

Issue 3 — March 28, 2026

RE:LAX

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Buffalo Bandits Lacrosse

*The rematch:
Bandits, Rush meet tonight
after OT clash in February*

Also in this issue:

- NLL Madness, part 2: Who will reach the
semifinal of our hypothetical bracket?

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2. *Bandits travel to face first-place Rush*

Coming off of a wild comeback victory over the Seals in San Diego, the Bandits look to win their fifth straight game as they head to Saskatoon to face the 11-4 Saskatchewan Rush. The last time these two teams met, the game went to overtime — will we see that again tonight?

6. *'NLL Madness' continues — who will win?*

We've reached the quarterfinal round of our NCAA Tournament-inspired "NLL Madness" bracket, and the top two teams are fresh off their first-round byes. Will the top teams prevail, or will the underdogs pull off upsets?

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

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Bandits travel to face first-place Rush

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

It seems to be the case that every time the Buffalo Bandits and Saskatchewan Rush take the field against each other, the end result is a remarkable game.

In last year's NLL Finals, the two teams reached a winner-take-all Game 3.

The first game of the series was a nailbiter, as the Bandits emerged victorious thanks to a raucous Banditland crowd.

Four goals from Ian MacKay were a pretty big help, too, as Buffalo took the win, 12-10.

Game 2 in Saskatoon was just as close, but three straight fourth quarter goals from the Rush led them to the series-tying win.

The first half of Game 3 was nearly a dead heat. Five straight Buffalo goals gave the Bandits a 7-3 lead, but the Rush answered with three goals of their own before the break.

The second half seemed to be an outlier not indicative of how the rest of the series was played, though.

The Bandits blanked the Rush, outscoring their opponents 8-0 over the final 30 minutes to capture their third straight championship.

In a quest for revenge, Saskatchewan came east to face the Bandits at KeyBank Center on Friday, Feb. 27.

Unsurprisingly, it was another great game.

Buffalo led 8-4 at the half, but the Rush dominated the second half.

Goals from Ryan Keenan and Robert Church in the final minute and a half sent the game to overtime.

In overtime, the two teams went back and forth for several minutes.

Rush goalie Frank Scigliano and Bandits goalie Matt Vinc turned away shot after shot, going toe to toe just as they had in the NLL Finals the year before.

Finally, after nearly seven minutes of overtime, Josh Byrne wired a shot past Scigliano for the win.

The goal symbolized not just an overtime win for the Bandits, but the resurgence of the team's former MVP.

Through the first 10 games, Byrne scored just 16 goals.

Over the course of four straight games from Jan. 10 to Feb. 7, Byrne scored three total goals.

The Bandits lost all four games.

In the last of those losses, Byrne was held without a goal in a 13-11 loss to the last place Philadelphia Wings.

Through the first 66 minutes and 47 seconds of this game against the Rush, Byrne was headed towards another game with that dubious distinction.

All of that was erased with one goal.

It hadn't been a bad game for Byrne, as he totaled seven assists during regulation.

But the goal seemed to lift a major weight off Buffalo's star forward.

HOW TO TUNE IN:

TV: CW23
(Buffalo market only)

STREAM: ESPN+

RADIO:
WWKB 1520 AM

Since then, Byrne has recorded seven points or more in each game, including a four-goal, nine-point performance against Colorado on Friday, March 13.

The overtime win not only kickstarted a run for Byrne, but it launched a win streak for the Bandits.

It looked like the win streak would end last week in San Diego, but a wild fourth-quarter comeback and overtime winner from Dhane Smith kept the run alive.

In order to make it five straight wins, the Bandits will face their toughest test remaining in the regular season, as they go on the road to face the Rush.

While the Bandits have enjoyed a run of success since the two teams last met a month ago, the Rush have slowed down a bit.

They began the season 10-1, and they had won nine in a row until that overtime loss at the end of February.

If losing to one Western New York team in overtime that weekend wasn't good enough, the Rush found themselves in the same exact spot the next night.

In Rochester, the Rush were held to just one goal in the fourth quarter, as Knighthawks goalie Rylan Hartley slammed the door on an excellent offense.

Ryan Smith won the game in overtime for Rochester, handing Saskatchewan a second straight loss.

The next week, the Rush returned home and held off a late comeback attempt to beat San Diego, 10-9.

Heading back on the road, Saskatchewan traveled to Ontario to face the Toronto Rock last week.

Toronto rookie C.J. Kirst, the first overall pick in last year's NLL draft, scored three goals in the second quarter alone, and the Rush trailed at halftime.

They kept it close the second half, but Toronto led the entire rest of the way, taking a 13-9 win.

Both Kirst and Toronto captain Challen Rogers recorded seven points.

The loss moved Saskatchewan into a tie with the Vancouver Warriors for first in the NLL.

Although they've hit a cold streak, the Rush have the talent to pull themselves back together.

On offense, the Rush are led by the three-headed monster of Keenan, Church and Zach Manns.

All three players have surpassed the 30-goal mark this season. Keenan leads the pack with 33, while Church and Manns each have 31.

Austin Shanks isn't far behind, either, as he has 25 goals and 60 points to his name this season.

Saskatchewan's defensive group is led by veterans Matt Hossack and Mike Messenger.

Hossack has caused 29 turnovers this season, the second-most of any player in the league.

He trails only Callum Jones of the Ottawa Black Bears, who has caused 30 turnovers this season.

Messenger is one of the league's best shot blockers, and he's blocked 27 so far this season.

The only player in the league with more is Buffalo's Paul Dawson with 29.

In goal, the Rush have gotten strong play from veteran Frank Scigliano.

Scigliano is one of only three starting goalies in the league allowing less than 10 goals per game.

He trails only Georgia's Brett Dobson and Vancouver's Christian Del Bianco in goals against average (GAA).

Scigliano will probably be a pretty tough egg for the Bandits to crack, especially with the game being in Saskatoon.

The Rush are a perfect 6-0 at home this season, and several of those games weren't particularly close.

Scigliano is only allowing roughly 8.5 goals per game at home, too, so the Bandits are going to have to take advantage of every opportunity.

One of the biggest keys to this game will be penalties.

The Rush have scored more power play goals than any other team in the NLL, so Buffalo has to stay out of the box.

The other major factor for Buffalo is goal droughts.

There have been way too many times this season where the Bandits go 10, 15 or even 20 straight minutes without putting the ball in the back of the net.

We saw that happen last week in San Diego, as Buffalo had three separate stretches of more than 10 minutes without a goal.

Against the top team in the league, that cannot happen.

If the Bandits can get themselves into a consistent rhythm on offense, they can really make life difficult for Saskatchewan's defense.

If the lengthy goal droughts persist, it'll be a long night for Bandits fans.

Buffalo will have an added boost for tonight's game, as Nick Weiss has been activated off of injured reserve and will play.

Matt's pick: Rush 11, Bandits 9

Tonight's game begins at 9 p.m., and fans in the Buffalo market can watch live on the CW23.

The game will be streamed on ESPN+, and radio listeners can tune into WWKB 1520 AM.

As always, stay tuned to @re_laxlacrosse on X for live goal updates and analysis between quarters.

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).

BUFFALO (8-6)

AT

SASKATCHEWAN (11-4)

‘NLL Madness’ continues — who reaches the semifinals?

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

As the men’s and women’s NCAA tournament brackets advance to their second weekend, our “NLL Madness” bracket advances to round two.

The records have changed after last week’s results, but the seeding stays the same, with the reason being that

We saw some upsets in round one, with the biggest being #11 Halifax taking down #6 Ottawa.

The journeys for lower seeds only get tougher from here on out, especially as the top two teams join the fold.

Can a lower seed stun the big dogs, or will we see all chalk?

Let’s find out!

#1 Saskatchewan Rush vs. #9 Las Vegas Desert Dogs

The number one seed has entered the conversation, and to put it simply, they’re loaded.

Four different players have cracked the 60-point mark, and three of them have scored 30 or more goals.

Ryan Keenan and Robert Church are both top-10 in the league in total points, and Zach Manns and Austin Shanks aren’t far behind.

They’ve got solid depth, too, as Brock Haley has recorded 14 goals and 33 points this season.

On defense, veterans Mike Messenger and Matt Hossack anchor a unit that has allowed the third fewest goals in the league.

They’re aided, of course, by veteran goalie Frank Scigliano, who’s enjoying a career season.

Scigliano is allowing just 9.32 goals per game, the best mark of his career.

His 79.6% save percentage is the best he’s ever had as a starter, too.

The Rush have been at the top of the league for nearly the entire season. They went on a nine-game win streak at one point, stretching from Dec. 20 to Feb. 22.

That’s a stretch of more than two months without a single loss.

Since then, though, they’ve hit a bit of a cold streak.

An overtime loss in Buffalo ended the win streak on Feb. 27, and they suffered another overtime loss in Rochester the next night.

They split their next two, narrowly beating San Diego on March 14 before falling in Toronto last weekend.

In that loss to Toronto, Shanks only recorded one point and Manns was held without a goal.

Church and Keenan both excelled with six points each, but Scigliano was shaky in net, allowing 12 goals.

They’re still the top team in the league, but they enter this fictitious tournament cold.

On the other side, Las Vegas is coming off an upset over San Diego in this tournament.

In real life, they’ve won back to back games, and they’re flirting with a playoff spot.

Mitch Jones and Jonathan Donville have both been very good on offense, but weak goaltending will be their downfall in this tournament.

There will be no upset in this one, and the Rush advance to the semifinal.

Prediction: Saskatchewan wins.

#4 Georgia Swarm vs. #5 Toronto Rock

This one would be fun to watch.

After all, they’ve played once already this season, a 10-9 overtime win for Georgia on Jan. 24.

Georgia doesn’t have a particularly potent offense, as star scorers Shayne Jackson and Lyle Thompson have had down years compared to where they’re usually at.

It’s pretty impressive when 61 and 57-point seasons are considered “down years,” but that’s a sign of how good the two have been throughout their careers.

Their first-round draft pick from last year, forward Nolan Byrne, is enjoying a 25-goal rookie campaign.

The unquestioned strength of the Swarm, though, is goaltending.

Brett Dobson, who played his college lacrosse at St. Bonaventure, is playing at an MVP-caliber pace.

Through 14 games, Dobson has allowed less than eight goals per game, and he’s stopped 84.3% of the shots he’s faced.

He leads all starting goalies in both of those categories by a fairly wide margin.

I wouldn’t be the least bit surprised if he takes home the league’s MVP award at season’s end.

On the other side of the floor, the Rock boast a star goalie of their own.

Nick Rose is back in Toronto this year after being traded to Calgary at the deadline last year.

The 2025 season was one to forget for the Rock. They went 6-12, finishing as the second-worst team in the NLL.

Much of the team’s struggles were attributed to an early season-ending injury to top scorer Mark Matthews, who only played four games before going down.

Matthews and Rose are back this season, and they’re aided by a couple of star rookies.

By virtue of their brutal 2025 season, the Rock held both the first and third overall picks in the draft.

They used the first pick on forward C.J. Kirst, and he’s had an excellent rookie campaign.

Kirst has 30 goals and 58 points, and he leads all rookies in both categories.

Right behind him is the man who Toronto selected third overall, forward Owen Hiltz.

Hiltz has had an excellent first season of his own, with 26 goals and 51 points.

Captain Challen Rogers is also enjoying a career year, as he’s already surpassed his previous personal bests in goals, assists and points.

Toronto is going to be a tough out, but they’re meeting a brick wall in this one.



Bracket HQ

Bracket made with

Dobson has been too good, and he'd silence the Rock offense in this hypothetical matchup.

Prediction: Georgia wins.

#3 Colorado Mammoth vs. #11 Halifax Thunderbirds

The Cinderella story of the first round is back for another matchup, but can they pull off another upset?

Clarke Petterson's offense may make it a game, but don't expect the underdog to pull this one off.

Randy Staats and Cody Jamieson have both been solid, but they don't have the offense to keep up with that of Colorado.

Andrew Kew is on a warpath this season, and he leads the league in goals with 43.

Those 43 goals have come across just 11 games, by the way.

That's a pace of nearly four goals per game.

That pace over a full season would total more than 70 goals, which has only been topped twice in the league's history.

Kew hasn't had to do it alone, either, as Will Malcom and Jack Hannah have put up 70 and 68 points respectively.

Their top draft pick from last year, forward Braedon Saris, has been very solid this season, too.

He leads all rookies in assists with 30, and his 44 points rank third among all first-year players.

In goal, Dillon Ward has put together another strong season.

He has stopped 80.9% of opposing shots, good for third in the league.

Warren Hill has also been good in net for Halifax, but he hasn't been as good as Ward.

Hill might be able to limit Colorado's offense, but the Thunderbirds don't have as good of an offense to counter Ward's excellence.

This is probably the easiest matchup of the quarterfinal round to predict.

Prediction: Colorado wins.

#2 Vancouver Warriors vs. #7 Buffalo Bandits

Vancouver has arrived for their first NLL Madness matchup, and they're going up against the team that's made for the playoffs like no other.

Again, because this is a publication dedicated to the Bandits, they don't need much of an introduction.

Dhane Smith is doing his thing, unsurprisingly. His 94 points are the third-most in the league.

After a frustrating first half of the season, Josh Byrne seems to be finding his footing, too.

He's recorded seven or more points in each of his last four games, all wins for Buffalo.

The team's last loss was, ironically, against Vancouver on Feb. 20.

In that game, the Warriors outscored Buffalo 4-0 in the third quarter on the way to an 11-9 win.

Vancouver boasts the league's top point scorer, as forward Keegan Bal has put together another spectacular year.

Through 15 games, Bal has scored 36 goals and recorded 107 points.

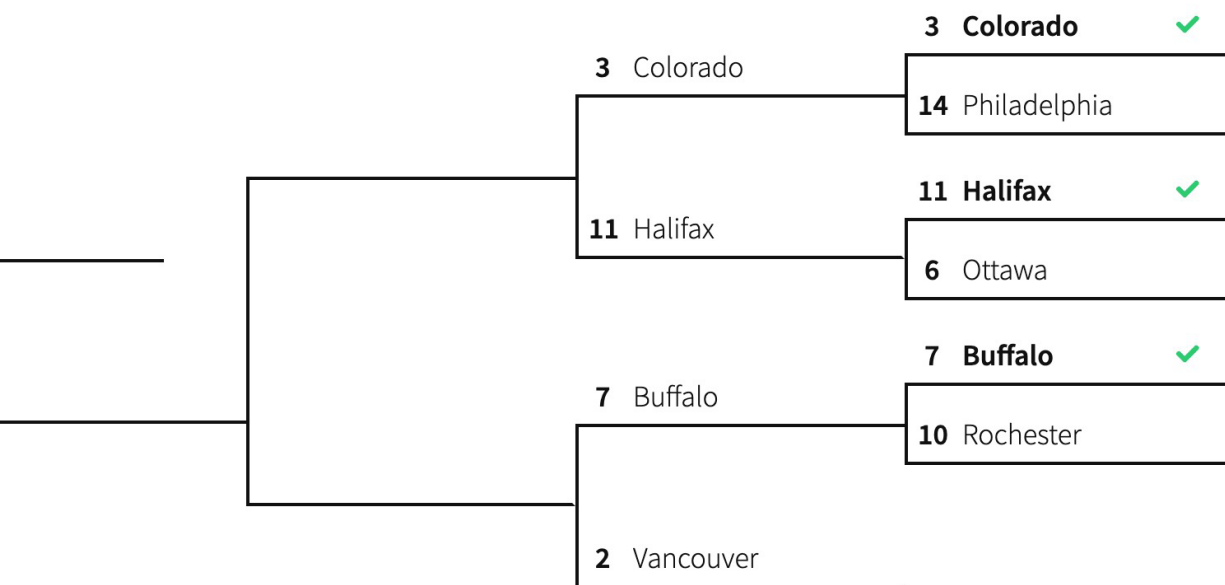
His 71 assists are the most of any player in the league, too. Surprisingly, Bal doesn't even lead his own team in goals.

That honor belongs to veteran Curtis Dickson with 38.

While Bal and Dickson have been the offensive headliners, Jesse King and Adam Charalambides have also enjoyed solid seasons.

But like many other teams in this bracket, the Warriors have strong goaltending.

Christian Del Bianco has had yet another outstanding year in his first full season as Vancouver's starter.



brackethq.com

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The former league MVP ranks second in the league in both goals against average (GAA) and save percentage, trailing only Dobson in both categories.

Matt Vinc hasn't been as strong in net for Buffalo, and the 43-year-old has started to show some signs of age.

The most decorated goalie in league history may be playing in his final year, and he's seen many situations just like this (hypothetical) one.

Vinc has played more playoff games than any other player in league history, and he's not going down without a fight.

Vancouver may have a better team on paper, but Buffalo is experienced, and they can find ways to win when it counts.

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
NLL Madness?

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