

NHL returns to 84-game season for first time in decades

BY STEPHEN WHYNO
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Business has been booming for the NHL for several years, with the salary cap skyrocketing and attendance reaching new heights in packed arenas.

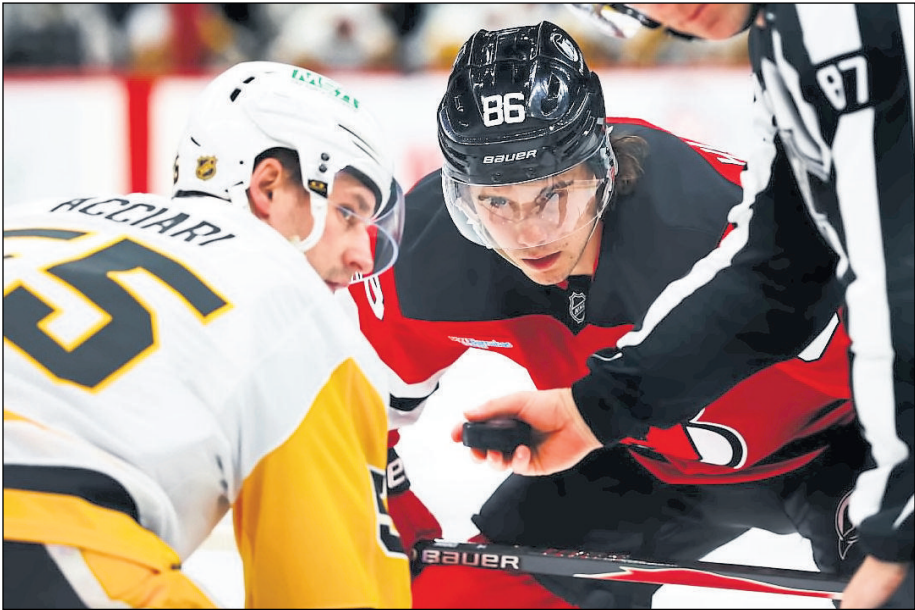
Let's play two more. The league is going to an 84-game regular season for the first time since 1994 — it was in place for two seasons — and just the second time in its 109-year history. Players and owners agreed to the increase from 82 for each of the 32 teams as part of the collective bargaining agreement that is in place through 2030, doubling down on more hockey for all.

How much more? A record 1,344 regular-season games because there were fewer teams in the early 1990s.

“That will power some of our growth,” Washington Capitals owner Ted Leonsis said. “That uplift is very subtle. People aren't realizing it, but that's an organic way to grow.”

The change meant shorter training camps and fewer exhibition games, and it could have an effect on everything from goaltending tandems to stats and records.

“Eighty-four games is a long, long road,” said ESPN analyst Ray Ferraro, who was a player the last two times the



New Jersey Devils center Jack Hughes (86) before a face off against Pittsburgh Penguins center Noel Acciari (55) during the second period of an NHL hockey game on April 9 in Newark, N.J.

schedule was this long. “I'm just interested to see what the new rhythm of the season will be like.”

EARLY START SPREADS OUT THE GAMES

The Sept. 29 opening night is the soonest play is getting underway in North America and matches the earliest start date on the calendar worldwide from when Los Angeles and Anaheim took the ice in London in 2007. The season started Oct. 7 each of the past two years and Oct. 10 in 2023.

“I'm excited that we're starting early,” Boston winger David Pastrnak said. “That's probably the biggest change or thing that I'm excited about is

that you don't have to wait until Oct. 10, 11 when you're already in the town the whole September.”

The 1,344 games are spread out over a 194-day span before every team plays its finale on April 10 ahead of the playoffs. With the exception of the holiday break for Christmas and the All-Star break in early February, there are only two days without at least one game on the schedule.

“There's going be more time in between games,” Tampa Bay's Jake Guentzel said. “I think last year it was kind of condensed with the Olympic schedule, so I think the spread-out of games will help. ... You just got to take care of

your bodies (because) it's obviously a war of attrition.”

Pittsburgh has the most back-to-back sets with 15. Vegas and Calgary are tied for the fewest with eight each.

LESS FAKE HOCKEY EVENS OUT THE WORKLOAD

Rod Brind'Amour, coach of defending champion Carolina, made headlines by saying he'd rather go to 86 games and eliminate the preseason altogether because it lacks value for fans.

The way the NHL Players' Association sees it, limiting the exhibition schedule to two games for anyone with 100-plus games of experience more than makes up for

extending the regular season.

“The thought behind it is the workload is the same, if not a little less,” said NHLPA assistant executive director Ron Hainsey, who played 17 seasons from 2002-20. “Those exhibition games sometimes are more difficult than a regular-season game. You're out there with players, not necessarily NHL players, and things get a little haywire. Whereas, there's a lot of reasons that if you just flip two exhibition into two regular season games, it's a good thing.”

WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN AN 84-GAME SEASON

— Gone are the days when a goaltender would play in nearly every game. Grant Fuhr's single-season record of 79 appearances in 1996-97 is safe, and the last time a goalie surpassed 70 was Cam Talbot's 73 in 2016-17. Utah's Karel Vejmelka started 63 games last season and played in 64. The NHL has become much more of a rotation in the crease and coaches now have an extra two games to apportion the responsibilities.

— Alex Ovechkin

broke Wayne Gretzky's career goals record of 894 in April 2025, and now Washington's longtime captain returns for a 22nd season, sitting on 929 with a couple of extra chances to put the mark further out of reach for the next player who might one day approach it.

“He knows how to score goals,” said Pittsburgh captain Sidney Crosby, who holds the record for the most point-a-game seasons with 21. “You don't lose that. Maybe as you get older, you might have to adjust a little bit, but his shot is his shot and that's not going anywhere.”

— Edmonton's Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov and Colorado's Nathan MacKinnon have combined for the 11 highest-scoring seasons among active players. With two extra games, any of them — plus San Jose's Macklin Celebrini — could set career highs and maybe even top McDavid's 153 points that are the most since the salary cap era began in 2005. The NHL record is 215 points set by Wayne Gretzky in 1985-86.

LADY

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tempo right out of the gate in the first set, taking advantage of Caldwell errors and building quick separation for a 25-11 rout.

Caldwell County pushed back over the next two sets, forcing longer rallies and keeping the margin tight

down the stretch. But HCA consistently came up with the late touches when it mattered most, closing out back-to-back 25-22 frames to put the match away in three.

Taylor Barbee powered the frontline with seven kills, also coming up with 13 digs and a pair of aces. Hadlee Hayes put together a busy night all over the floor, finishing with six kills, eight assists, 11 digs, and a

block.

Fowler made her own mark at the net, picking up two kills, four digs, an ace, and a block that pushed her to 99 blocks for her career. Sophie Arvin contributed five kills and seven digs, while Emma Dalke chipped in three kills and a solo block.

Setter Makenzie McCarty kept the offense flowing with 14 assists, adding 10 digs, three

aces, two kills, and two blocks. Libero Allison Craft spearheaded the back-row defense, diving for a match-high 18 digs to keep Caldwell from stringing together runs.

Overall, HCA registered 26 kills, 25 assists, eight aces, and 64 digs.

The Lady Warriors will hit the road Monday when they head to Dixon to take on Webster County.

TIGERS

FROM PAGE B1

secured all the insurance it would need with roughly 15 minutes left in regulation. Shanklin turned distributor, threading a precise ball into open space for Hernandez, who beat his defender to the spot and tucked away his second goal of the night inside the far post.

The Lakers pushed

additional attackers forward over the final 10 minutes in an effort to spoil the shutout, but the Christian County defense held firm. Senior goalkeepers Preston Gentry and Stafford Winston split time between the posts, combining for six saves to preserve the clean sheet.

Christian County will look to keep its winning streak alive Monday night when the Tigers host Trigg County at the Stadium of Champions.



Photo by Torrence Bates/KNE

The Christian County Tigers gather in a team huddle before kickoff against Calloway County on Thursday at the Stadium of Champions. The Tigers went on to blank the Lakers 2-0 on Senior Night.

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