



THE RECORDER

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Student Loan Forgiveness Hangs In The Balance

by Liam McCusker
Staff Writer

As the U.S. Department of Education moves to privatize student loans, more than 500,000 borrowers in Connecticut could be affected.

Secretary of Education Linda McMahon has begun to phase out the Saving on a Valuable Education (SAVE) plan and has narrowed the definition of qualifying for loan forgiveness under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Buyback program, part of a broader shift in federal student loan policy. As this situation unfolds, not every lawmaker supports the decision or believes McMahon has the power to eliminate these programs without consulting Congress.

“I believe there’s no authority for the administration to make this unilateral decision without Congress,” U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., said. “I’m challenging the legality of the Trump administration narrowing the definition of qualifying for public service employment under PSLF, and I’m joining my colleagues in calling for the department to follow the law and protect PSLF.”

Amid this uncertainty, the options that remain available to borrowers who structured their financial plans around these programs are complicated, according to Blumenthal.



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see **LOANS** on page 2

“Different people may have different options and they should consult their servicers,” Blumenthal said. “The Republicans have unilaterally decided to phase out the SAVE plan by 2028, so there is some time between now and then to take advantage of it.”

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, a Republican-backed measure signed by President Donald Trump on July 4, 2025, also eliminated the Income-Contingent Repayment (ICR) plan and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) plan, which Blumenthal says narrows the options for borrowers. “I am going to work to reverse the elimination of the SAVE income-driven repayment plan before 2028 so that students can still take advantage of it in the meantime,” Blumenthal said.

Blumenthal is also pursuing oversight and legislative efforts in response to the changes. “Congress has a responsibility to protect the integrity of federal student loan programs that borrowers rely on when making financial and career decisions,” Blumenthal said. “I have been pressing the U.S. Department of Education for transparency about any proposed changes and supporting efforts to ensure programs like Public Service Loan Forgiveness remain accessible.”

by Nicolina Coronis & Elijah Hernandez
Staff Editors

The Importance of Student Senate Elections

With Senate voting concluding this week, representatives of CCSU’s Student Government Association (SGA) are changing, and new faces are preparing to make a difference in their community.

Current President James Finlay and Vice President Malachi Collins explained the role SGA plays in fulfilling its obligations to students.

“Student Government Association, the biggest thing that we do is represent student voices,” Finlay said. “We have resident senators, commuter senators and first-year senators, who will be elected in the fall during a special election. We also have at-large senators that anyone can run for, and they represent the people who elected them.”

“The main thing we do is build relationships and ensure we can vote on issues that could change policy,” Collins said. “I realize how many different segments of campus there can be, and I feel like SGA can be that connecting piece.”

Collins and Finlay emphasized the value SGA provides for students, noting that it serves as a space that brings people together.

“It’s important because I feel like it’s a platform for the people,” Collins said. “Some people have never had the opportunity to vocalize their ideas in a group setting. I think it gives people that first step into advocacy.”

“I think the biggest thing that we do, and that I try to do, is support students in their clubs on campus,” Finlay said. “Whether that be advocating for their needs with the administration, or funding student clubs and interests, campus life is one of our biggest focuses.”

Finlay also explained how student activity fees contribute to funding campus organizations.

“Each student pays a \$100 student activity fee,” Finlay said. “About 76% of that, roughly \$76 per student, goes to SGA, and that money gets dispersed into our various accounts.”

With SGA serving as a bridge between students and campus leadership, voting becomes one of the most important ways students can ensure their needs and concerns are heard.

“These people are going to be representing where you live or where you’re invested on campus, and they have the ability to improve the community,” Collins said. “If you don’t vote, you’re not utilizing the investment you have here.”

Finlay said civic participation on campus mirrors the broader democratic process.

“Democracy and politics come from within us,” Finlay said. “It’s not just in Washington, D.C., or the Capitol in Hartford. It’s in our everyday interactions, especially at school, where we should be expanding our mindset.”

He added that participation in student government and campus organizations can have long-term benefits.

👉 HEY BLUE DEVILS! 👉

Voting for the Student Government Senator Elections is now LIVE!

To vote, log into [Club Central](#) with your [my.ccsu.edu](#) email address & password. The voting link is an alert at the top of the page!

Voting ends Tuesday, April 14th at 11:45 pm. Thank you for participating! ❤️

You may only vote on the ballots that pertain to your student status, meaning only commuters can vote on the commuter ballot, and only current residents can vote on the resident student ballot.

CCSU Student Government Association

MySGA@ccsu.edu

(860)-832-3740

Follow us on Instagram @CCSUSGA

see **SENATE** on page 5

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CONTRIBUTORS
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MCKENNA DALEK

CO-EDITORS IN CHIEF
MARCUS SAUNDERS
ELIJAH HERNANDEZ

MEETINGS

MONDAYS AT 3:00 PM AT

THE RECORDER OFFICE

CCSU STUDENT CENTER
R107
1615 STANLEY STREET
NEW BRITAIN, CT 06050

860 • 832 • 3744

theccsurecorder@gmail.com
centralrecorder.org

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LOANS continued from front Blumenthal also expressed concern about broader instability within the Department of Education and the potential impact on federal aid programs. "I am concerned that instability at the U.S. Department of Education could create barriers for students and families who rely on federal financial aid," Blumenthal said.

Borrowers who will be most impacted by the elimination of these programs are those with low incomes, and Blumenthal said the effects could span professions and occupations, including electricians, carpenters and others who rely on borrowing for their education.

Blumenthal warned that changes to loan forgiveness programs could have long-term impacts on the workforce across the nation. "If these incentives are weakened, fewer students may choose public service careers," Blumenthal said. "Communities could feel the impact through staffing shortages in critical fields." Blumenthal disagrees with McMahon's assertion that loans are given to borrowers at the expense of taxpayers and believes that every tax dollar spent on loans is an investment in the country's future.

Whether it is national defense, particularly defense contractors he sees frequently because he

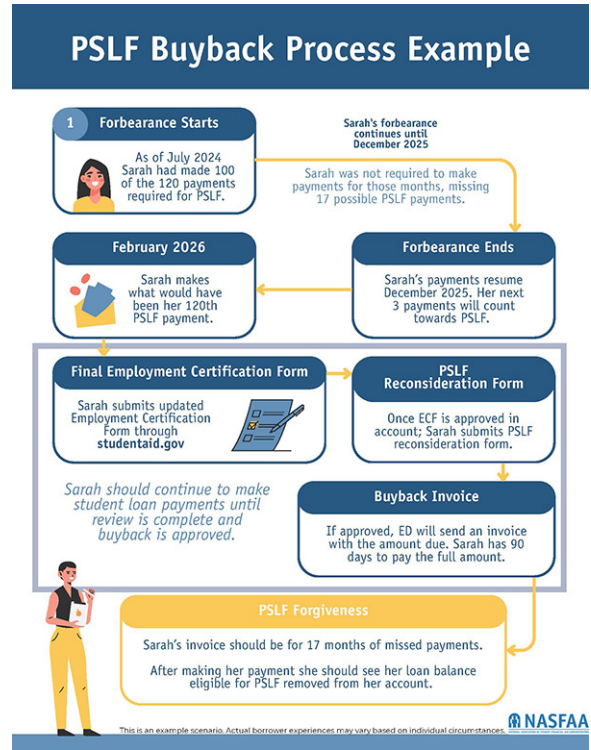
serves on the Armed Services Committee and visits Electric Boat, Pratt & Whitney and Sikorsky, or workers in the health care profession, Blumenthal said the investment benefits the public.

"The taxpayer is making an investment in the workforce that benefits them," Blumenthal said. "In any line of work there is a benefit to the public of having skilled and talented people with the right education serving in these important roles and creating public good. They drive economic growth, and an investment in education is not money thrown out the window."

In terms of planning financially amid the uncertainty, Blumenthal urged students to consult their counselors because they can provide advice tailored to each individual's needs based on what they are studying and their economic circumstances. Blumenthal also urged students to stay informed and explore ways to reduce borrowing.

"Students should stay informed about changes to federal repayment and forgiveness programs and speak with their school's financial aid office regularly," Blumenthal said.

At Central Connecticut State University, 49% of undergraduate students borrow federal student loans, according



The International Studies Program expects the Global Festival to be a longstanding tradition at CCSU, Lorenzo Gagliotta

to a 2024-25 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System survey conducted by the Financial Aid Office. Recent changes to forgiveness programs have led to apprehension on campus, according to office officials. "Borrowers are hesitating to switch plans until there is greater clarity," said Student Financial Services Director Keri Lupachino. "Some graduates are delaying major financial commitments, home purchases, relocation decisions."

According to Lupachino, the main concerns students have voiced are whether the payment plan they are currently using will continue to count toward PSLF and whether rules could change after borrowers have already made career or repayment decisions based on existing programs. She said the recent changes have led to an increase in one-on-one counseling appointments. The Financial Aid Office directs students to speak with their loan servicer or check Federal Student Aid for the most up-to-date information.

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or fill out the contact form on our website: centralrecorder.org

Lupachino said students are likely fearful at the moment due to a lack of guidance from the federal government regarding student loan forgiveness programs. “Federal loan programs have undergone multiple changes in a short period,” Lupachino said. The Financial Aid Office communicates federal changes to loan programs to students through targeted emails and updates on its website. Lupachino also offered advice on how students can best plan financially for forgiveness programs amid ongoing changes at the federal level.

“Certify qualifying employment annually for PSLF and keep detailed records of employment and payment history,” Lupachino said. “Enroll in a qualifying income-driven repayment plan as confirmed by federal guidance. Monitor communications directly from their loan servicer and Federal Student Aid.”

Blumenthal said he understands the level of apprehension students and families are experiencing amid the uncertainty. “I want Connecticut students and families to know that you are not alone in this uncertainty and frustration,” Blumenthal said. “Your education and financial security are a priority, and I will continue working to make sure federal programs support Connecticut families.”



Richard Blumenthal has been a Connecticut Senator for the past 15 years, Richard Blumenthal's official website

OPINION

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

DEAR READERS,

This semester, I've spent a significant amount of time working closely on the polytechnic and Research 2 transition, and in this letter I'm offering my perspective as a CCSU undergraduate student.

It's not the end of the world. It's not the end of the legacy and culture that Central has built over its history.

Some of the major objections to the proposal that we've witnessed have to do with the immediacy of the announcement and the initial lack of collaboration in making the decision to transition the school in a very calculated and specific direction.

While it may seem like a surprise to some, there were clear indications that the university, as a business, needed to make a significant change to ensure a bright future for students at Central.

But how true is this? There has been a decrease of 41,125 students enrolled in high school in Connecticut over the last decade, according to the Connecticut State Department of Education. This has a direct correlation to the number of students applying for higher education, putting significant strain on university budgets. State funding for the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities system has also been dwindling due to a heavy dependency on COVID-19 relief funds over the last

few years. A lack of budget readjustment has left some universities in the CSCU system looking for additional revenue sources.

These constraining factors on the budget and the business side of the university have left not just President Zulma Toro in a precarious situation, but CCSU as a whole in a position where it needs to justify itself on a larger stage than just New Britain.

The transition isn't meant to ostracize who or what it currently means to be a Central Connecticut State University student, but rather to bolster the degree you are earning — both in stature and in pride.

Are there aspects that could potentially negatively affect what it means to attend CCSU? Of course. As with any change, there will be aspects that may inadvertently have consequences. However, with a change this large, the university will likely do what it can to mitigate those consequences, which is why a task force has been created to oversee the proposal process on a larger scale.

My concerns center on what this change could mean for the demographics of the university. One aspect that I am proud to share when I talk about CCSU is the fact that it is so diverse. Seeing different hues and shades, unique styles and regalia, and a wide range of backgrounds and cultures on a daily basis is a pivotal part of the CCSU experience.

After researching different polytechnic institutions across the country, their constituencies often have a similar look and feel that differs from what CCSU currently represents. It doesn't concern me that some students may be attracted to a new polytechnic identity and Research 2 distinction. What concerns me is how that shift could shape the next 50 years of graduates.

However, optimism for the future is necessary for preserving the past, and when we have the opportunity to voice our opinions, we should take advantage of the avenues that allow us to be part of that change.

The task force is currently distributing surveys to students and faculty. I encourage everyone to complete them and provide thoughtful, constructive feedback that can be considered as the proposal continues to develop.

If you have anything you would like The Recorder to cover as it pertains to the polytechnic proposal, don't hesitate to reach out and share your perspective. We're interested in how students are feeling. Do you know what the shift entails? When was the first time you heard about it? Is our coverage doing enough?

One mission that won't change with this transition is The Recorder's commitment to delivering news to our community.

Wonderful Wishes,

by **Elijah Hernandez**
Co-Editor-in-Chief

THIS WEEK'S CAMPUS EVENTS

Political Science Club + Student Government Association [SGA]

I.C.E. Know Your Rights
Thursday, April 16, at 1:30 PM
Lobby Table 1 | CCSU Student Center

Muslim Student Association

Beyond the Veil: Deconstructing Islamophobia
Thursday, April 16, at 3 PM
CCSU Student Center | Alumni Hall

AcaBellas

AcaBellas' Spring Concert at Torp Theatre
Thursday, April 16, at 4 PM
Davidson Hall | Torp Theatre

Car Club

2026 Spring Charity Car Show
Sunday, April 19, at 10 AM
CCSU Student Center Parking Lot



The Applied Innovation Hub has a wide variety of state-of-the-art equipment, from robotics technology to rooms full of 3-D printers, Elijah Hernandez/The Recorder



CLEVER COMPOSING BY

by Ron Marq
Design and Layout Editor

Charlie Puth has stayed coolly under the pop radar with the mom-and-pop appeal of a Disney kid turned mainstream artist. His fourth album, *Whatever's Clever!* pivots to a more reflective and self-aware sound based on recent experiences. While he calls it 'dad pop', it's more commonly known as Adult Contemporary, which is usually an amalgam of popular songs from the 1970s to the early aughts [2000s] that range from yacht rock to easy listening, to smooth jazz.

Think of the tracks that would play as you rode in the backseat of your parent's car while it rained and swore you were in your own music video. The album was produced by Puth and Mike Tucker also known as BloodPop®, responsible for making pop anthems for Lady GaGa, Beyoncé, HAIM, Madonna, Britney Spears, RAYE, Charli XCX, and more.

Charlie's first single and album track, 'Changes', accepts the terms of change, whether in relationships, life events, or otherwise. Speaking of, he's a dad-to-be, which he highlighted in its fantastically nostalgic music video. The song has remnants of Peter Gabriel's choral sections and Bruce Hornsby and The Range's 'That's The Way It Is', from the bright piano solo, spacious drums, and even in its lyrics.

The following track 'Beat Yourself Up' is an even brighter funky horn-filled pop ballad on giving yourself grace for surviving your past mistakes rather than ruminating on them. Next up is 'Cry' featuring alto saxophone phenom, Kenny Gorelick, also known as Kenny G, who I affectionately refer to 'Jazz Jesus'. A reassuring mid-tempo ballad encouraging all to let their tears flow instead of constantly masking emotions.

'Washed Up' is another feel-good harmonious track with notes of Sade's 'Smooth Operator' and Earth, Wind, and Fire's 'That's The Way of the World' reassuring the listener for their help even when they refuse to ask and end up in a worse predicament. 'New Jersey' is a R&B flavored track



Whatever's Clever! (Standard Edition) [above] (Expanded Edition) [right], charlieputh.com

with touches of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis in the production. Featuring Rayvn Lenae of 'Love Me Not' fame, they totally trash the state's reputation due to having heartbreak while in it.

'Don't Meet Your Heroes' is a slow-burning jazzy piano/orchestral ballad about the letdown from putting a love interest on a pedestal. A mid-2000s love song 'Home' features Japanese American popstar Hikaru Utada [宇多田ヒカル], crooning how their living space is incomplete without them, also with some cinematic orchestration reminiscent of an anime's end credits scene.

'Hey Brother' is a James Taylor-tinged track harping on the nostalgia of sibling rivalry and reinforcing a familial bond with his brother with a vocal/guitar solo. 'Sideways' is a groovy R&B/soft rock ballad about weathering the treacherous extremities of relationships at their worst intertwined with soulful vocals and another orchestral/vocal outro.

'Love In Exile' has Puth joining forces with yacht rock and blue-eyed soul gods Michael McDonald and Kenny Loggins about the end stages of a relationship when love is no longer reciprocated. 'Until It Happens To You' starts with a spoken intro by the actor/singer Jeff Goldblum followed by harmonic vocals and the Mildred Snitzer Orchestra that turn into a snappy Motown style track with hints of 'Can't Hurry Love' by The Supremes, or 'Maneater' by Hall and Oates, that has the feel of a 1980s children's cartoon intro.

On 'I Used To Be Cringe', over nothing more but a guitar and his layered vocals, Charlie humbly confesses to using



popular slang, wearing strange outfits, and getting wild haircuts simply to fit in and advance towards the pipe dreams of Hollywood he wanted in his youth. He asks for forgiveness from all he might have hurt or abandoned in his search for it all. The standard issue album ends there but on the Expanded Edition, the bonus track 'Reply to This' sounds very much like Charlie's earlier work, reassuring a girl that she doesn't have to respond to his messages of advances, but just wants to make sure that she read them.

The Japanese Edition, however, holds the absolute hidden gem bonus track 'Holding On for Dear Life' speaking of drunkenly falling for a girl at a party he knows he can't have, giving in to every urge to pursue her. But if had her, he'd hold her and never let go.

'Whatever's Clever!' breaks Charlie out of his comfort zone and embraces different musical eras and collaborators. It takes a lot to be self-aware of your façade, embrace your authentic self, and endure the growing pains of transitioning into the role of a father figure. It's a definite feel-good album with a solid tribute to the soundscape of yesteryear. Cleverly done, Charlie!

7/10

If you want to hear him live, he'll be performing at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, CT on May 23rd with special guests Daniel Seavey, and Ally Selort as part of his world tour.



Sexistential album cover, robyn.com

by Ron Marq
Design and Layout Editor

Having had skin in the game for decades and gaining notoriety with hit singles like “Dancing on My Own” and “Call Your Girlfriend,” Swedish pop star Robyn Carlsson isn’t new to the game, but true to it. Her brand of electronica-infused pop blurs the lines between avant-garde abstraction and dance-floor firestarters.

Sexistential is her return to music after her album Honey in 2018. A lot has happened to Robyn since then, including isolating during the pandemic and having a son through IVF from an unknown father, which paused her music-making for a time. After seeing the world and taking her time, she returned to trusted producer Klas Åhlund and set out to rediscover herself through harmonic vocals, spoken word and shameless sexual expression.

“I really felt like I was crashing into myself again. I wanted the album to feel like it was hitting with a hard impact,” Carlsson said.

“Really Real” ponders whether her feelings during sex are valid, with fragmented and fluctuating trains of thought over harsh percussion and squelchy synths. “Dopamine” speaks to the chemical rush of satisfaction from love, sex or any pleasure, and the lack of fear surrounding it, with bright, bubbly chords.

“Blow My Mind” is a clean and polished reworking of her song of the same name from her 2002 album Don’t Stop the Music, with an incidental breathy phaser effect. “Sucker for Love” feels like a spiritual sequel to “Dancing on My Own,” but instead of retreating sadly into the corner, Robyn ambushes her love interest and insists that love is always worth it, regardless of the consequences.

“It Don’t Mean a Thing” is heavy with letdown and the sadness of wasted potential with a romantic partner. “Talk to Me” is a cheeky, euphemism-filled

track about phone sex, taking the listener on a steamy journey of self-exploration.

The title track, “Sexistential,” has Robyn nonchalantly rapping about her sexual needs, motherhood and the problems surrounding it, all while grappling with existential dread. The words “it’s” and “existential” combine to form “sexistential.”

“Light Up” is an upbeat anthem in which Robyn finds redemption through a lover who sees her despite her mistakes and emotions. “Into the Sun” then subverts that trope, portraying a lover as an untimely end, like burning up while approaching the sun’s atmosphere.

The album is a piece of pure Europop in true Robyn fashion. While only nine songs long, Sexistential covers a lot of ground, giving a strong voice to the extremes of women’s libido and emotions while shedding the normalized shame surrounding them.

If men can croon about it, why can’t women? Amid a turbulent world, it’s a refreshing turn of taboo into truth.

7/10

SENATE continued from front

“Participating in SGA elections, hall council elections in individual residence halls, or just getting involved in clubs is important,” Finlay said. “Our senators here at SGA are going to go on and do great things in their professional lives. You want the best people representing you.”

Finlay also spoke about the importance of the Senate within SGA.

“As much as I’m president, that means I preside over the Senate,” he said. “I want to elevate the voices of our senators. The SGA wouldn’t really be anything without the Senate.”

He said his role during meetings is largely procedural.

“My main job, especially in our weekly Senate meetings, is presiding over the meeting,” Finlay said. “I guide discussion at a procedural level, taking motions, calling motions and calling for votes. I don’t usually participate in the discussions themselves.”

Finlay said senators carry much of the responsibility for addressing campus concerns.

“They’re the ones asking questions for clubs about funding,” Finlay said. “They’re the ones bringing forward issues they see, whether it’s something broken in the residence halls or a concern about the dining hall. They’re the ones doing a lot of the work of bringing those issues forward.”

He added that senators also play a role in planning campus programming.

“Another big thing we focused on this year was creating as many events as possible for students to participate in,” Finlay said.

In terms of who can run for SGA, Finlay said any undergraduate student with an interest in serving the campus community is encouraged to participate.

“We want a diverse pool of candidates,” he said. “That’s really important.”

Finlay also had a message for students who may be hesitant about getting involved.

“Make sure people vote,” Finlay said. “And in the fall, if we have any open seats left over or positions for first-year senators, definitely declare if you’re interested and want to make a difference.”

“You can do so much if you show up at 100%,” he said. “If you try to be better every week and push yourself outside your comfort zone every day.”



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The Recorder's 2026 NBA Playoff Predictions

by Colby Brennan,
Elijah Hernandez,
Dylan Romagnoli,
Marcus Saunders

Eastern Conference First Round:

(1) Detroit Pistons vs. (8) Charlotte Hornets: Pistons in 6

The Pistons are the favorites to win this series. They play a brand of basketball similar to the Oklahoma City Thunder of last year, that is, a great gritty defense with amazing depth to complement any future issues. They posted the second-best defensive rating in the league at 108.9. The Hornets, on the other hand, will be playing freely, without any expectations. They shoot a lot of 3-pointers, making 16.3 per game, the most in the league. LaMelo or Knueppel could make two or three games interesting by getting hot beyond the arc. The Pistons' physical style of play will be the key to winning this series, as Charlotte ranks in the bottom five in paint points per game, and the Pistons are the No. 1-ranked team in paint points.

(2) Boston Celtics vs. (7) Philadelphia 76ers: Celtics in 4

In a matchup that has an intense history, the Boston Celtics will face the weakened Philadelphia 76ers in the first round. The Celtics shattered expectations, with some analysts predicting before the season that they wouldn't even make the playoffs.

But Jaylen Brown has stepped up so much that, at one point, he was in the MVP conversation for his efforts this season. That, compounded with Jayson Tatum coming back less than a year from his Achilles injury and playing like he hasn't skipped a beat, makes the Celtics look like one of the most formidable teams in the league.

The 76ers have dealt with crucial injuries all season from all of their star players — Tyrese Maxey, Paul George and, most recently, Joel Embiid. A battle-wounded 76ers team is in no shape to beat the second-rated offense in the league, according to Basketball-Reference.com. With the Celtics' depth, combined with the mind of Joe Mazzulla, I have the Celtics sweeping in the first round.

(3) New York Knicks vs. (6) Atlanta Hawks: Hawks in 7

In the first round, the No. 3-seeded New York Knicks will face off against the No. 6-seeded Atlanta Hawks. In a veterans-versus-the-next-generation bout, my prediction is that the Hawks will take the series in seven games. The young core of Dyson Daniels, Onyeka Okongwu and Jalen Johnson has been on an explosive tear at the end of the regular season, going 19-6 in its last 25 games.

With the pivotal addition of Jonathan Kuminga at the trade deadline, pace is going to be the major deciding factor of the series. The Hawks have the fifth-highest pace in the league, while the Knicks rank 27th out of 30, according to Basketball-Reference.com. With the surge in production from Nickeil Alexander-Walker and the game-changing impact that Jalen Johnson has in any game he plays, the Knicks are going to have a hard time slowing the pace to fit their comfort zone.

However, this isn't to say the Knicks are just going to roll over and die. In the NBA, they rank third in offensive rating and seventh in defensive rating this season. They are a really well-rounded team, and with the playoff experience of names like Jalen Brunson, Karl-Anthony Towns and OG Anunoby, I believe they'll take it to a Game 7, where we'll see gritty, intense basketball.

(4) Cleveland Cavaliers vs. (5) Toronto Raptors: Raptors in 7

Raptors in seven. They have a top-five defender in the game with Scottie Barnes, who can guard any position 1 through 5 and will be able to cover any player on the Cavs. This should be a series where each team has one X-factor player who can swing the series. For the Cavs, James Harden still needs to prove he can perform in the playoffs when it matters most, especially with their lack of depth for their bigs. The pressure will be on him to play his best. For the Raptors, Brandon Ingram is the X-factor that the league has forgotten about, a consistent scorer who can provide some leadership for a young team while quietly becoming a sound defender for the sixth-best defense in the league. Defense feels more trustworthy than offense in this series, Raptors in seven games.



After the action-packed Play-in series determined the bracket, the first round will begin on April 18, official NBA website, [nba.com](https://www.nba.com)

Western Conference First Round:

(1) Oklahoma City Thunder vs. (8) Play-In Winner: Thunder in 4

Oklahoma City begins its path to defending its title and should continue its dominance against whichever play-in team it plays. The Thunder returned everyone from its championship roster and had Shai Gilgeous-Alexander turn in another MVP-caliber performance this season, setting the stage for what should be another dominant postseason run. To make another deep run, Jalen Williams will have to return to the superstar-caliber form he reached last season after an injury-riddled regular season.

(2) San Antonio Spurs vs. (7) Portland Trail Blazers: Spurs in 5

The Spurs are simply just more talented than the Trail Blazers, and I can easily see this being a sweep, but I think that the Spurs' lack of experience could cause them to slip up for one game, with this series ultimately being a gentleman's sweep. It will be the first playoff series for six of the 9 players in the Spurs' rotation. The Spurs have been dominant when Victor Wembanyama is on the floor, posting a 50-14 record when he plays, and I don't see the dominance ending here. Deni Avdija will be an interesting watch in this series. With everyone's eyes on their Play-In Tournament game against the Phoenix Suns, he put the whole world on notice dropping 41 points, 11 rebounds and 4 assists. People questioned if his constant rim pressure and free throw attempts would be able to translate to the postseason, but if the play-in was any indicator, he should still have success. Unfortunately for Avdija and Portland, they have to go against

the best paint defender in the world in Wembanyama.

(3) Denver Nuggets vs. (6) Minnesota Timberwolves: Nuggets in 6

The Timberwolves continue to be the toughest team to predict over the last three seasons, making the conference finals in back-to-back seasons. This is the year that the streak ends. The Nuggets head into the playoffs on a 12-game winning streak, and they're the healthiest they've been all season, as the only person on the injury report is Peyton Watson, who enjoyed a breakout season before his hamstring injuries. Denver is going to do whatever it takes to make sure the ball isn't in Anthony Edwards' hands and will be fine with letting others beat them. The Timberwolves may try to do the same thing with Nikola Jokic, but we've seen how that story goes, and I trust Jamal Murray and Aaron Gordon more than anyone on Minnesota besides Edwards because they've shown that they can step up in the biggest moments. The Timberwolves are not going to make it easy at all, and out of respect for what they did in the last two seasons, I believe they will win at least two games.

(4) Los Angeles Lakers vs. (5) Houston Rockets: Rockets in 6

The Los Angeles Lakers will be at a big disadvantage without their star players Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves, leaving LeBron James to lead a depleted Lakers roster against a very talented Houston Rockets team. Houston has been one of the top defensive teams all season, with Amen Thompson at the head of the snake, and Los Angeles will be hard-pressed to create easy offense without Doncic and Reaves. If Doncic can find his way back onto the

court late in the series, L.A. can push the series to seven games, but otherwise, Houston should make easy work of L.A. in six.

Eastern Conference Second Round:

(1) Detroit Pistons vs. (5) Toronto Raptors: Pistons in 6

This should be a gritty series with two teams that boast great defenses. The Pistons are a team that thrives off of turnovers, but the Raptors have two lengthy defenders in Barnes and Ingram that could cause major issues for cross-court passes. The biggest factor for the Pistons to win against the Raptors is the play of Cade Cunningham. He has been excellent against them all season, putting up 31 points and nine assists over these games. Toronto's lack of rebounding, ranking 24th in the league, will be their downfall, as Jalen Duren should be able to dominate on the glass.

(2) Celtics vs. (6) Hawks: Celtics in 6

In one of the most exciting matchups of the playoffs, there will be fireworks in the second round with the Boston Celtics facing off against the Atlanta Hawks. Similar to the previous matchup for the Hawks, their fast-paced play will be an intriguing factor due to the Celtics being rated the "slowest" team in the league.

A battle of playstyles, this bout will come down to how much of an impact the supporting cast can make in clutch moments. Viewers have seen the Celtics' bench dismantle a potential playoff team in the Orlando Magic in a game the Magic had to win. I think the overwhelming options of the Celtics will prove to be too much for the young Hawks, but I think this

series will still make great TV. During the season, they split their encounters, and I think this series will be similar, going 4-2, with the Celtics winning and advancing to the Eastern Conference finals.

Western Conference Second Round:

(1) Oklahoma City Thunder vs. (5) Houston Rockets: Thunder in 6

Oklahoma City won the regular-season series against Houston two games to one, and this has the chance to be a very close-knit series. OKC's top-ranked defense will pose a great problem for Houston's isolation-oriented offense, which ranked 21st in assists per game this season. With an all-time talent like Kevin Durant leading the Rockets, Luguentz Dort and OKC's other perimeter defenders will have a lot on their plates to nullify the shot-making ability of Durant and the Rockets. The Thunder bench will serve them well as the postseason goes on. One thing they have benefited from all season has been their ability to plug and play their guys as they see fit.

(2) San Antonio Spurs vs. (3) Denver Nuggets: Spurs in 7

This series is a coin flip and has a really good chance to be the best series of the entire playoffs. I originally planned to go with the Nuggets, but the Spurs check almost every box. They are top five in both offensive and defensive ratings, have the third-best win percentage in the clutch (66.7%) and have a 7-foot-5 alien that can challenge Nikola Jokic as the best player in the series in Victor Wembanyama. The only thing they lack is playoff experience, but will Wembanyama show that if you are a one-of-one type of player, you don't need experience?

While their offense is still really good with Jokic and Jamal Murray on the court together (130.6 offensive rating), what worries me about Denver is that they are bottom 10 in the league in defensive rating and always rely on timely stops in close games. How long can you live and die by that? It has to eventually come back to bite you, right?

It may be tested a little in the first round, but especially in the second round, the shot-making from deep is going to be key for San Antonio, especially for Stephon Castle and Dylan Harper, whose jump shooting will be put under a microscope for the first time in their careers. If they aren't making shots and losing confidence, that could swing the series. Wembanyama's defense will most likely keep them in every game, but what will happen in the clutch? Luckily for the Spurs, they don't have to solely rely on their young guards. They have 2022-23 Clutch Player of the Year and two-time All-Star De'Aaron Fox, who will relieve a lot of pressure and be counted on to produce more than he did in the regular season, where he averaged 18.6 points per game. This series will show who can rise to the occasion and who will have to take a hard look at their game at the end of it.

Eastern Conference Finals:

(1) Detroit Pistons vs. (2) Boston Celtics: Celtics in 6

The Boston Celtics boast one of the most well-rounded teams when looking at statistics such as offensive and defensive efficiency. They have the second-highest offensive efficiency in the league, which makes sense when considering that they are one of the most methodical teams in the NBA. They rank in the top five in both rebounding and 3-point shots made, averaging 46.3 rebounds per game and recording 1,268 3-pointers made, according to NBA statistics.

The Celtics also maintained the fourth-most efficient defense in the league, trailing only Oklahoma City, the San Antonio Spurs and the Detroit Pistons, according to Databallr.com. These efficiency numbers are higher than last season's and on par with the numbers they produced the year they won the championship. The Celtics' strength lies in their ability to convert rebounds into points and their outstanding ability to lock in on both ends of the floor. Having the lowest turnover rate in the league shows they command the floor by rarely making mistakes.

Where the Celtics falter is in their isolation-heavy nature. Because the team has so many players who can create their own shots, if they are forced into bad shots or repeatedly reset due to a strong defense like Detroit's, they can find themselves in a low field-goal range and needing someone to play the hero. The Celtics are tied for the second-lowest assists per game at 24.6, according to NBA statistics.

This, in conjunction with the fact that they rank 28th out of 30 teams in steals per game at 7.1, shows they rarely deviate from the game plan coach Joe Mazzulla draws up. This lack of taking chances, or gambling defensively, reinforces the isolation-heavy style. If they have to go bucket-for-bucket with a team that can't miss, they could find themselves in deep waters.

In the Eastern Conference finals matchup between the Celtics and the Pistons, I have the Celtics winning in six games based on their capabilities on both sides of the court. With Cade Cunningham returning from a collapsed lung and carrying much of the offensive load, the Celtics are a well-oiled machine that can dismantle any team in the league when their X-factors are firing on all cylinders. The Celtics' depth, their ability to stick to their style of play and their playoff experience are all likely to shine in this year's Eastern Conference finals.

Western Conference Finals:

(1) Oklahoma City Thunder vs. (2) San Antonio Spurs: Thunder in 7

OKC did exactly what was expected of them all season, dominating in all facets of the game. Getting to the Western Conference finals is no different. Their top-ranked defense will be firing on all cylinders, with Chet Holmgren and Isaiah Hartenstein rebounding and protecting the paint, while Luguentz Dort and Alex Caruso lock down the perimeter.

On offense, they will continue to lean on Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, who has continued to do everything asked of him, from making timely clutch buckets to creating open looks

for his teammates. In order to elevate the Thunder to the level they were at last season, they will need Jalen Williams to return to form. His points per game dropped from 21.6 to 17.1 and he has seen less shooting volume compared to his previous season. While this can be attributed to his injury history this season, the Thunder will need their second option healthy to take some attention away from Gilgeous-Alexander and ready to meet the big moments a long playoff run can bring. Oklahoma City will need to flip the script against a San Antonio team that plagued them in the regular season, as it was the only team to beat them multiple times.

If the Spurs make it here, that means they are clicking on all cylinders and have proved that you don't need playoff experience if you have the right pieces. Victor Wembanyama was holding down the paint and dominating on offense, De'Aaron Fox elevated his game in the biggest moments, Stephon Castle was able to score at all three levels while playing elite point-of-attack defense and they got good production from Dylan Harper off the bench with a splash of big games and moments. What San Antonio has over Oklahoma City is that they are only one of two teams that has defeated them multiple times this season, and they beat them four times. Regular-season matchups aren't always a great indicator of who will win a playoff series, but if you beat a team four times in a season, that shows that you have what it takes to compete with them. Stephon Castle is going to have a lot on his plate trying to defend Shai Gilgeous-Alexander, but it's going to have to be a team effort if they want to advance to the Finals.

Ultimately the Thunder get the job done and return to the NBA Finals for the second straight season.

NBA Finals:

(1) Oklahoma City Thunder vs. (2) Boston Celtics: Thunder in 7

To push a series to seven games, the Celtics will have to win an away game against one of the best home-court advantages in the league in Oklahoma City. For Boston to take a game or two in a hostile environment, Brown and Tatum will have to continue the great performances we've seen from them these past postseasons, but to push this Thunder squad, they'll have to get major contributions from role players like Payton Pritchard and Derrick White. Boston, being at the top of the league in three-point percentage, will need their shooters to stay consistent and make the shots they've been known to make throughout the regular season. Oklahoma City's frontcourt duo of Holmgren and Hartenstein will pose problems for Boston as the series progresses, and Boston will need Tatum to continue putting up big rebounding numbers to help their big men against a big and tough Thunder frontcourt.

Overall, the series will come down to whichever supporting cast puts together the best series. As you go down the depth charts of these two teams, Oklahoma City has the talent on their bench to outlast the Celtics role players. The Thunder bench outscored Boston's by five points this past regular season. The Thunder are a team that will kill you in waves. With Game 7 being in Oklahoma City, all it takes is two bad possessions from the opponent, and the momentum is all on their side. The key to winning the series for Oklahoma City will be their frontcourt, particularly offensively. It's well known how dominant Holmgren can be defensively, but he will need to stay consistent and limit his mistakes for OKC to repeat as champions.

The Thunder defeat the Celtics in epic game seven fashion and win back-to-back NBA Finals. They become the first team to repeat as NBA champions since the 2018 Golden State Warriors and are now in the conversation to be the NBA's next dynasty.



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From Startup to Sports Giant: ESPN Panel at Central to Highlight Media Innovation and Impact

by Marcus Saunders &
CCSU News

NEW BRITAIN, CONN. - What began as a bold and uncertain idea in 1979 has grown into one of the most influential forces in sports media. That story of innovation and entrepreneurship will take center stage at Central Connecticut State University, as students and community members are invited to explore how ESPN transformed the way the world consumes sports at the ESPN Innovation & Entrepreneurism Panel on Wednesday, April 29.

ESPN, which launched on Sept. 7, 1979, in Bristol, revolutionized sports. Thanks to an entrepreneurial spirit and out-of-the-box thinking by founder Bill Rasmussen, the network created a 24/7 media ecosystem, transforming how fans consume sports.

A panel of ESPN trailblazers will discuss how one bold idea ignited a global sports revolution, and how the network has continued to innovate by making sports more accessible, engaging and culturally pervasive.

The panelists are Mike Soltys, ESPN historian and 44-year ESPN veteran; Carol Stiff, former VP of Women's Sports Programming at ESPN; and Gary Striewski, ESPN SportsCenter anchor. Aimee Crawford, the Robert

C. Vance Endowed Chair in Journalism and Mass Communication spoke highly of the panelists and was grateful to get them to come to Central.

"All three are trailblazers, and we felt that they could bring unique perspectives to how the network has continued to innovate by making sports more accessible, engaging and culturally pervasive," she said.

This event is hosted by Crawford and the New Britain Institute, in conjunction with community partners Junior Achievement of Southwest New England, Inc. and the Consolidated School District of New Britain.

Crawford described what she hopes people will get out of the panel.

"I hope that people learn more of the story behind how ESPN revolutionized sports, and how it has continued to innovate by increasing coverage of women's sports, and by focusing on digital, streaming and social media," she said.

She added that they will show a sneak peek of a new documentary at the event.

"We will show a clip of the new ESPN documentary at the event. I hope that people will

be inspired by a story of success and innovation that happened right here in Connecticut, and that they will return to see a screening of the full documentary at our Central Sports Film Festival on May 7," she said.

The ESPN Innovation & Entrepreneurism Panel will begin at 5 p.m. in Lecture Hall 102 at the Applied Innovation Hub. The event is open to students, faculty, and members of the community. Parking will be available in the Student Center lot.

How One Bold Idea Ignited a Global Sports Revolution

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 29, 2026 ~ 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.
CENTRAL'S INNOVATION HUB LECTURE HALL

THE 2026 NEW BRITAIN INSTITUTE LECTURE
Innovation & Entrepreneurship

In collaboration with **CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY**
and the **Robert C. Vance Charitable Foundation**



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Mike Soltys
ESPN Historian &
44-year ESPN veteran



Carol Stiff
Former VP,
ESPN Women's
Sports Programming



Gary Striewski
ESPN SportsCenter Anchor

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Photo Credit, Amy Crawford

CCSU ATHLETIC SCHEDULE

Men's & Women's Track

April 17-18 @ UConn Northeast Challenge

Softball

April 18 vs. LIU at 1 PM
April 18 vs. LIU at 3 PM
April 19 vs. LIU at 12 PM
April 21 @ Rider at 1 PM
April 21 @ Rider at 3 PM



Baseball

April 17 vs. Delaware State at 3 PM
April 18 vs. Delaware State at 1 PM
April 19 vs. Delaware State at 1 PM
April 21 @ UMass at 3 PM
April 22 @ Quinnipiac at 3 PM

Women's Lacrosse

April 18 @ New Haven at 1 PM