Sports

Photo of the Day |



UConn volleyball plays the DePaul Blue Devils on Saturday Sept. 27th. The match ended in an unfortunate loss for the Huskies with a final score of 3-1.

PHOTO BY EMMA RODRIGUEZ, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

THE PUCK DROP:
BILLET FAMILIES IN THE NHL



FILE LOGO/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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Behind the success of every rookie in the NHL is something that you don't necessarily see on the ice: a support system they have off the ice, in the form of a billet family.

While billet families are more popular in junior hockey, they exist in the professional leagues. Billet families host rookies and sometimes second-year players, providing them housing, meals and a familiar environment as they adjust to playing in the league.

However, billet families in the NHL look a little different compared to the juniors. They're veteran NHL players who open their homes up to their rookie teammates.

Plenty of NHL veterans have hosted players; Pittsburgh Penguins legend Mario Lemiux hosted Sydney Crosby and Taylor Hall, and Luke Grazdic hosted Connor McDavid during his rookie campaign.

"You're such a young kid. You're coming into the NHL and you don't know anybody," McDavid said in a 2025 article from TSN. "The guys you're trying to become friends with are fathers and husbands."

McDavid emphasized in the article that as a rookie, you need someone to catch you up to speed.

"You need guys to take you under their wing and show you the ropes, understand where to be, when to be there, how to be there," McDavid said in the TSN article.

Most recently, the Islander's star-studded rookie Matthew Schaefer lived with Matt Martin, his wife Sydney Esiason and their two daughters.

Schaefer, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2025 NHL draft, immediately made an impact as soon as he stepped on the ice for the Islanders. The defenseman racked up 23 goals and 36 assists in his rookie season, winning him the Calder Trophy, the award for the best first-year player in the NHL.

Fans can see his heroics off the ice as well. From time to time, Sydney Esiason will post videos of Schaefer with her daughters, saying he's almost like an older brother figure to them.

"From the moment he kind of stepped in our house and met our family, before it was ever decided he was going to live with us, you just feel the type of kid he is, the type of energy he has," Martin said in an article from Yahoo! Sports. "Kind of gravitated towards our kids and our kids gravitated towards him. It's a really special thing for my kids."

After living with them for the 2025-26 season, Schaefer plans to run it back with the Martins for his sophomore campaign.

"I mean, I kept my stuff there and then I'm like, I'm coming back. I guess they can't say no. I think they want me out probably sooner, but you know what? I'm like, 'Hey, I'm planting my seed here and I'm staying here.'" Schaefer said in an article from Yahoo! Sports.

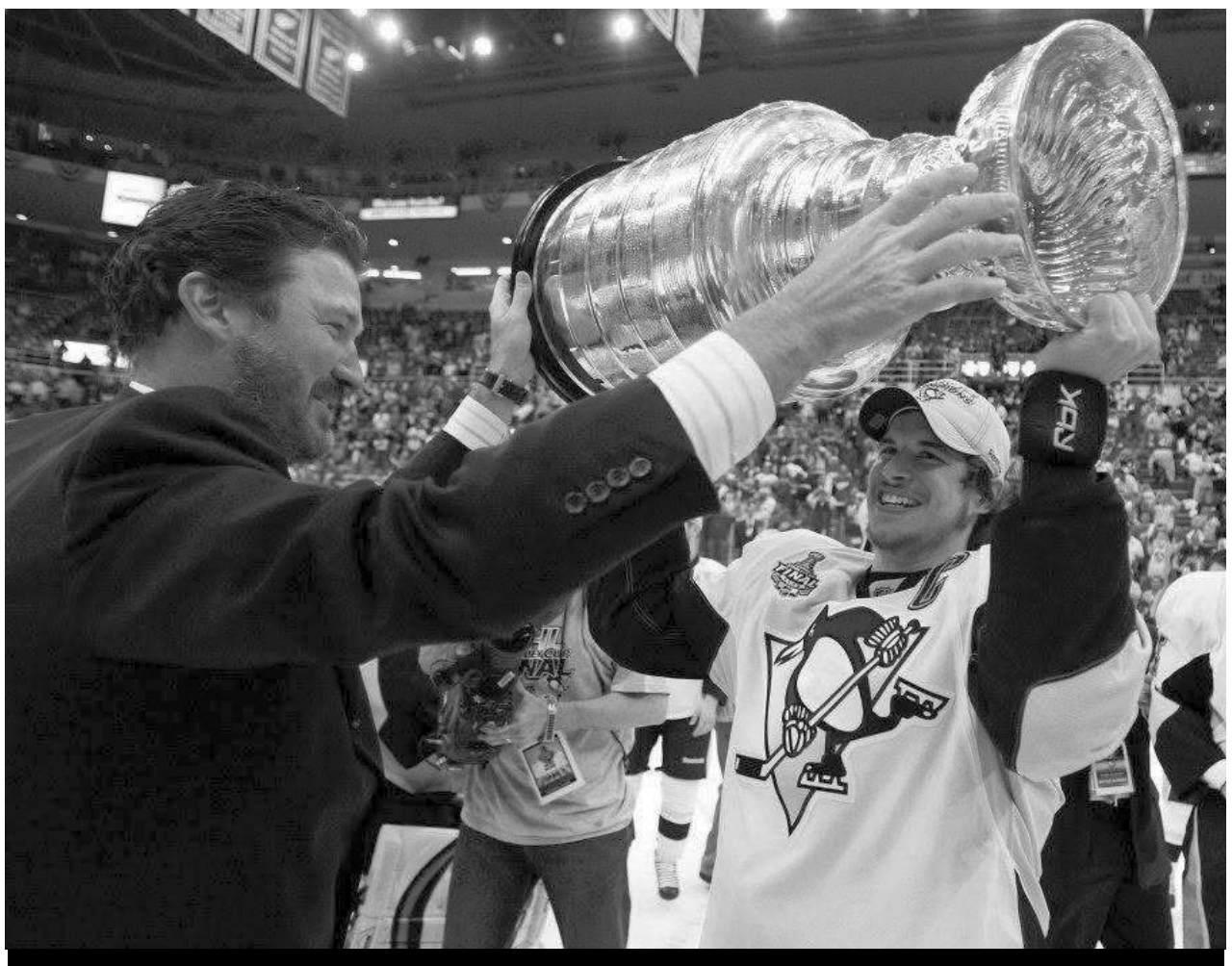
Along with Schaefer, rookie Gavin McKenna, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2026 draft, will be living with his Maple Leafs teammate, John Tavares.

McKenna has already made an impression on the Tavares family after living with them for a few weeks.

"He's great with them," Taveres said in an article from NHL.com regarding McKenna's relationship with his kids. "As a parent, I can't say enough about how much I appreciate how amazing he is interacting with them. He's fit in seamlessly with our family."

These stories and shared experiences between veterans and rookies show you that success is often achieved from the encouragement of those you're surrounded by.

"What I've tried to tell him, and Auston [Matthews] has done the same thing, is that people are going to love you and are excited to have you and believe in you," Tavares said in an article from NHL.com.



Mario Lemiuex handing the Stanley Cup to Sidney Crosby at the Stanley Cup Finals in 2009. Lemioux hosted Crosby when he came to Pittsburgh in 2005.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PITTSBURGH PENGUINS ON FACEBOOK



A close up of a hockey stick and pucks on ice. Billet families in the NHL are veteran NHL players who take in their rookie teammates.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TIMA MIROSCNICHENKO ON PEXELS