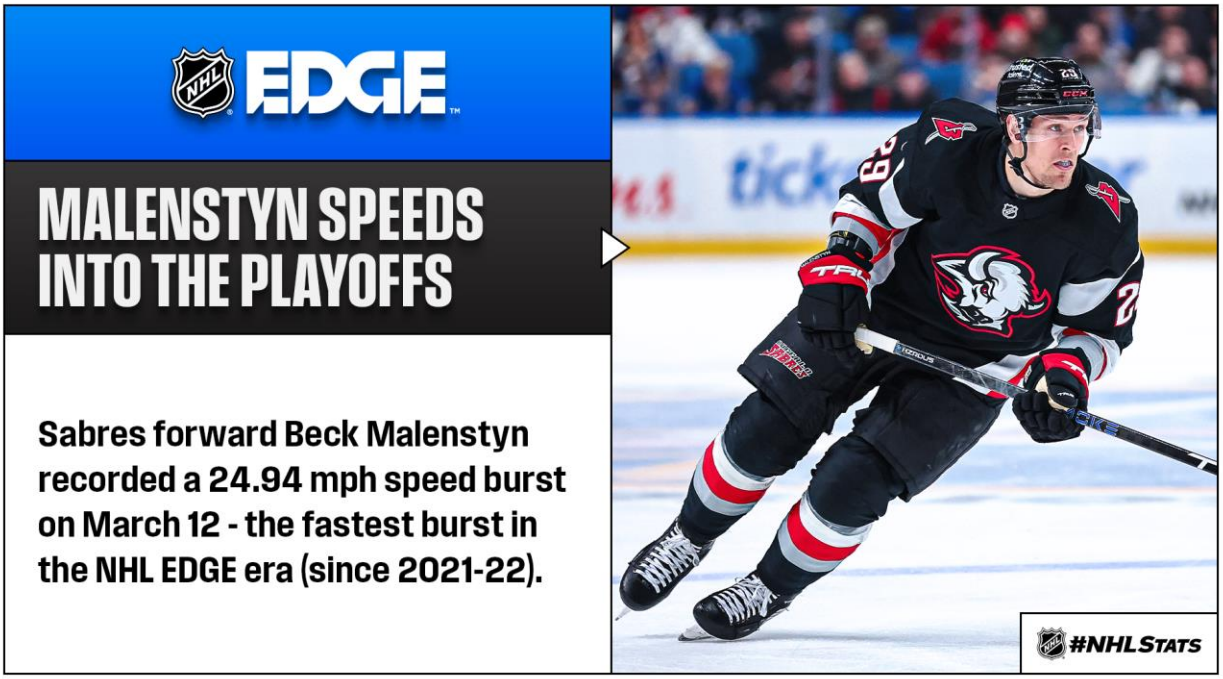
Recent playoffs have seen rookies become more impactful. Eighteen rookies in NHL history have recorded 15-plus points in a playoff run – seven of those instances have occurred since 2009-10. **Jake Guentzel** (21 in 2016-17 w/ PIT) and **Ville Leino** (21 in 2009-10 w/ PHI) were among that cohort, tying **Dino Ciccarelli** (21 in 1980-81 w/ MNS) for the most points in a playoff run by a rookie.

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Who are the most dynamic players to watch this postseason according to NHL EDGE?

According to NHL EDGE, the fastest skater participating in the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs is Sabres forward **Beck Malenstyn** (24.94 mph on March 12), while the player with the hardest shot is Senators defenseman **Tyler Kleven** (103.51 mph on Jan. 31).

Oilers forward **Connor McDavid** led all skaters with 151 bursts of 22+ mph in the regular season, and Bruins forward **Morgan Geekie** is the only player in the postseason that recorded two 100+ mph shots in 2025-26.



* * *

How often does the team that wins the Presidents' Trophy and/or the No. 1 seed in the overall League standings go on to win the Stanley Cup?

Since the NHL's expansion era (1967-68), the team that finished first in the overall NHL standings has gone on to win the Stanley Cup 15 times in 57 years (26.3%). It has happened only four times since 1999-00 (CHI in 2013, DET in 2008 & 2002, COL in 2001).

* * *

The regular season featured some intense Wild Card races. Do Wild Card teams have a shot in the playoffs?

At least one Wild Card team has advanced out of the First Round in six of the 10 previous years under that format, including multiple teams four times in a single postseason. In 2019, all four Wild Card teams advanced to the Second Round. A Wild Card team has never won the Stanley Cup, but two have reached the Final: the Panthers (2023) and Predators (2017).

* * *

Will another Atlantic Division team make the Final?

A team currently in the Atlantic Division has reached the Stanley Cup Final in seven consecutive seasons. In the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Atlantic Division makes up five of the eight playoff teams in the East: Boston, Buffalo, Montreal, Ottawa and Tampa Bay.

Atlantic Division Teams in Stanley Cup Final, Since 2019:

2025 – Florida (Won Cup)
2024 – Florida (Won Cup)
2023 – Florida (Lost Final)
2022 – Tampa Bay (Lost Final)
2021 – Tampa Bay (Won Cup)
2020 – Tampa Bay (Won Cup)
2019 – Boston (Lost Final)

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The Oilers will aim to reach the Stanley Cup Final for a third straight year. How rare is that feat?

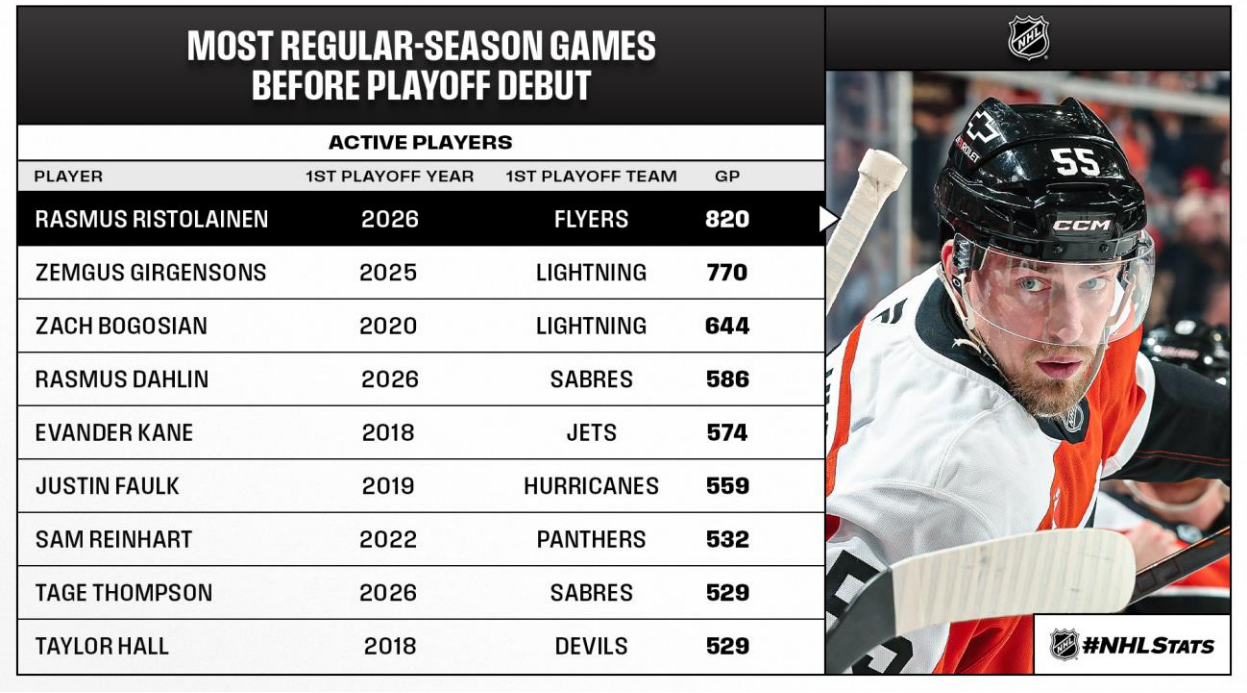
Only seven teams in the NHL's expansion era (since 1967-68) have reached the Final in three straight years, and only two have done so in the past four decades: the Panthers (2023 – 2025) and Lightning (2020 – 2022). Each of the last six NHL franchises to skate in at least three straight championship series won at least one Stanley Cup.

* * *

Need a veteran to root for? Here are the players in the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs with the most regular-season games played that have not won a Stanley Cup.

1,579 GP – Brent Burns (COL)
1,345 GP – Claude Giroux (OTT)
1,287 GP – Nick Foligno (MIN)
1,252 GP – Jamie Benn (DAL)
1,195 GP – Matt Duchene (DAL)
1,159 GP – Erik Karlsson (PIT)
1,139 GP – Tyler Myers (DAL)

1,058 GP – Adam Henrique (EDM)
1,058 GP – Marcus Johansson (MIN)
1,048 GP – Jeff Petry (MIN)



* * *

Which players this postseason have appeared in the most career playoff games?

All five of the most experienced players in the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs have won at least one championship: three now skating for the Lightning, and two on the Penguins. Lightning forward **Corey Perry** leads the list and has the fourth-most playoff games in NHL history behind only **Chris Chelios** (266 GP), **Nicklas Lidstrom** (263 GP) and **Patrick Roy** (247 GP).

237 GP – Corey Perry (TBL; Stanley Cup in 2007)
196 GP – Ryan McDonagh (TBL; Stanley Cup in 2021 & 2020)
180 GP – Sidney Crosby (PIT; Stanley Cup in 2017, 2016 & 2009)
177 GP – Evgeni Malkin (PIT; Stanley Cup in 2017, 2016 & 2009)
170 GP – Victor Hedman (TBL; Stanley Cup in 2021 & 2020)

* * *

Which of this year's playoff teams have waited the longest to win the Stanley Cup?

The Sabres have never won the Stanley Cup in their 55-season history, marking the longest wait of any team in the postseason and the second-longest drought in the NHL behind only the Maple Leafs (58 seasons since 1967). The Flyers are also in the midst of a 50-plus year drought following their back-to-back Stanley Cup wins in 1974 and 1975.

Which players can move up all-time lists on Records.NHL.com?

Penguins forward **Sidney Crosby** enters the postseason with 201 career playoff points and needs one to pass **Jaromir Jagr** for sole possession of the fifth most in NHL history. Crosby (130) also needs seven assists to tie **Paul Coffey** (137) for the fourth most in NHL history.

Lightning forward **Nikita Kucherov** (118) needs five helpers to tie Jagr (123) and break into the top-10 list for most postseason assists.

Crosby's 71 goals are tied for the 18th most in postseason history and he enters the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs eight shy of **Jean Beliveau** (79) for 10th place. Crosby is also six goals behind **Alex Ovechkin** (77) for the most among active skaters.

Penguins forward **Evgeni Malkin** (28) is tied for the ninth-most power-play goals in playoff history and needs three to tie Ovechkin (31) for fifth place – and the most among active skaters.

Lightning forward **Corey Perry** has five career playoff overtime goals – only two players have more: **Joe Sakic** (8) and **Maurice Richard** (6). Oilers forward **Leon Draisaitl** trails closely with four.

Draisaitl has eight career overtime points in the playoffs, one back of **Doug Gilmour** and **Adam Oates** (both w/ 9) for second most in NHL history behind Sakic (14).

Lightning blueliner **Victor Hedman** (120) needs one point to tie **Chris Pronger** (121) for the 10th-most postseason points by a defenseman in League history.

Lightning goaltender **Andrei Vasilevskiy** (67) needs one victory to tie **Andy Moog** (68) for the 11th-most wins in postseason history and three to match **Jacques Plante** (71) for 10th place.

Malkin (53) needs one multi-point game to tie Sakic for seventh most in postseason history and three to tie **Glenn Anderson** and Coffey for fifth most.

Draisaitl's eight four-point games are tied with Lemieux for the fifth most in NHL history and one shy of Coffey (9) for fourth most.

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