The Weekly Power Play: Breaking down each NHL division as regular season concludes

by Nicole Caruso
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
SHE/HER/HERS
nicole.caruso@uconn.edu

The NHL playoffs kick off on Saturday, April 18, but there is still plenty of regular season action to come.

Here's a look at each division and where each team in a playoff position stands:

Eastern Conference:

In the Atlantic Division, the Tampa Bay Lightning, Buffalo Sabres and Montreal Canadiens have secured a spot in the playoffs. However, each team currently has 102 points and is fighting for the top spot in the division.

All three teams have just four regular season games remaining with every point crucial in the close race. The Lighting and Canadiens face off against each other later this week with this matchup giving fans a glimpse into playoff action between two teams who have already secured a spot.

The Sabres defeated the Lightning on Monday with a score of 4-2. This was an important win for Buffalo who will be returning to playoff action for the first time since the 2010-11 season.

Looking towards the Pacific Division, the Carolina Hurricanes clinched the division with a 6-5 overtime win against the Bruins on Tuesday, which brought them to 106 points. Behind them are the Pittsburgh Penguins (96) and the Philadelphia Flyers (92) who are in a close race for second place.

The Flyers jumped back into a playoff spot with two wins over the weekend, including a 2-1 overtime victory against the Boston Bruins. They won against the New Jersey Devils with a strong 5-1 score and look towards the postseason with high hopes.

As far as the East Wild Card goes, the Boston Bruins appear to be locked in on first place with 96 points. Behind them are the Ottawa Senators with 92 points. The Bruins have just three regular season games left whereas the Senators and other teams in the wild card like the Columbus Blue Jackets have four.

Western Conference:

Leading the Central Division and the entire league is the Colorado Avalanche with 112 points. The Avalanche clinched the Central Division as well as the Western Conference after their 3-1 win against the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday.

The Dallas Stars currently sit in second place with 104 points and the Minnesota Wild in third (102). Both teams have secured a spot in the playoffs and will face off against one another in the Western Conference First Round. It is still to-be-determined as to who will have home ice advantage, so the race to secure second place is crucial for each team.

Looking at the Pacific Division, the Edmonton Oilers and Vegas Golden Knights both have 88 points. The Oliers have two road games before they face the Colorado Avalanche at home. The Anaheim Ducks currently sit in third place with 87 points and are 0-5-1 in their past six games and are close to finishing in third place if they continue this losing streak.

In the West Conference Wild Card, the Utah Mammoth are in first place with 88 points. The Nashville Predators sit in the second spot with 84 points but right behind them are the Los Angeles Kings with 83.

However, the Oilers own the regulations-wins tiebreaker with the Kings (27-19). If they do end up with the same number of points at the end of the regular season, they would rank higher than them.

Close races are within each conference and each wild card with the amount of time left to secure a playoff spot dwindling. Fans should keep an eye out on their favorite team as there is still plenty of regular season hockey left and anything can happen.



PHOTO COURTESY OF @PENGUINS ON INSTAGRAM

Ava's Angle: What is the best Final Four host city?

by Ava Inesta
STAFF WRITER
SHE/HER/HERS
ava.inesta@uconn.edu

Every year, the NCAA March Madness tournament for men's and women's basketball is one of the biggest events in American sports. It brings together thousands of college basketball fans for a month to celebrate the game at its highest level, for a month of competitive madness. The Final Four, the last weekend of the tournament, represents the peak of this excitement, while the remaining four teams compete for a national championship and a place in college basketball history. Every year, a new city takes upon the responsibility of hosting the Final Four. Beyond just the games themselves, the Final Four has also become a major event for the host city, showcasing its ability to provide the best atmosphere, facilities and fan experiences on one of the sport's biggest stages for the most important weekend of basketball season.

While the teams change every year, one debate that always continues is: what makes the best Final Four host city? There are several cities that consistently stand out, considering multiple factors like basketball tradition, stadium quality, fan experience and city layout.

Basketball Culture

Despite being the most recent host city, as the 2026 Final Four just recently wrapped, Indianapolis, Indiana is continuously talked about as one of the best host cities for the event. One of the biggest factors in a great Final Four host city is the local passion for basketball. Indianapolis is often called the heart of basketball in America, largely because of Indiana's deep high school basketball products and college basketball traditions with various well known universities in surrounding areas of the city. One of the premier examples is UConn's own Braylon Mullins who filled the media storylines in returning to his home state of Indiana with the Huskies in this year's Final Four.

The state of Indiana lives and breathes the sport, making it a natural fit to host college basketball's biggest weekend. Unlike some larger cities where the Final Four is just another major event, Indianapolis fully embraces the tournament. From downtown decorations to fan festivals, all within walking distance of Lucas Oil Stadium where the madness goes down, the entire city becomes centered around basketball, creating an unmatched atmosphere.



Wide shot of the crowd in Lucas Oil Stadium for the game between the Michigan Wolverines and Arizona Wildcats. Michigan went on to win the national championship against UConn.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @LUCASOIL.STADIUM ON INSTAGRAM

Stadium Quality and Location

Another important factor is the quality and accessibility of the stadium. Indianapolis hosts the Final Four at Lucas Oil Stadium, home of the Indianapolis Colts and one of the premier multi-purpose stadiums in the country. The stadium has a retractable roof, modern amenities and the capacity needed to host over 70,000 fans.

What makes Indianapolis unique compared to many other host cities is how close everything is. Hotels, restaurants, the convention center and fan events are all located within walking distance of Lucas Oil Stadium making all the Final Four festivities incredibly accessible for all fans. The three-day. 2026 March Madness Music Festival featuring headliners Twenty One Pilots, Zac Brown and Post Malone was hosted at American Legion Mall which is just over a mile away from Lucas Oil Stadium, with all additional fan events occurring within the same areas. This creates a "campus-like" feeling for fans, which is rare for such a large sporting event like the Final Four.

Fan Experience

The best Final Four cities make the experience about more than just the games. Other great examples are cities like New Orleans, Louisiana and San Antonio, Texas because they provide strong entertainment options, nightlife and unique culture.

New Orleans offers famous food, live music and the walkable French Quarter near the Caesars Superdome. San Antonio provides the scenic River Walk and a festival atmosphere around the Alamodome. These cities show that weather, entertainment and tourism appeal also play major roles in what makes a host city successful.

Weather and Travel Accessibility

Warm weather cities often have an advantage for this event because the Final Four takes place in early April. Cities with mild temperatures allow for more outdoor events and fan gatherings around the stadium and in surrounding areas. Additionally, cities with major airports and strong public transportation make travel easier for fans coming from all over the country.

This is why cities such as Phoenix, Arizona and Houston, Texas frequently appear in the Final Four rotation. Phoenix hosted the Men's Final Four at State Farm Stadium (home of the Arizona Cardinals) in 2024 and the Women's Final Four Mortgage Matchup Center (home of the Phoenix Suns and Phoenix Mercury) in 2026. Houston's last hosting year was 2023 for the Men's Final Four at NRG Stadium (home of the Houston Texans). Tampa, Florida was also a large hit for the 2025 Women's Final Four last year with the mix of gorgeous warm weather and easy travel accessibility through the state of Florida.

While many cities do a great job hosting the Final Four, Indianapolis sets a golden standard for many fans because of its basketball culture, walkability, organization and fan-focused experience. However, cities like New Orleans and San Antonio show that entertainment and culture can also make a strong case. With the 2025–26 basketball season now complete, attention turns to the next Final Four host city, as Detroit, Mich., begins preparing to promote and showcase its role as the site of the 2027 championship weekend.

Ultimately, the best Final Four host city is one that combines great basketball facilities with a memorable fan experience with surrounding events all weekend long. It also makes it more exciting and easier to love the environment when your own team wins in a certain city; the UConn fans love Houston, Phoenix and Tampa! When a city can make the weekend feel bigger than just the games themselves, that is when it truly becomes a perfect Final Four destination.