

Issue 5 — April 11, 2026

RE:LAX

Your Unofficial Home for
Buffalo Bandits Lacrosse

*The glory days:
Celebrating anniversaries of
Bandits' first championships*

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- Bandits host Rochester in regular season home finale

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Our "NLL Madness" bracket has reached its title game, and it's a clash of titans between the Bandits and the Georgia Swarm. Who comes out on top in this hypothetical title game?

6. *Reliving the Bandits-Wings '90s playoff clashes*

This weekend marks the 30-year anniversary of the Bandits' third championship, a win over the Philadelphia Wings in 1996. Let's take a look back at the incredible streak of playoff matchups these two teams had — five in a row, with four of them coming in the title game.

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

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Bandits host Rochester on Fan Appreciation Night

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

It's been a tale of two lacrosse teams in Western New York since the last time they met three months ago.

After a 4-1 start that included a win over their regional rivals, the Rochester Knighthawks have fallen off a cliff.

They've won just two of their last 10 games, and they now find themselves in 10th place in the NLL.

Those regional rivals have gone the opposite way since January.

As all Bandits fans know, the team has been red hot over the last two months.

Buffalo has won six straight games and seven of their last eight. They locked up a playoff spot last week thanks to a win over Vancouver and a Rochester loss to Halifax.

Things were a lot different when they matched up in Rochester on Jan. 10, however.

Both teams entered the game at 3-1, but Buffalo was coming off an uninspiring win over the Las Vegas Desert Dogs the week before.

The Bandits' offense looked great, scoring 15 goals.

It was the defense that was problematic.

They allowed 13 goals to an offense that was projected to be one of the league's worst when the season began.

In Rochester, the Bandits fell behind in the first quarter thanks to three straight goals from Zed Williams.

Buffalo never regained the lead, falling 12-9 for their second loss of the season.

Much of Buffalo's recent championship success came from strong defense, but that wasn't proving to be the case early in 2026.

Part of the difficulty came from a rule change that was instituted before the season that limited how the Bandits could align their defense.

Prior to this season, Buffalo would stack one or two defenseman in the crease in front of Matt Vinc.

They made it a lot tougher for opponents to score by doing this, and stalwarts like Paul Dawson and Steve Priolo racked up blocked shots left and right.

It frustrated opponents to no end, though, and the league stepped in during the offseason to put a stop to defensemen in the crease.

Adjusting to a new defensive gameplan came with some growing pains. The loss to Rochester was the first of four straight, and they allowed double-digit goals in each loss.

None were worse than their game in Colorado on Jan. 31, however.

In one of the ugliest Bandits games I've ever seen, Mammoth forward Andrew Kew racked up seven goals and 11 points on the way to a 20-9 drubbing.

A home loss to the last-place Philadelphia Wings the next week seemed to seal Buffalo's fate.

After a stretch like that, it didn't seem possible that this team could win another championship, and their chances of even making the playoffs seemed slim at best.

HOW TO TUNE IN:

TV: MSG
(Buffalo market only)

STREAM: ESPN+

RADIO:
WWKB 1520 AM

But if there's one thing about the Bandits, it's that they never quit.

An overtime win over Saskatchewan followed by a win in Toronto the next night brought the Bandits back to .500, and they've been on a rampage since.

It hasn't always been pretty, and it certainly wasn't when Buffalo's offense had to put together multi-goal comebacks in consecutive games a few weeks ago.

But wins are wins no matter how they come, and the Bandits have done nothing but win since February.

Much of their success can be attributed to the resurgence of Josh Byrne.

Byrne struggled significantly in the first half of the season, and he looked like a shell of his former MVP self on offense.

Across their six straight wins, though, Byrne has been nothing short of dominant.

He's recorded at least seven points in all six wins, which included two four-goal games.

Byrne, Vinc, Dhane Smith and company are on a roll, much to the chagrin of the rest of the league.

Tonight marks the final home game of the regular season for the Bandits, but they're hoping for at least one playoff game in Banditland.

I think they earn their seventh straight win and pull themselves one step closer to a first-round home game.

Matt's pick: Buffalo 13, Rochester 8

Fans in the Buffalo market can catch tonight's game on the CW23 or listen live on WBEN 930 AM.

The game will also be viewable on ESPN+.

Faceoff for tonight's game is set for 7 p.m.

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).

‘NLL Madness’ championship: Georgia or Buffalo?

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

After three rounds of a grueling, fictitious “March Madness” bracket with all 14 NLL teams, we have finally reached the title game.

In a surprising twist, neither of these teams received first-round byes, meaning they had to fight their way through all three rounds to get here.

Both teams were also responsible for the elimination of one of the top two seeds, proving that neither team had an easy path to the championship.

Before we dive into the NLL Madness championship game and see how both of these teams got here, RE: Lax sends its official congratulations to the champions of the Division I men’s and women’s basketball tournaments.

Congratulations to the Michigan Wolverines and UCLA Bruins, respectively.

Now, let’s take a look at our final two teams, starting with the squad who knocked off the top overall seed in the semifinal round.

#4 Georgia Swarm

The Swarm are one of the few teams who are still in the same spot they began the tournament in.

They began NLL Madness in fourth place in the NLL, and that’s where they still sit.

Georgia’s path to the title game was no joke, but it started off with a bit of a no-brainer.

They faced off against the #13 seed Oshawa FireWolves, a team with some young stars but not much of a cohesive identity.

26-year-old Alex Simmons has once again torn up the league, and he ranks in the top 10 in goals and points with 38 and 96, respectively.

Simmons also turns 27 on Sunday, which means he shares a birthday with my mom.

Simmons is joined by Tye Kurtz to fuel the Oshawa offense, who is 10th in the league in goals with 35.

Other than that, Oshawa doesn’t bring much to the table.

With Brett Dobson on a rampage so far this season, there wasn’t much of a question that Georgia would survive the upset.

Georgia’s second matchup was much tougher, facing a rejuvenated Toronto Rock team.

After an abysmal 2025 season that saw them finish near the bottom of the league and trade key pieces at the deadline, the Rock have worked their way to a 10-6 record with two games to go.

They’re led by two top draft picks from last year, first overall pick C.J. Kirst and third overall pick Owen Hiltz.

Kirst is the runaway favorite for Rookie of the Year, as he leads all rookies in every offensive category.

Toronto also got a boost with the return of Mark Matthews, as the star forward was ready to go after an injury ended his 2025 season in just his fifth game.

4 Georgia

7 Buffalo

Bracket made with brackethq.com.

They also welcomed Nick Rose back, as the veteran goalie rejoined the team after a trade sent him to Calgary at last year’s deadline.

Toronto and Georgia played once in the regular season, a 10-9 overtime win for the Swarm on Jan. 24.

This may have been our closest matchup of NLL Madness, but because of how incredible Dobson has been between the pipes, I went with Georgia to reach the semifinal round.

There, they’d meet a team who started the year flaming but have since cooled down, the Saskatchewan Rush.

The Rush began the season 10-1 before falling to Earth as of late, as they’ve lost four of their last five games.

When this bracket was created, though, they still held the top spot in the league.

It’s no surprise to see the Rush have this much success. They fell just one game short of an NLL Cup last year, and they certainly have the talent to get back there.

Ryan Keenan, Robert Church and Zach Manns are as good of a three-headed monster as any team could ask for on offense.

All three have scored at least 32 goals and racked up 75 points.

They also have Austin Shanks, who isn’t far behind with 26 goals and 62 points of his own.

Veterans Mike Messenger and Matt Hossack anchor one of the league's best defensive units, holding down the fort in front of goalie Frank Scigliano.

Scigliano has been one of the league's best starting goalies this season, and he's currently allowing the second fewest goals per game of any starter.

It was tough to go against the Rush, but Dobson's numbers don't lie.

It's not common for a goalie to win league MVP, but Georgia's netminder is on pace to do just that.

As the old adage says, defense wins championships.

Despite solid scorers like Shayne Jackson, Lyle Thompson and rookie Nolan Byrne, the Swarm have arrived at the title game for one primary reason — they out-goaled everyone else.

#7 Buffalo Bandits

They're baaaaaaack.

Seriously, did you really think I wouldn't pick the Bandits to go this far?

Yes, it might show a bit of hometown bias to pick Buffalo at a time when they were in seventh place, but I think I've been somewhat vindicated by their play over the past few weeks.

The Bandits have lost just one game over the past two months, and they've won each of their last six.

They're coming off a dominant win over the Vancouver Warriors, a team with the league's top scorer and one of its best goalies.

Ironically enough, Buffalo also faced Vancouver in the second round of this tournament, but we'll get to that.

To begin NLL Madness, the Bandits matched up against their regional rivals, the Rochester Knighthawks.

Rochester is headlined by the defending league MVP, Amherst native Connor Fields.

Fields hasn't been far off that pace this season, as he ranks fourth in the league in both goals and points.

He hasn't had to do it alone, as Ryan Lanchbury has facilitated offense well with 71 assists.

Ryan Smith has also been an excellent contributor, too, sniping 36 goals.

But, I'll go back to the "defense wins championships" argument, and Rochester doesn't have a great one.

Their goalie tandem of Rylan Hartley and Riley Hutchcraft has struggled, so much so that Rochester has allowed more goals than anyone else despite playing one fewer game than most teams.

Buffalo's offense has gone cold at times this season, but they'd likely be able to turn it right back on against a struggling defensive unit.

I picked Buffalo to get past the Knighthawks, meaning they'd stare down Vancouver in the second round.

The Warriors are led by another MVP favorite, Keegan Bal.

Bal leads the league in assists and points, and he's seventh in the league in goals.

Somehow, he doesn't lead his own team in goals, as Curtis Dickson has scored 38 compared to Bal's 37.

Jesse King, Adam Charalambides and young gun Marcus Klarich round out an offense that leads the league in shooting percentage.

They also boast an anchor in net, as Christian Del Bianco is enjoying yet another stellar season.

Del Bianco, the 2023 NLL MVP, ranks second in the league in goals against average (GAA) and third in save percentage.

He still holds those ranks even after being shelled by the Bandits' offense last weekend.

This game was tough to predict on paper, but I went with Buffalo because of their unmatched postseason experience.

I was a bit unsure of the selection, but after Saturday's game, I'm 100% confident.

That led Buffalo to the semifinal game, where they'd face the Colorado Mammoth.

This was a similar matchup on paper to the Vancouver game, as Colorado also boasts a strong offense and good goaltending.

The Mammoth are tied with the Rush for the most goals of any team in the NLL, and the duo of Andrew Kew and Will Malcom have combined for many of them.

Jack Hannah, Dylan McIntosh and rookie Braedon Saris have also put up solid numbers.

The veteran presence of Dillon Ward has kept things steady on the back end, as he ranks third in the league in save percentage.

The Bandits and Mammoth played twice this season, once in Buffalo and once in Denver.

The game in Denver was a massacre, as the Mammoth steamrolled Buffalo on the way to a 20-9 win on Jan. 31.

It was a different story when the two teams played in Buffalo on March 13, as the Bandits came away with a 13-10 win.

These two squads are very evenly matched, but I again went with Buffalo's experience.

The Bandits simply know how to get the job done in the playoffs, so I selected them to pull off another upset and reach the championship game.

Matt's Pick

This game would be fascinating, and it usually is when they meet.

They actually began the regular season against each other, a 15-11 win for the Bandits in Buffalo.

That was a rare off game for Dobson, and it's one of only three games all season in which the Swarm have given up double-digit goals.

Although Dobson would likely be a brick wall standing in the way of the Buffalo offense, Vinc has been equally as hot over the past couple of months.

In each win of Buffalo's six-game win streak, Vinc has recorded a save percentage of 81% or higher.

He also hasn't allowed 10 goals in a game in nearly a month.

The 43-year-old is widely considered to be the greatest goalie in the history of professional box lacrosse, and some believe he may be the NLL's best player of all time.

He continues to defy Father Time and be a crucial asset to a Buffalo team that seems deadset on winning a record fourth straight championship.

It's tough to go against Dobson considering how great he's been this season, but Buffalo is pretty much unbeatable when it comes to the postseason.

The Bandits have won the last three NLL Cups, and they're taking home the first NLL Madness championship.

Prediction: Buffalo wins.

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

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Reliving the Bandits-Wings '90s playoff clashes

MATT VOLZ
Editor in Chief

When the Bandits first entered the Major Indoor Lacrosse League (MILL) in 1992, it didn't take long for them to find success.

They burst onto the scene once they got to the playoffs, reaching the championship game against the Philadelphia Wings.

The Wings had a bit of a down season in 1992, finishing second in the American Division at 3-5.

They weren't far removed from sustained success, though, as they won back-to-back titles in 1989 and 1990.

The Wings received the honor of hosting the championship game on April 11, 1992 — 34 years ago, tonight.

John Tavares, now Buffalo's head coach, was a 23-year-old rookie for the team at the time.

1992 marked the beginning of what would become an elite career for Tavares, a career that ended with his number 11 hanging in the rafters of KeyBank Center.

He was joined by the two other players whose numbers have been retired by the team, Darris and Rich Kilgour.

The trio of Darris Kilgour, Tavares and Derek Keenan packed a lethal scoring punch, and Keenan was named the league's Rookie of the Year.

They all ranked in the top five in the league in points, trailing only the legendary Gait brothers.

The 1992 championship game was played at the Spectrum in Philadelphia, a place that had never been kind to the Bandits' cohabitants.

The Sabres could never seem to beat the Flyers at the Spectrum, most notably dropping all three games played there during the 1975 Stanley Cup Final.

Many Buffalo fans were probably fearing the same outcome for the 1992 MILL title game, but Buffalo held a 10-9 lead in the game's final minutes.

With the Wings in desperation mode, rookie Chris Flynn buried a shot past Bandits goalie Bill Gerrie to tie the game.

The goal brought the crowd at the Spectrum to their feet, and the last few seconds ticked off the clock as the game headed to overtime.

The two teams went back and forth for a few possessions before Tavares scored arguably the most iconic goal in the franchise's history.

Tavares found his way to the slot and threw a behind-the-back shot over his shoulder, securing the team's first championship in their first year of play.

The win was likely a sigh of relief for Buffalo sports fans, who were no strangers to playoff heartbreak in the early 1990s.



The Champion's Cup, circa 2006.

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The 1992 championship came just a few months after the Bills lost their second consecutive Super Bowl, a 37-24 drubbing at the hands of the Washington Redskins.

The Sabres were concluding a disappointing season that saw them sneak into the playoffs despite a losing record.

In their first-round series, Buffalo continued a stretch of early exits, falling to the Boston Bruins in seven games.

The Bandits brought their home city its first professional sports championship since the Bills won back-to-back American Football League (AFL) titles in 1964 and 1965.

Speaking of back-to-back championships, the Bandits cruised through the 1993 season to reach their second consecutive title game.

Buffalo's offense was dominant, averaging nearly 18 goals per game.

Tavares led the league in goals, assists and points, while Keenan was third in the league in goals.

Darris Kilgour had a bit of a down year, but strong seasons from Bob Hamley and Jim Veltman elevated the rest of the offense.

The Bandits went unbeaten in the regular season, winning their first National Division title.

Buffalo earned a first-round bye in the playoffs, hosting the Boston Blazers in the semifinal round.

In their second-ever playoff game at The Aud, the Bandits treated the home crowd to a 12-10 win, guaranteeing that the championship game would be in Buffalo.

For the second year in a row, the Bandits faced the Philadelphia Wings, with the championship game played 33 years ago this week.

The 1993 Wings were equally as dominant as the Bandits, and they allowed fewer goals than any other team.

Philadelphia's offense was fueled by the addition of both Gait brothers, who finished second and third in the league in points behind only Tavares.

The Bandits and Wings played once during the regular season, a 13-12 Bandits win in Buffalo on Feb. 27.

That was Philadelphia's only loss of the entire season, as the Wings went 7-1 and won the American Division.

The championship game was another nailbiter, as the game was tied at 12 with under a minute remaining.

The Bandits had the ball, and unsurprisingly, Tavares led the charge.

He found Bob Hamley at the point, who fed the ball across to Darris Kilgour for an open look.

Darris ripped a shot past Wings goalie Dallas Eliuk to give Buffalo the lead with 29.9 seconds remaining.

In the final seconds, Tavares intercepted a pass and fired it down to the other end of the floor, sealing Buffalo's second championship in as many years.

Tavares was named player of the game for his four-goal, seven-point performance.

Again, the Bandits seemed to be the only Buffalo team who could win a championship.

A few months before the 1993 MILL title game, the Bills reached their third straight Super Bowl.

This one was even worse than the last, as the Dallas Cowboys slaughtered the Bills, 52-17.

The Bills would make it four straight Super Bowl appearances the following year, again losing to the Cowboys.

The Sabres also fell short in the 1993 playoffs, losing to the Montreal Canadiens in the second round.

While the other two teams consistently fell short of winning the "big one," the Bandits had done it in both of their first two seasons.

In the next two seasons, though, the Wings got their revenge.

The two teams matched up in the MILL championship game for a third straight time in 1994, but this time, the Wings got the job done.

In the highest-scoring playoff game in league history, the Wings' offense couldn't be stopped in a 26-15 win.

In 1995, the two teams met again in the playoffs, this time in the semifinal round.

It was the third straight time they had played in Buffalo in the postseason, but again, the Wings got the job done on the road.

Bandits vs. Wings playoff matchups in the 1990s:

- 1992 Championship (BUF)
- 1993 Championship (BUF)
- 1994 Championship (PHI)
- 1995 Semifinal (PHI)
- 1996 Championship (BUF)

In another high-scoring thriller, Philadelphia prevailed, 19-16, and the Wings would win their second straight title a week later with a win over Rochester in the championship game.

After four straight postseason matchups with each team winning twice, 1996 served as an opportunity for a grudge match.

Sure enough, the Bandits and Wings found their way to each other for the championship game once again.

The 1996 title game was a bit different for Buffalo, though, as it also served as the last game they'd ever play in their first home.

30 years ago this week, the athletic history of The Aud came to an end, as Bandits and Sabres fans said goodbye to the old and outdated arena.

The brand new Crossroads Arena (now KeyBank Center) was set to open down the street in the fall, but before they left, the Bandits had one more special memory to create at The Aud.

Led by strong offensive performances from Tavares and Troy Cordingley, the Bandits secured their third championship with a 15-10 win.

The game was played on Friday, April 12, which was also my mom's birthday.

Two days later, the Sabres played their final game at The Aud, a 4-1 win over the Hartford Whalers.

The Bandits-Wings rivalry of the mid-90s is long gone, especially with the second iteration of the Wings set to cease operations after the season.

But on the anniversaries of some of the rivalry's greatest moments, it's worth a look back to remember what may have been the greatest rivalry in the sport's history.

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