NHL MORNING SKATE: STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS EDITION – MAY 20, 2026



* The 2026 Conference Finals begin tonight in Colorado as two of the Western Conference's top regular-season clubs, the Golden Knights and Avalanche, clash for Game 1.

* Colorado's **Nathan MacKinnon** will look to extend his goal streak to seven games and join rare company since the expansion era while Vegas' **Mitch Marner** aims to add to his playoff scoring lead and become one of the fastest players in NHL history to 20 playoff points with a single franchise.

* An #NHLStats Second Round recap was released Tuesday, highlighting trends from the past series and looking ahead at storylines for all four teams ahead of the 2026 Conference Finals.

* Resources for the 2026 Upper Deck NHL Draft are now available ahead of the event in Buffalo on June 26-27, 2026, including an #NHLStats Pack, 100 prospect profiles, as well as legacy and family ties.



AVALANCHE, GOLDEN KNIGHTS SET TO FACE OFF IN GAME 1 WEDNESDAY

Two of the Western Conference's top regular-season clubs clash to open the Conference Finals tonight when the Avalanche host the Golden Knights in Game 1 at Ball Arena. Colorado and Vegas, which have both won a Cup in the past five seasons, will clash in their second head-to-head playoff series (2021 R2) and will put their Stanley Cup pedigree, decorated rosters and recent acquisitions on display as they look to cover their cities in glory once again.



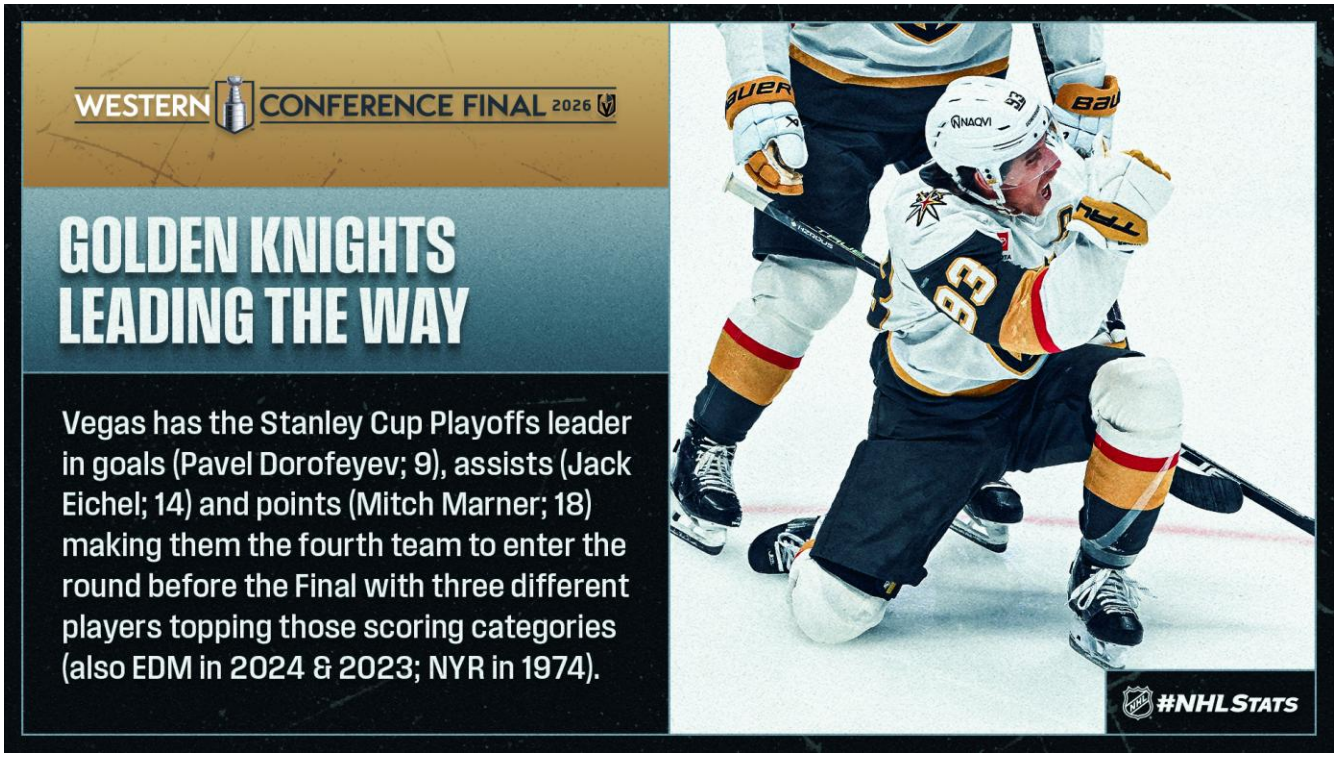
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* The Avalanche and Golden Knights have a combined 23 Stanley Cup winners on their roster, a group that includes **Nathan MacKinnon** and **Jack Eichel**. MacKinnon enters Game 1 of the Western Conference Final looking to become the ninth player in the expansion era (since 1967-68) with a seven-game playoff goal streak and the first since **Valeri Nichushkin** (7 GP in 2024 w/ COL). Eichel needs two points to reach 60 in his postseason career and can become the third-fastest U.S.-born player in NHL history to hit the mark (52 GP entering Game 1), behind only **Kevin Stevens** (46 GP) and **Brian Leetch** (49 GP).

* The Avalanche and Golden Knights also feature several postseason veterans that have yet to win the Stanley Cup, including two each who have played more than 800 regular-season games: **Brent Burns** (1,579 GP) and **Brock Nelson** (1,001 GP) from Colorado and **Tomas Hertl** (873 GP) and **Noah Hanifin** (829 GP) from Vegas. Should Burns succeed this postseason, he will become the third player in NHL history to capture their first championship with 1,500 regular-season games under their belt, following **Ray Bourque** (1,612 GP w/ COL in 2001) and **Dave Andreychuk** (1,597 GP w/ TBL in 2004).

* Another Golden Knights forward with plenty of regular-season experience that is still chasing their first championship is the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs scoring leader, **Mitch Marner** (7-11—18 in 12 GP). Marner is set to skate in the Conference Finals for the first time in his 10 career postseasons. He can tie **Pat LaFontaine** (13 GP w/ BUF) and **Phil Esposito** (13 GP w/ BOS) for the ninth-fewest games to reach 20 career playoff points with a single franchise – **Newsy Lalonde** (9 GP w/ MTL) tops that list.



#NHLSTATS PRESENTS 2026 SECOND ROUND RECAP

Electric crowds inside and outside of arenas, high-scoring games, comebacks and overtime were all part of the 2026 Second Round, which #NHLStats released a recap of on Tuesday.

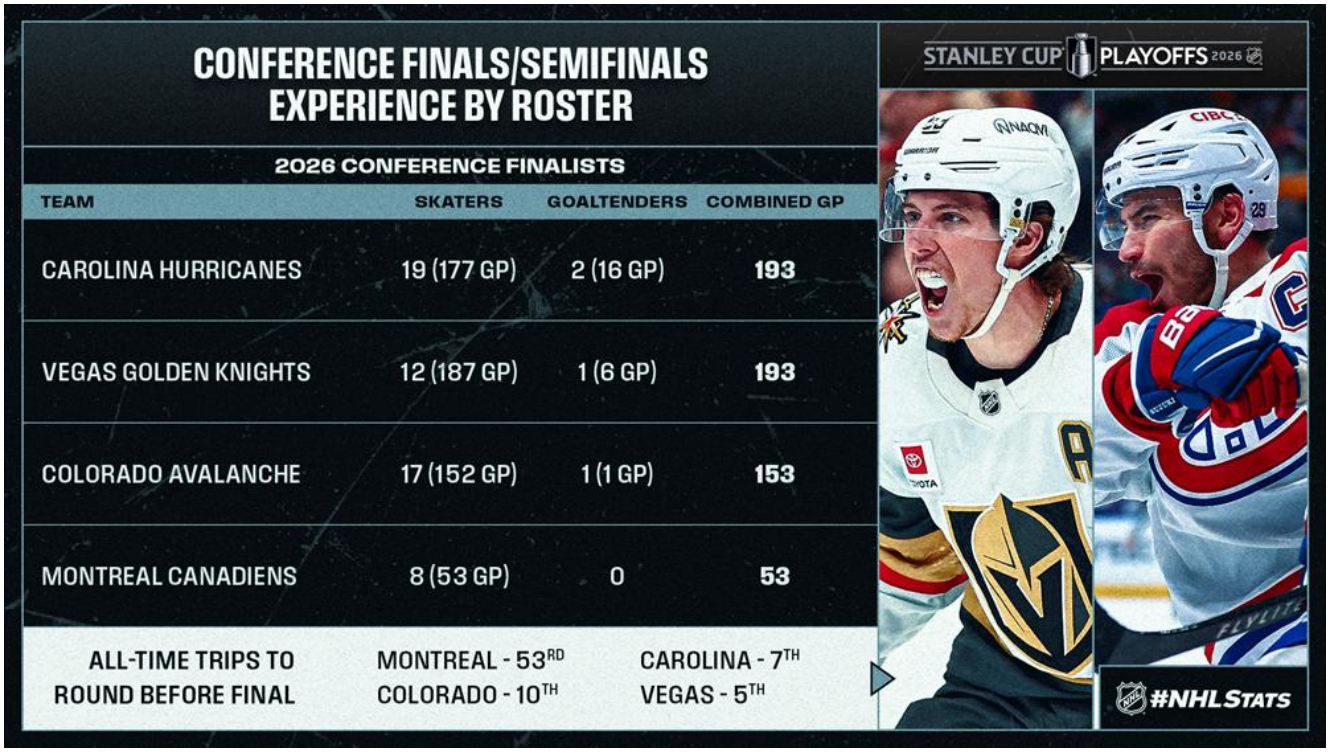
* Trends from the Second Round included 6.5 goals per game, the second-highest rate in the second round over the past 32 postseasons (6.7 in 2023 R2), and three of four teams securing their spot into the third round after scoring a series-clinching goal in overtime (CAR, COL & MTL) – an NHL first. The three series-clinching overtime goals were one shy of the most in any round in playoff history (4 in 1993 DSF). The last came in a contest that made 2026 the third playoff year ever to have each of the first 12 series require at least one overtime contest.



* Looking ahead to the Conference Finals, storylines to follow include the top two teams from the regular season – the Avalanche and Hurricanes – entering with a combined 16-1 record through the first two rounds (CAR: 8-0; COL: 8-1). That is the best combined record by two teams entering the Conference Finals.

* This is the second time since 1987, when the best-of-seven format was introduced for all four rounds, that two teams have reached the Conference Finals each with one or fewer losses (COL: 8-1; CAR: 8-0). The other instance was in 1995 when Detroit and Philadelphia both entered with 8-1 records (16-2 combined); the Red Wings advanced to the Stanley Cup Final where they were swept by the Devils, who had eliminated the Flyers in six games after entering the Conference Finals with their own impressive record (NJD: 8-2).

* Championship pedigree defines the 2026 Western Conference Final between Colorado and Vegas, which between them have the three highest-scoring forwards from the Second Round, while the Eastern Conference Final will pit a perennial contender against the youngest team in more than 30 years to reach the third round – with both seeking to end a lengthy Stanley Cup drought.



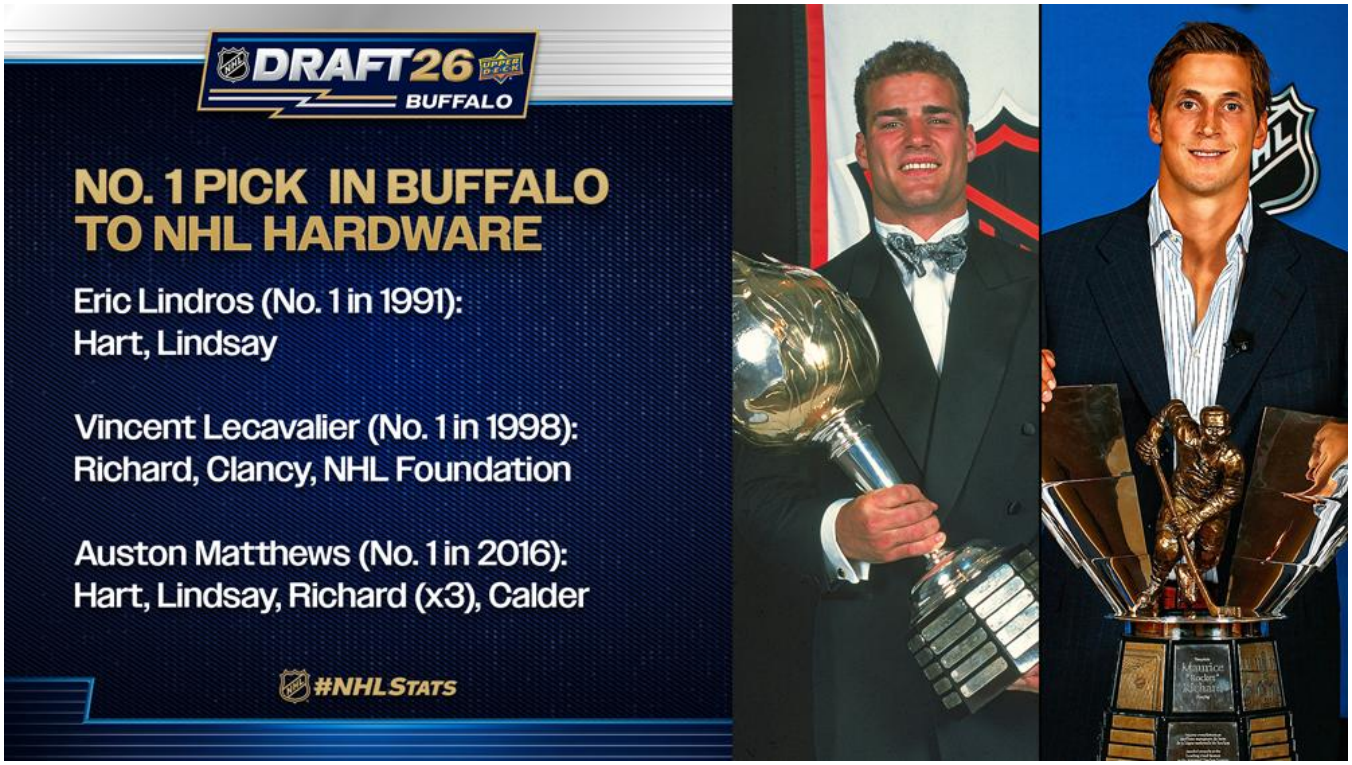
LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2026 UPPER DECK NHL DRAFT

After a resurgent year that saw the Sabres finish as the No. 1 seed in their division for the first time in 16 years, clinch a playoff spot for the first time in 15 years and earn a series win for the first time in 19 years, it seems fitting that the 2026 Upper Deck NHL Draft returns to Buffalo after many pieces of their core were drafted and developed by the franchise, including No. 1 picks **Rasmus Dahlin** and **Owen Power**.



* It will mark the first time in a decade and the fourth time overall the franchise will host the draft with Round 1 set for Friday, June 26 (7 p.m. ET on ESPN, ESPN+, Sportsnet, TVA Sports) at KeyBank Center and Rounds 2-7 on Saturday, June 27 (11 a.m. ET on NHL Network, ESPN+, Sportsnet).

* There is a memorable history of No. 1 picks who had their name called at an NHL Draft hosted in Buffalo going on to have an impactful career: Hall of Famer, Canada Cup and Olympic champion **Eric Lindros** (1991 by QUE), Stanley Cup champion and World Cup of Hockey winner/MVP **Vincent Lecavalier** (1998 by TBL) and Olympic gold medalist **Auston Matthews** (2016 by TOR) who stands as the only active player to hold an all-time goals record for an Original Six franchise. Toronto will once again hold the No. 1 pick a decade after selecting Matthews in 2016.

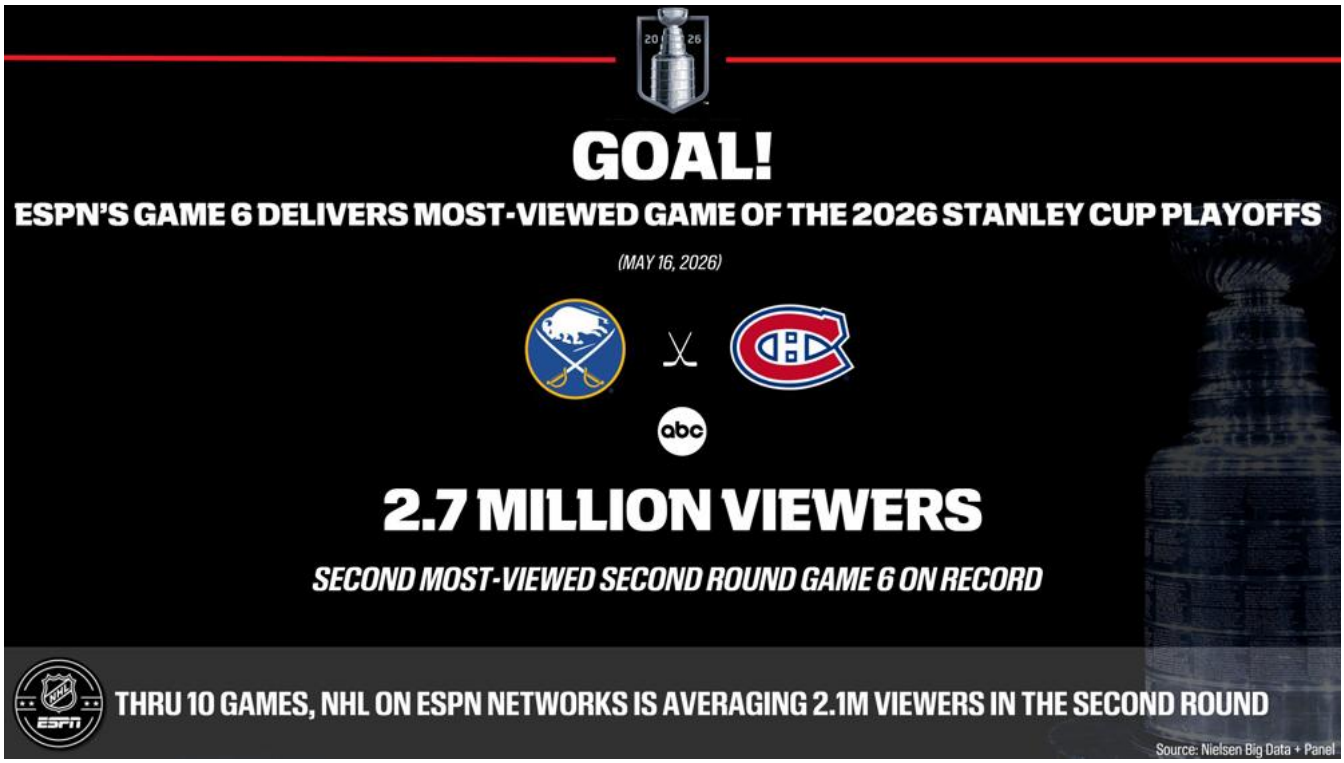


NHL DRAFT RESOURCES

* #NHLStats Pack: Looking Ahead to the 2026 Upper Deck NHL Draft
* 100 Prospect Profiles (with scouting reports)
* Legacy NHL Prospects & NHL Ties
* NHL Central Scouting's Final Draft Rankings

QUICK CLICKS

* **Rod Brind'Amour**'s NHL roots first sprouted in Montreal at 1988 Draft
* Top 10 storylines ahead of NHL conference finals
* NHL EDGE stats for Hurricanes-Canadiens series in 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs
* TNT Sports Posts Its Most-Watched NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs Second Round Ever
* ESPN delivers most-viewed game of the 2026 Stanley Cup Playoffs



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