

penton col. w/o oct. 8/19

## STANLEY CUP DREAMS ALL OVER NORTH AMERICA

There can be only one Stanley Cup champion next June, but as the 2018-19 season gets underway, there are high expectations in many jurisdictions across North America.

With the off-season addition of the No. 1 available free agent, John Tavares, Toronto Maple Leafs' fans have high expectations that they will snap the 52-year drought that began the season after they won their last cup, 1967.

With the acquisition in late September of all-star defenceman Erik Karlsson, the San Jose Sharks have high expectations that finally, this will be the season they don't experience any playoff disappointment.

With most of their stars returning, including the sublime Alex Ovechkin, the Washington Capitals have expectations of pulling off a repeat of their first Stanley Cup triumph.

With Blake Wheeler's signature on a new five-year contract and the team's young stars, such as goalie Connor Hellebuyck and centre Mark Scheifele, one year older and one year better, Winnipeg Jets think they can take one step beyond the Western Conference final, where their run to the Cup ended last spring.

With an unprecedented trip to the Stanley Cup final in their first year in the league, the Vegas Golden Knights see no reason why this year should be any different victory-wise.

With Sidney Crosby still in his prime, and with the knowledge that they know how to win the big games (two Cup triumphs in the last three years will have that effect), the Pittsburgh Penguins think they can get back to the big stage. Fans in Nashville expect that one of these years, they'll stop singing Close But No Cigar and change the lyrics to something more upbeat. With skill at every position (Pekke Rinne in goal; a slew of scorers; and top-four defensemen to die for), the Predators are hoping for a breakthrough.

Why not Boston? Why not Tampa Bay? Well why not? Those two were among the five teams to eclipse the 50-win mark last year and there's no reason why they shouldn't be top contenders again.

And that's it, folks. The Stanley Cup winner will be one of the nine aforementioned teams. If you're a fan of one of the other 22 clubs, sorry to burst your bubble. Maybe next year.

- **Dwight Perry** of the Seattle Times: "Back when NCAA rules allowed it, Florida State football coach **Bobby Bowden** took movie star **Burt Reynolds** — an ex-FSU player and a huge Seminoles booster — on a recruiting trip to Ohio to better his chances of sealing the deal. I'll pitch FSU to the player, Bowden told Reynolds, while you sweet-talk the kid's single mother. 'Well, the kid ended up going to Notre Dame,' Bowden quipped, 'and the mother came to Florida State.'"
- **Sean McIndoe** in The Athletic, on the Calgary Flames' off-season moves: "They made a blockbuster trade and signed a big UFA, because this is a team that absolutely needs to make the playoffs. Then they hired a coach who's never made the playoffs."
- Another one from McIndoe, assessing the Columbus Blue Jackets' coach **John Tortorella**: "A coach who responds to adversity by throwing water bottles at fans and charging into opposing dressing rooms to fight."
- **Scott Ostler** of the San Francisco Chronicle, on the 49ers' loss of QB **Jimmy Garoppolo**: "The team is rallying behind **(C.J.) Beathard**, whom most fans — no offence to the earnest and hard-working young man — were hoping would function mostly as a potted plant this season."
- **Brad Rock** of the Deseret News: "Boise State's preseason training regimen included lugging 100-pound bags of Idaho potatoes up the stadium stairs. Cute, but most offensive linemen lug 100 pounds of french fries around their waistlines, anyway, don't they?"
- Comedy writer **Jim Barach**: "Former Major League Baseball star **Brad Lidge** is now an archaeologist. In fact, he was on the Dominican Republic expedition that dug up **Bartolo Colon**."
- Barach again: "Mets pitcher **Jacob deGrom** has finished the season with a 1.70 ERA. Which is even more impressive considering he didn't get to pitch any games against the Mets."
- **RJ Currie** of [sportsdeke.com](http://sportsdeke.com): "Winnipeg Jets sniper **Patrik Laine** mercifully shaved off the worst beard in hockey. It wasn't all bad: he is the namesake in Manitoba for two out of every three newborn goats."
- Comedy writer **Alex Kaseberg**: "In Minnesota's loss to the Rams, Viking long snapper Kevin McDermott lost the tip of his pinky finger, got it sewn up and kept playing. Once I took a sick day because I had a case of the hiccups."
- **Dwight Perry** again: The Indians just became the first team in baseball history with four 200-strikeout pitchers: **Corey Kluber, Trevor Bauer, Carlos Carrasco** and **Mike Clevinger**. Just call them the 4-by-200-K relay."

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