NHL opens 2025-26 season, full of centennial celebrations, new talent and farewells

By CLAIRE FRANKLAND
Sports Editor

The National Hockey League opened up its 2025-26 season on Oct. 7 with the back-to-back Stanley Cup Champions, the Florida Panthers, raising its 2025 Stanley Cup Banner to the rafters of Amerant Bank Arena.

While the Panthers look to three-peat this season and claim the franchise's third Stanley Cup, the other 31 teams gear up to battle for the same prize.

As the season gets underway, let's highlight some of the important events, players and key parts of the game to look out for in the 2025-26 season.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

This season is extremely special for three teams in the league, which make up the original six. The original six made up the NHL from 1942 until the league expanded to 12 teams in 1967, according to ESPN.

These original six franchises are the Montreal Canadiens, Chicago Blackhawks, Boston Bruins, New York Rangers, Detroit Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs.

In particular, the Rangers, Red Wings and Blackhawks will be celebrating their 100th season, with the Canadiens having celebrated theirs during the 2008-09 season, the Maple Leafs celebrating in the 2016-17 season and the Bruins in the 2023-24 season, with the celebrations continuing into the 2024-25 season.

To honor the milestone, each team released its centennial jerseys, throwing it back to the origins of the team in patchwork, color and style.

The Rangers wore its new threads on opening night and will wear them nine more times throughout the season on special nights. The Red Wings' new jerseys feature the classic number font, which is a nod to the Cougars' "Barber Pole" uniforms, worn in 1927-28, according to the NHL website. And the Blackhawks are no different, introducing its centennial jersey featuring a vintage lace-up collar and a centennial shoulder patch.

NEW TALENT HITS THE ICE

Opening up a new season means all new talent laces up the skates and hits the ice.

With the No. 1 draft pick in the 2025 NHL Draft, the New York Islanders selected defenseman Matthew Schaefer. Schaefer played two seasons in the Ontario Hockey League, ending last season with seven goals and 15 assists for 22 points in 17 games, according to his Elite Prospects.

The Hamilton, Ontario native is just 18 years old, and certainly does not look his age out on the ice, even at the professional level. In his NHL debut, Schaefer tallied his first point on an assist and scored his first goal against the Washington Capitals during his first game on Islanders ice.

His speed on the back check and hockey sense are crucial for a previously struggling Islanders squad, with even his first goal coming off of tricky poke-in-play, rushing hard from the point.

With just two NHL games under his belt, at the time of publication, he has set the record as the youngest player in history to play more than 25 minutes, according to a post on Bardown's Instagram. This astonishing record was previously held by Penguins forward captain Sidney Crosby.

Moving up to Montreal, right winger Ivan Demidov is the man to look out for on the Montreal Canadiens this season. Demidov was drafted fifth overall in the 2024 NHL Draft.

However, Demidov only appeared in two games last season, predominantly playing for the SKA St. Petersburg, in the Kontinental Hockey League, where he recorded 19 goals and 30 assists in 65 games, according to his Elite Prospects.

As of publication, the Sergiyev Posad, Russia native has recorded one assist for the Habs, in its 5-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings.

Demidov's skill has been on full display already, using his speed to create time and space for his linemates. In addition to his speed, Demidov's got hands, with great stick-handling ability, a dangerous combination as seen in athletes like Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

With all the new top-tier talent pouring in this season, we certainly cannot forget about the talent from the early 2000s, many of whom are coming up on the end of their professional career.



ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB FOWLER

Goaltender Marc-André Fleury officially announced that he would be retiring after the Minnesota Wild were eliminated in the playoffs last season, according to TSN.

Fleury was drafted first overall by the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2003, where he would go on to win three Stanley Cups, playing 21 seasons in the NHL. During his professional career, Fleury played for the Penguins, Las Vegas Golden Knights, Chicago Blackhawks and Minnesota Wild. Throughout his career, Fleury appeared in 1051 games with 575 wins and a .912 save percentage, according to the NHL website.

Despite retiring after the 2024-25 season, the Sorel, Quebec native signed a Professional Tryout Contract with the Penguins, appearing in one more exhibition game with the team he was originally drafted by.

Starting his 21st season in the NHL, Washington Capitals left-winger Alexander Ovechkin looks to extend his all-time goal record this year.

The Moscow, Russia native was the first overall pick in the 2004 draft, being selected by the Washington Capitals. He has 1,493 games under his belt, and 897 goals, shattering NHL legend Wayne Gretzky's all-time NHL goal record last season. At the age of 40, Ovechkin is only three goals away from being the first athlete in NHL history to reach 900 goals.

With Ovechkin's contract ending at the end of the 2025-26 season, many speculate his dominant run may be up soon in the professional league. Last season, he suffered a fractured left fibula, missing 16 games, according to Yahoo Sports.

Pittsburgh has a lot of history this season for its long-time athletes. This season marks the 20th season of the longest-tenured trio of teammates in North American professional sports, with Crosby, center Evgeni Malkin and defenseman Kris Letang.

This trio has won three Stanley Cups together for the Pittsburgh Penguins: in 2009, back-to-back Cups in 2016 and 2017, and has also totaled 3,812 points throughout their careers.

With loads of history this season and new talent emerging, fans from all 32 teams better buckle up for this NHL season and expect it to be like no other.

Music's complicated relationship with AI

By COOPER WOODWARD
Staff Writer

Artificial Intelligence began to rise to fame in late 2022 with the popularization of OpenAI's ChatGPT. Since then, AI has become a more integral part of our everyday life.

With that rise, however, came a fear of what power AI held. An industry that feared AI's power more than anyone, is the music industry.

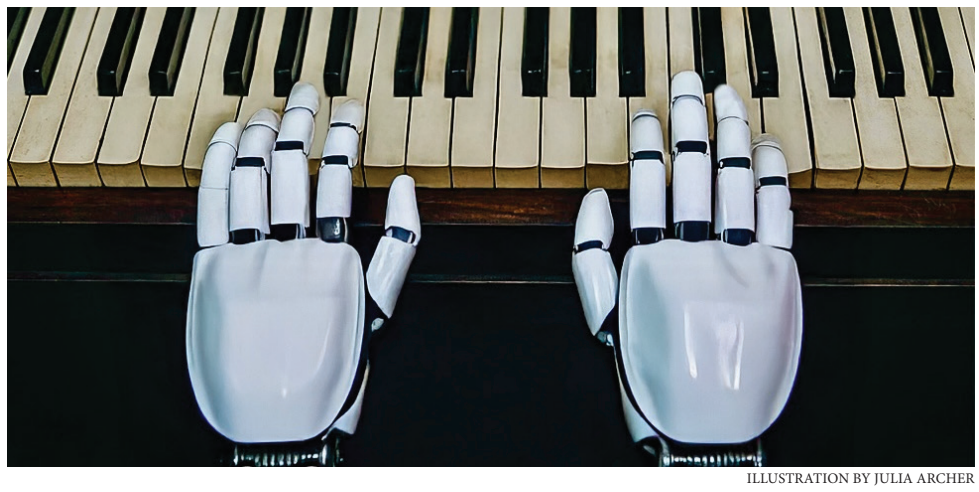
Now three years since its popularization, it's starting to rear its ugly head.

The line between creativity and code is beginning to get blurred as AI becomes more involved in the songwriting process. Some see this as a dawn of a new creative era while others are afraid that it is the degradation of what makes music human.

Now to ask the question, how did we get here?

AI has opened a door that's been locked for several years for rising independent artists. It has allowed for people to access songwriting and producing styles that they never would have in the past. They can do this through programs like Suno, a software that allows for users to generate a song completely from AI using a text prompt.

Hybrid models, which fuse human aspects with artificial ones, are also proving to be successful. Research projects like Amuse explore how inputting text, images and audio can inspire chords and melodies, helping brainstorming artists overcome creative blocks.


ILLUSTRATION BY JULIA ARCHER

However none of this comes without critics. Several of the harsher critics say that artificial intelligence projects lack emotional depth and authenticity that human expression brings. Kelley Jones of the Stereophonics said "art should come from the people."

Peter Hook of the bands "New Order" and "Joy Division" has gone on record saying that every song made by AI has been and always will be "shit."

Not to mention the legal uncertainty. Who owns an AI-generated voice? If an AI model was trained using existing music without permission, is that infringement? These questions are being asked in courts as we speak.

Country musician Anthony Justice as well as the firms Delgado Entertainment Law and Lovey + Lovey have filed a class action lawsuit against Suno and other generative AI company Udio. They allege that they scraped tens of millions of publicly available recordings from independent artists without their consent to train their AI algorithm.

Suno and Udio have responded to the suits, alleging that their use of copyrighted material falls under "fair use" and have filed a motion to dismiss in court arguing that the music generated by its platform does not contain samples of existing recordings.

This is just one example of the myriad of legal issues that have arisen from this kind of technology. It begs the question. "Is it worth it to use technology that creates more problems than it solves?"

Platforms are already seeing an influx of content called "AI-Slop" which are low effort tracks that ride on the novelty of AI rather than pure artistic talent. Streaming platforms like Spotify have made progress in regulating it, reportedly removing large numbers of AI tracks that violate that same infringement companies like Suno and Udio are being sued for.

All of this has led to growing pressure for regulations. Laws like the ELVIS Act in Tennessee are early steps toward defining artists' control over their voices and likenesses when AI is involved.

Artificial Intelligence in music is no longer just a possibility, but a certainty. Yet despite this, its role is uncertain. Will it produce a net positive or net negative? The answer may not be as black and white as you may think.

Music has always adapted to new tools. Synthesizers, sampling, digital audio workstations, all of it the industry has survived and adapted through. Each time it evolves, the same question comes up: "What makes art, art?"

In this age, It's not just about what music sounds like. It's about who makes it, and how they choose to do so.