

Issue 2 — March 21, 2026

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Buffalo Bandits Lacrosse

*NLL madness:
Putting all 14 NLL teams in a
'March Madness' bracket*

Also in this issue:

- MacKay back in lineup as Bandits head to San Diego to battle Seals

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What's in this issue:

2. *NLL madness: Putting all 14 NLL teams in a 'March Madness' bracket*

It's tournament time in the NCAA, and "March Madness" is back to take over all of our lives for three weeks. This begs the question: what if the NLL had a 14-team bracket? Who would come out on top in this single-elimination tournament?

6. *Bandits head west in search of fourth straight win*

The Bandits are headed to San Diego this week, and they've been on a roll lately, winning three straight and four of their last five. With Josh Byrne on a roll and Ian MacKay back in the lineup, can the Bandits keep the good times rolling?

Front and back cover photos by **MATT VOLZ | Editor in Chief**

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What if the NLL had a ‘March Madness’-like playoff?

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

It’s the middle of March, which means the greatest post-season tournament on Earth has returned for our viewing pleasure.

The men’s and women’s NCAA tournaments always provide jaw-dropping upsets, last-second shots and other wild “where were you when” moments.

It’s an elite playoff format that can’t be matched by anything else, mostly because each tournament features a staggering 68-team field.

So, as I watch the games while writing this, let’s have some fun.

What if we put each NLL team in a March Madness-esque bracket?

For starters, the matchups will be a bit weird because the NLL has 14 teams, not 16.

The opening round of the NCAA tournament features 64 teams. The second round narrows it down to 32 teams, then it goes to 16, eight, four and two in subsequent rounds.

Because the number of teams in the NLL isn’t a multiple of four, the top two teams will receive a first-round bye in our bracket while the remaining 12 battle it out.

I’m going off of each team’s record entering this weekend of play, so the byes will go to the 11-3 Saskatchewan Rush and the 10-4 Vancouver Warriors.

This week, we will go through each first round matchup, with the second round, semifinals and championships to come in the following issues.

With that all set, let’s take a look at our bracket, starting on the left side to determine who will face the top-seeded Rush.

#8 San Diego Seals (6-7) vs. #9 Las Vegas Desert Dogs (5-7)

As most #8 vs. #9 matchups are, this one is a toss-up.

San Diego has been streaky this year, as they’re currently on their second three-game losing streak of the season.

Between those skids, though, the Seals won five out of six games.

Offensively, they’re led by Tre LeClaire and Wesley Berg, who have both surpassed the 50-point mark.

In the offseason, they picked up veteran scorer Connor Robinson from Colorado to boost their offense.

Although Robinson has been solid, scoring 18 goals across 13 games, it’s a bit of a dip from previous seasons where he found himself around the 70-point mark.

On the flip side, the Desert Dogs are looking to make some noise for the first time in the history of their young franchise.

It’s been rough sledding for Las Vegas since coming into the league in 2023. They’ve finished in dead last in each of the past two seasons and have failed to win more than five games in a single season.

With their win over Rochester last Sunday, they tied their highest single-season win total in franchise history.

Their top two goal scorers are both former Bandits playing their first year in Sin City.

Mitch Jones is the headliner, with 26 goals and 72 points in 12 games.

Chris Cloutier left Buffalo for the Desert Dogs in free agency, and he’s rewarded his new team with 25 goals.

Cloutier went to Las Vegas alongside Chase Fraser, and Fraser had a great start to the season before going down with a season-ending injury on Jan. 31.

This would be a great matchup, and I’m going to take the young up-and-comers.

Prediction: Las Vegas wins.

#5 Toronto Rock (8-5) vs. #12 Calgary Roughnecks (4-9)

At first glance, this probably looks like a no-brainer.

But as all NCAA tournament fans know well, upsets happen when you least expect them.

The Rock are back near the top of the league after a dismal 2025 season in which they finished 6-12.

It was over early for Toronto, as Mark Matthews went down with a season-ending injury during an 0-5 start.

They were sellers at the deadline, and franchise goalie Nick Rose was traded to Calgary.

Rose was a free agent in the offseason, and he opted to return to Toronto.

It’s been a positive reunion, as he’s led the Rock to an 8-5 record.

The team he left has struggled mightily this season, limping to a 4-9 mark.

Tanner Cook has been an offensive bright spot for Calgary, and he ranks fourth in the league in goals with 35.

Tyler Pace has done a great job of getting the ball to the team’s scorers, and his 47 assists is tenth best in the league.

Other than that, though, it’s been rough for the Roughnecks.

They’ve won two in a row after a dreadful 2-9 start, but I’m not thinking this one will be an upset.

Prediction: Toronto wins.

#4 Georgia Swarm (8-5) vs. #13 Oshawa FireWolves (4-10)

Out of all the first-round matchups in this bracket, this one might be the most intriguing to watch.

Despite two very different records, these two teams have quite a bit in common.

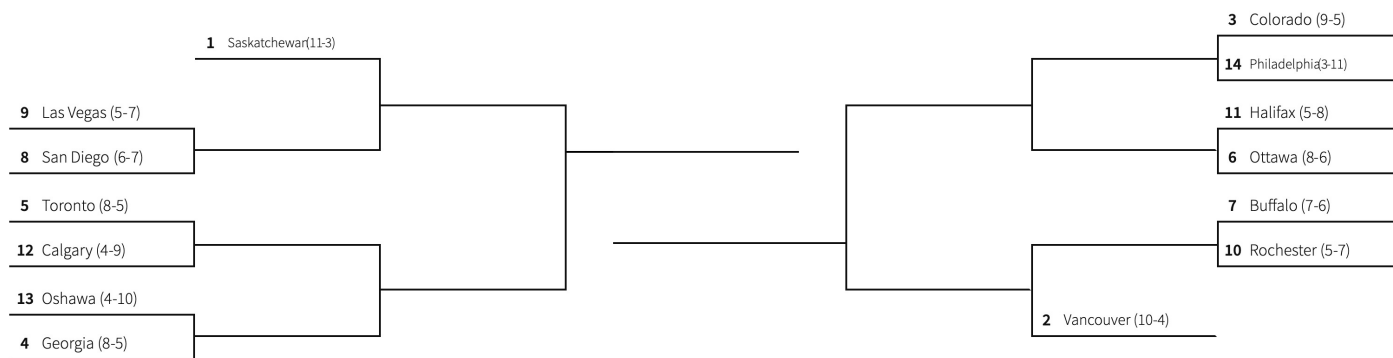
For starters, they both have a duo of offensive studs that can score on the best of goalies.

Georgia is, unsurprisingly, led by the 1-2 punch of Shayne Jackson and Lyle Thompson.

Both of them have spent their entire careers with the Swarm. For Jackson, that dates back to 2013, when the Swarm still called Minnesota home.

Thompson joined the team in their first season in Georgia 10 years ago, and he’s been a consistent top-of-the-league scorer throughout his career.

By his standards, it’s been a bit of a down year, though he’s still put up 50 points in 13 games.



Bracket made with brackethq.com.

On the other side, the FireWolves have had a tough season in their first year in Oshawa, but they're led by some top-tier offensive talent.

Alex Simmons and Tye Kurtz took the FireWolves to the NLL Finals as rookies in 2024, bursting onto the scene with their excellent scoring abilities.

Now in their third year as pros, individual success has remained despite team success fading.

Simmons has put up 34 goals and 83 points, ranking him in the top five across the league in both categories.

Kurtz isn't far behind, as his 32 goals puts him seventh in the league.

The other major similarity between these two teams is strong goaltending.

Oshawa's Doug Jamieson hasn't been quite as good as he's been in years past, but he's stopped nearly 80% of the shots he's faced.

For Georgia, though, Brett Dobson has been an MVP candidate in net.

Dobson, a graduate of nearby St. Bonaventure University and a native of Oshawa, leads all starting goalies in both save percentage and goals against average (GAA).

He's only allowing 7.7 goals per game, which ranks ahead of second place by nearly two full goals.

As the saying goes, defense wins championships. Give me Georgia in this one.

Prediction: Georgia wins.

#3 Colorado Mammoth (9-5) vs. #14 Philadelphia Wings (3-11)

To put it simply, it has not been a good season for Philadelphia.

They rank dead last in nearly every offensive category, which includes a league-worst 126 goals.

With the recent trade of Joe Resetarits to Buffalo, the Wings now have just one player with 40 or more points.

That player is Brennan O'Neill, the first overall pick of the 2024 draft.

O'Neill turns 24 on April 12, and he's led the team all year with 29 goals and 57 points.

Defensively, Philadelphia gives up a ton of shots. That doesn't help goalie Nick Damude, who has actually put together a decent season despite poor defense in front of him.

Damude is riding an 80.2% save percentage, but he's still surrendering more than 11.5 goals per game.

That's a number that has led to the Wings allowing more goals than any other team through March 20.

It doesn't bode well for them going up against Colorado, who ranks as one of the league's best offensive teams.

The Mammoth have spread the wealth offensively, as they boast three players with 60+ points.

Andrew Kew is the star sniper, and his 37 goals are tied with Ottawa's Jeff Teat for the most in the NLL.

Combined with an excellent goalie in Dillon Ward, Colorado is an easy pick here.

Prediction: Colorado wins.

#6 Ottawa Black Bears (8-6) vs. #11 Halifax Thunderbirds (5-8)

The Black Bears are enjoying something they've never experienced before — team success.

They came into the league as the New York Riptide in 2020, and they've had a losing season each year.

In their first season in Ottawa last year, they were slightly better but still missed the playoffs at 8-10.

The lone bright spot for them over the last half decade has been Teat, the franchise's first draft pick at #1 overall in 2020.

Teat is a natural-born goal scorer, and he's led the league in goals in each of the last three seasons.

He's on pace to do that again in 2026.

This year, though, Teat doesn't have to do it alone.

Rob Hellyer came to Ottawa after a stellar 2025 season with the Seals, and he's continued to excel offensively.

His 56 assists and 81 points both rank in the top five of the NLL.

Ottawa hasn't had the best goaltending this season, as Zach Higgins has allowed over 11 goals per game.

On the flip side, Halifax has hit a snag after a great 2025 season.

Last year, the Thunderbirds finished 11-7 and reached the NLL semifinals, losing to Saskatchewan.

It's been a bit slower in 2026, as they currently sit at 5-8.

They're 2-3 since the beginning of February, but when taking a closer look at that stretch, Halifax looks better than their record.

Each of those three losses was by exactly one goal, including an overtime loss to Toronto last weekend.

Also, those losses were to Buffalo, San Diego and Toronto, all of whom currently sit in playoff spots.

Halifax, like Ottawa, doesn't have the strongest goaltending, but they do have something most of the Black Bears don't: experience.

In a postseason tournament like this one that I completely made up, experience is key.

I'm taking Halifax to pull off the upset.

Prediction: Halifax wins.

#7 Buffalo Bandits (7-6) vs. #10 Rochester Knighthawks (5-7)

Could you ask for anything better than a playoff matchup between two teams located so close together?

Buffalo doesn't need much of an introduction, obviously, as this entire publication is dedicated to them.

Still, their postseason success is vital to this experiment.

The Bandits are seemingly made for the postseason.

They've got their stars on offense, but they also have a solid collection of veterans who usually seem to do many of the little things right.

Nobody in the league has blocked more shots than the Bandits since it became an official stat a few years ago, and they still lead the league this year despite having to adjust their whole defensive setup thanks to rule changes.

In net, the Bandits have Matt Vinc, who continues to dunk on Father Time every weekend.

The Knighthawks, Vinc's former team, could surely use him this season.

Rochester's goalie tandem of Rylan Hartley and Riley Hutchcraft have combined to give up nearly 12.5 goals per game, and they've combined for the lowest save percentage of any team in the league.

Offensively, you can't talk about Rochester without mentioning Connor Fields.

The Amherst native has put up another great season, with 31 goals and 79 points.

He's had some help from Ryan Lanchbury, whose 53 assists tie him with Josh Byrne for fifth in the league.

Again, though, defense wins championships, and Buffalo boasts one of the best defensive units in the NLL.

Call me a homer, but I'm taking the thrice-defending champs in this one.

Prediction: Buffalo wins.

Stats for this story were provided by nllstats.com, a league-wide database run by NLL writer Graeme Perrow.

Check out his commentary on nllchatter.com as well as his updates on X (@GraemePerrow).

*Want to make your own picks for
RE: Lax Madness?*

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Bandits head west in search of fourth straight win

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

After a 3-5 start, the Bandits appear to be back to their former selves.

They've won four of their last five games, dating back to a win over Halifax on Saturday, Feb. 14.

One of the major reasons for their recent success has been the re-emergence of team offense.

Buffalo fell short of the 10-goal mark in each of their last three games in January, following that up with a 13-11 loss to the last-place Philadelphia Wings on Saturday, Feb. 7.

Since then, they've only failed to hit that mark once.

Part of that has been a result of Josh Byrne finding the back of the net again.

Through the first half of the season, the former MVP battled through what looked like a down year.

In his first eight games, Byrne scored just 12 goals.

That's a rate of just a goal and a half per game, a full goal per game lower than what he recorded last season.

Across his whole career, he averaged roughly 2.3 goals per game before this season.

He was held completely scoreless in that aforementioned loss to Philadelphia in early February, but that seemed to be the tipping point of the star's season.

In each of the next two games, he recorded two goals and five total points, his highest point totals in over a month.

Over the last three games, though, he's exploded back into a top-of-the-league scorer.

On Friday, Feb. 27 against the first-place Saskatchewan Rush, Byrne didn't score in regulation, but he found other ways to contribute.

He tallied seven assists, tying his best single-game total of the season.

The game went to overtime, and Byrne picked the best possible time to strike again.

He buried a shot past Rush goalie Frank Scigliano, and it was off to the races from there.

The next night in Ontario, Byrne steamrolled the Rock to the tune of a hat trick and seven points.

The Bandits had swept the weekend, but number 22 wasn't finished.

Last Saturday against Colorado, Byrne had his best offensive game of the season, erupting for four goals and nine points.

Buffalo won each of those three games to put themselves back over .500 and firmly in the playoff conversation.

Outside of Byrne, the Bandits have been unsurprisingly led by the offensive prowess of Dhane Smith.

Smith has recorded 59 assists and 88 points, both good for third-best in the NLL.

When Smith and Byrne are both hot, the Bandits are nearly impossible to stop.

In order to be an unstoppable force, though, Buffalo needs their depth scoring to contribute.

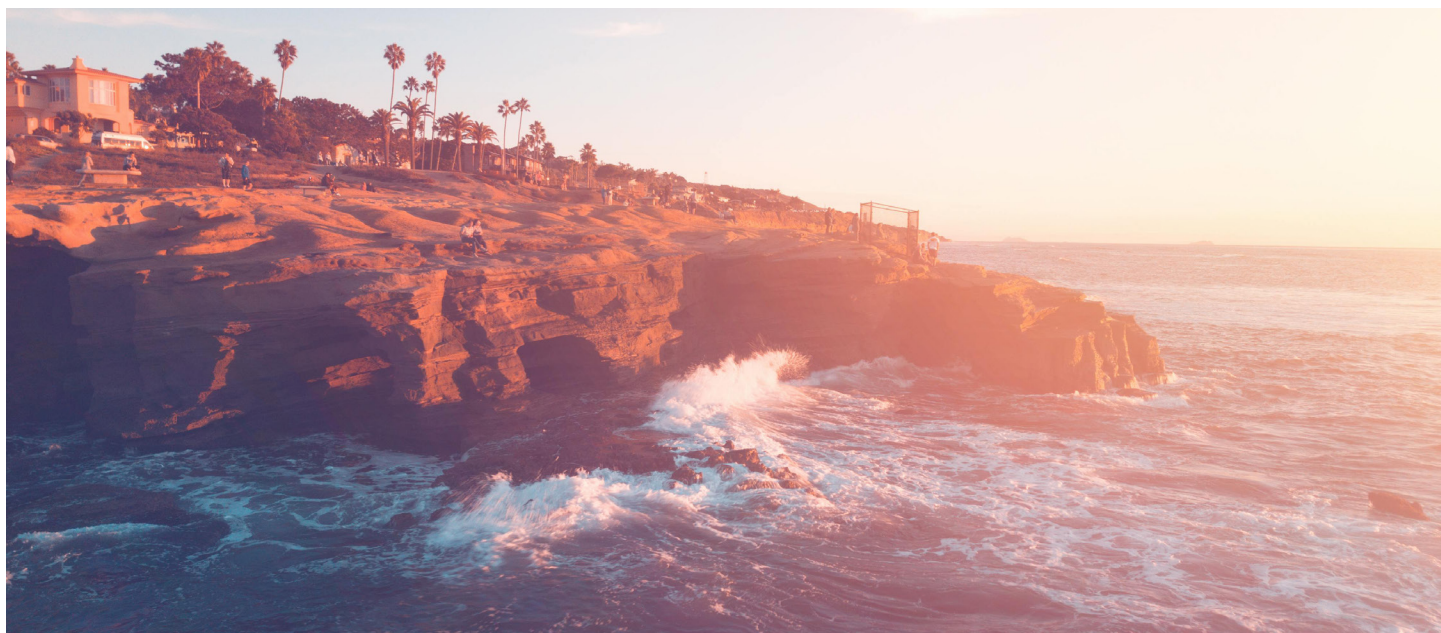
Two solid depth scorers from the last three championship runs, Chase Fraser and Chris Cloutier, both left in free agency to join the Las Vegas Desert Dogs.

It hasn't been the smoothest replacement, but some players have enjoyed decent seasons.

Kyle Buchanan notched a career-high 34 goals last season, and the 38-year-old is close to that pace this year.

Through 13 games, he's notched 22 goals, good for third on the team.

Tehoka Nanticoke is another depth piece who could set some personal bests this season.



A cliff near San Diego. Image by Mark Munsee via Pexels.

BUFFALO (7-6)

AT

SAN DIEGO (6-7)

Graphic by **MATT VOLZ** | Editor in Chief

Nanticoke has 19 goals and 32 points through 13 games, already a better offensive season than he had in 2025.

He'll have to pick up the pace a bit to match his highest single-season totals of 32 goals and 51 points, which he recorded in his 2022 rookie campaign.

Buffalo is also set to bring back one key contributor, though, as Ian MacKay is active for tonight's game.

MacKay erupted for 37 goals and 54 points last season, by far career bests in both categories.

While his goal scoring dropped a bit, he was on pace to smash the 54-point total before sustaining an injury on Friday, Feb. 27 against the Rush.

His return should spark an offense that added more fuel at the trade deadline.

Buffalo brought Joe Resetarits back in a deal with Philadelphia, and the Hamburg native returns to his hometown team after more than a decade playing for other squads.

Resetarits picked up two assists in last weekend's win over Colorado, and he'll look to score his first goal of his second Bandits stint tonight.

On the back end, Matt Vinc will look to continue a solid streak and stop a Seals offense that has hit a cold patch.

While Buffalo has won three straight games, San Diego has gone in the opposite direction, as they've lost three straight.

Their last win was exactly one month ago, a 9-8 win over Halifax on Saturday, Feb. 21.

They don't have top-of-the-league scoring talent like Buffalo does, but Tre Leclair and Wesley Berg still pose a threat.

San Diego picked up veteran Connor Robinson from Colorado in the offseason, hoping he'd add a significant offensive presence.

The results have been a bit disappointing, though.

Through 13 games, he's managed 39 points, a far cry from his 67 points in 2025.

The Seals have slightly above average goaltending, as 23-year-old Christopher Origlieri has enjoyed a more successful season than he did last year.

Among starting goalies, he ranks sixth in goals against average (GAA), allowing just a touch over 10 goals per game.

Statistically, Origlieri has been better than Vinc this season, but Buffalo boasts a better defensive unit.

I think Buffalo is a better team than San Diego, but going on the road is always tough, especially when that means going to the other side of the country.

I'd anticipate some big-time offense from Buffalo, especially with Byrne on a hot streak and MacKay returning to the lineup.

I don't know that it'll be the prettiest of victories, but I think the Bandits get the job done to move to 8-6 on the season.

Matt's pick: Buffalo 13, San Diego 10

Tonight's game begins at 10pm, and it'll be aired locally on WIVB.

Out-of-market viewers can watch live on ESPN+, and radio listeners can tune into WGR 550.

For live in-game scoring updates and analysis, check out @re_laxlacrosse on X.

Stats for this story were provided by nllstats.com, a league-wide database run by NLL writer Graeme Perrow.

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PAUL LANTIERO 16
DUNCAN HALEY 39
RICK HANBERT RJ
STAN HULLER 30

KeyBank
NOTES

CHAMPION

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