A season preview of the New Jersey Devils 2026-27 campaign

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As a New Jersey Devils fan, I found the end of the regular 2025-26 season disappointing, with them not securing a spot in the playoffs and ending the season with a record of 42-37-3 and 87 points. The Devils placed seventh in the Metropolitan Division and 13th in the Eastern Conference, missing the postseason by 10 points. They suffered 37 regulation losses and picked up almost no points past regulation. If missing the playoffs showed anything, it's that having star players is not always enough to compete.



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANNA MIRABELLA

It is extremely frustrating, season after season, as a diehard fan, crossing my fingers that they will be playoff contenders. The last time the Devils made the playoffs was during the 2024-25 season. The best move for the Devils at this point is to make some big changes going forward for the 2026-27 team, and that's exactly what has happened.

New Jersey needed to improve in several areas: its defense was not consistent, and scoring depth and goaltending were all rocky areas that needed improvement. The Devils did make several important moves during the offseason as they look to improve their chances of returning to the playoffs.

While head coach Sheldon Keefe returns for his third season behind the bench for the Devils, General Manager Tom Fitzgerald was fired April 7 and replaced by General Manager Sunny Mehta, who has already made some crucial moves to change things up.

On Sept. 1, the Devils traded two 2028 NHL draft picks to the Nashville Predators for forward Luke Evangelista, who is going to play a big part in the Devils organization. Evangelista gives New Jersey another option on offense and could help create more scoring opportunities throughout the lineup. Alongside Devils forwards Jack Hughes and Jesper Bratt leading the team's offense, adding another forward could help take some of the pressure off of the team's top scorers.

Along with bringing in new players, the Devils made some difficult decisions with their existing roster. Moving young players like defenseman Simon Nemec, who was traded to the Calgary Flames, could affect the team's defensive depth and long-term plans.

The Devils also dumped goaltender Jacob Markstrom's contract over the summer. Dumping Markstrom's contract created more financial flexibility, as the Devils didn't retain any salary commitments. These moves are crucial because New Jersey needs to improve their roster, while also working on making decisions that will benefit the team in future seasons.

Apart from trades, the Devils were able to make some crucial signings, starting with forward Anthony Mantha, who was signed to a two-year contract. Forward Amadeus Lombardi was also acquired from the Detroit Red Wings in exchange for a 2026 fourth-round draft pick, and defenseman Declan Chisholm was acquired from the Washington Capitals to add to the team's defense. These additions could help the Devils become a more balanced team, but their impact will depend on how well they perform and fit into the lineup.

This new season is big for the Devils, hoping to clinch a playoff spot again. The thing is, the talent is there. The Devils do have high-scoring guys like Hughes, who scored 27 goals and 77 points last season, with Bratt following close behind with 22 goals and 71 points.

The Devils' three games played so far in 2026 offered a glimpse of what the team could look like this season. The Devils won their 2026-27 season home opener at Prudential Center in overtime 3-2 against the Philadelphia Flyers on Oct. 1. Two days later, they hit the road and traveled to Long Island to play the New York Islanders and got shut out 6-0, before battling the Utah Mammoth on Oct. 6, falling 5-3; that loss added another challenge, showing that the team still has areas to address.

Although it is too early to judge the team based on just three games, these results do highlight why consistency will be key if they are hoping for a playoff spot.

The Great Eight's chapter is coming to a close

Alexander Ovechkin announces his retirement at the conclusion of the 2026-27 season

By CLAIRE FRANKLAND
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On Monday, Oct. 5, the Washington Capitals announced news hockey fans have been holding their breath to hear for the past year; Capitals forward Alexander Ovechkin will retire from the NHL at the conclusion of this season.

For hockey fans, this news was not shocking; honestly, it's been known for quite some time now that Ovechkin would hang up the skates soon, as the third-oldest player in the league behind Colorado Avalanche forward Brent Burns and Los Angeles Kings forward Corey Perry.

Yet, at 41 years old, the undeniable part about Ovechkin's retirement is the lasting impact he will have not only on those who cheered him on for 22 seasons but also on hockey as a sport.

Ovechkin began his professional hockey career in 2001 in his home country, Russia, competing for HC Dynamo Moscow at the age of 16. Over 171 games in four seasons, the Moscow native recorded 95 points on 54 goals and 41 assists.

During that time, Ovechkin would also represent Russia in various international competitions, including the World 18U Championships and the World Junior Championships.

Yet, Ovechkin's time to shine would come in the 2004 NHL Entry Draft when he was selected first overall by the Washington Capitals. Drafted alongside Ovechkin would be various other NHL icons, including Pittsburgh Penguins forward Evgeni Malkin, former Winnipeg Jets forward Blake Wheeler and former Nashville Predators goaltender Pekka Rinne.

"If I play in Washington, I'll give this team my heart. I just want to play in the NHL," Ovechkin said after being drafted.

Nobody would know the impact Ovechkin would have on the NHL at that moment, but his debut in the Capitals home opener would set the tone for his record-breaking career ahead.

In a matchup against the Columbus Blue Jackets Oct. 5, 2005, 21 years before he would announce his retirement, Ovechkin would lead the way for the Capitals, scoring two goals to secure a 3-2 win over the Blue Jackets.

Not only would Ovechkin's two goals in his first career game set the tone for his career, but a hit 40 seconds into the first period on Blue Jackets defenseman Radoslav Suchy, a hit with so much force that it dislodged a panel of protective glass surrounding the rink.

Throughout his career, Ovechkin would become known for throwing nasty but clean hits on opponents, cementing his reputation as a strong force for the Capitals. As of publication, Ovechkin sits third all-time for most hits in the NHL at 3,882, falling behind former New York Islander forwards Matt Martin (3,936) and Cal Clutterbuck (4,029).

If you search the internet for compilations of Ovechkin's greatest hits, the internet will not fail you in that regard; that's for sure.

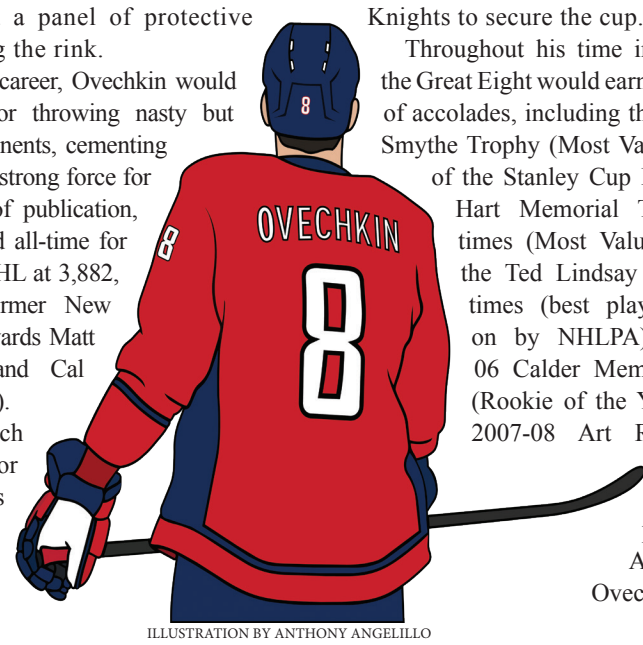

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTHONY ANGELILLO

Despite the NHL lockdown from 2012-2013, when he competed back in Russia with HC Dynamo Moscow, Ovechkin would play for one team and one team only, that being the Capitals. It's very few athletes in the NHL who only compete for one team throughout their whole career, yet Ovechkin has cemented himself in Capitals culture unlike anyone before.

"He brought us hockey in this area. He built this up until this," Ian Hibbeler, a Capitals season ticket holder, said Oct. 7 after the news broke. "I mean, up until he was here, there was nothing."

In 2018, Ovechkin would help the Capitals bring their first-ever Stanley Cup back to Washington D.C., as he recorded 27 points on 12 assists and 15 goals, including a goal in Game 5 against the Vegas Golden Knights to secure the cup.

Throughout his time in the league, the Great Eight would earn his fair share of accolades, including the 2018 Conn Smythe Trophy (Most Valuable Player of the Stanley Cup Playoffs), the Hart Memorial Trophy three times (Most Valuable Player), the Ted Lindsay Award three times (best player as voted on by NHLPA), the 2005-06 Calder Memorial Trophy (Rookie of the Year) and the 2007-08 Art Ross Trophy (league leader in points).

Additionally, Ovechkin was named to the 2005-06 NHL All-Rookie Team and was selected to the NHL All-Star Game 13 times.

Yet, on top of everything, one of Ovechkin's greatest accomplishments would come April 6, 2025, as he broke former NHL legend Wayne Gretzky's 894 NHL all-time career goals record; one that stood for 31 years.

With Gretzky in attendance for the historic moment, UBS Arena, home of the Islanders, roared in cheers and appreciation for the Great Eight's record-breaking performance, even if it was away from home ice. As of publication, Ovechkin sits with 929 career goals, with the closest active player being nowhere near his total, in Pittsburgh Penguins forward Sidney Crosby with 654 (15th in NHL history).

In addition to holding the all-time goal record, Ovechkin is the first NHL player to reach 900 goals and holds the record for most empty-net goals, most power-play goals and most shots on goal in league history.

Despite his departure from the league at the conclusion of the season, Ovechkin has mentioned in the past the possibility of him returning to Russia to once again play for HC Dynamo Moscow.

While the Great Eight's time is winding down, his impact on hockey in the Washington Metropolitan Area, across the nation and throughout the sport can not be disregarded.

It's only a matter of time before his banner is raised in the rafters of Capital One Arena and his induction into the Hockey Hall of Fame is announced.