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# Professional Women's Hockey Comes to Minnesota as Whitecaps join NWHL



By [Heather Rule](#) - May 15, 2018

The Minnesota sports scene will have another professional team to add to its list for the 2018-19 season with the addition of women's professional hockey in the Minnesota Whitecaps. It's the first

phase of expansion for the National Women's Hockey League (NWHL), which will now jump from four to five teams.

"This is a landmark moment," said Dani Rylan, NWHL founder and commissioner at a news conference Tuesday in St. Paul. "Make no mistake, when our league formed in 2015, if it was at all possible, we would have loved to have started with a team in Minnesota.

"But we always believed that this day would come."

It was only a matter of time, and gathering some resources before Minnesota could join the ranks. After all, hockey is everywhere in this state, even if it may seem like a "State of Hockey" cliché.

Rylan recalled sitting at Tom Reid's Hockey City Pub a couple winters ago. She looked around and saw the Minnesota state girls hockey tournament on every television in the restaurant.

"That only happens in Minnesota," Rylan said. "And you better believe, that was an inspiration to me."

She also cited the 28 women's hockey players graduating from the five Division I college hockey programs in Minnesota this year. That's almost enough for an entire skilled roster right there, she said.

The Whitecaps join the four other teams – all on the East Coast – as part of the NWHL, which started in 2015. The Minnesota team will initially be owned by the NWHL, just as each of the other teams started out. Minnesota joins the Boston Pride, Buffalo Beauts, Connecticut Whale and Metropolitan Riveters (in Newark, N.J.).

Winnie Brodt Brown, the first-ever Ms. Hockey winner and now team captain of the Whitecaps, said this expansion of a team in Minnesota is something they've talked about for years. It was just a matter of making it work. Being part of the NWHL and playing for something – the Isobel Cup – will be a dream come true, she said.



**Minnesota Whitecaps** 🏆

@WhitecapsHockey

Co-captains Brooke White and Winnie Brodt-Brown [#Whitecaps](#)  
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271 11:06 AM - May 15, 2018

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Not to mention the ripple effect it could have on youth and high school hockey in Minnesota. Brodt Brown sees having a professional women's team as just another way to continue to grow the game.

"The high school players want to play collegiate, and the collegiate players want to play professionally or on a national team," Brodt Brown said. "And players shouldn't have to end their career at 22 years old, for all the years and time and sweat they've put into it."

"I think it's going to just make girls hockey even that much better. Because now girls in college have something bigger to play for."

As Rylan said, it's a realistic dream now for girls to have the same dreams as their brothers: To play professional hockey.

The Whitecaps have been around since 2004. Whitecaps players Hannah Brandt, Kendall Coyne, Jocelyn Lamoureux-Davidson, Monique Lamoureux-Morando and Alex Rigsby all played on the gold-medal winning Team USA in the 2018 Olympics.

The coaching staff for the Whitecaps will be announced at a later time, and rosters will get filled out once free agency opens starting on June 1. The core management team will stay on board with the Whitecaps, Rylan said. All players across the league have one-year contracts, so free agency is a fresh slate for everybody in terms of rosters, according to Hayley Moore, NWHL deputy commissioner and director of player development.

Still, she expects the Whitecaps team will be appealing for many returning and new NWHL players.

"It's going to be a very competitive roster to crack," Moore said.

Many from current NWHL teams have already contacted the league asking to be on the "short list" for the coming season, Rylan said.

The home rink for the Whitecaps will be announced in the coming weeks, Rylan said. Though she added that they had a good experience at the NWHL All-Star weekend this past winter at TRIA Rink in St. Paul, so they're potentially looking to TRIA as a home rink.

### NWHL Live: 2018 All-Star Game 2.11.18



The league schedule also hasn't been finalized, but Rylan said with five teams instead of four, it makes things a bit easier. They're looking to continue the 16-game regular-season schedule with eight home games and eight away games for each team, she said.

It was said more than once during the news conference and interviews that if the NWHL could have had a team in Minnesota from day one, it would have wanted that. But creating a league takes time and resources, and with a handful of investors in the league plus the growing revenue streams over the past three seasons, the league was ready to expand, according to Rylan.



**NWHL**  
@NWHL

“Usually when we have a neutral site event, it’s to test the market, but let’s be serious. We don’t need to test it here. This is The State of Hockey”!

- Commissioner Rylan #NWHLtoMinnesota



171 12:59 PM - May 15, 2018

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“This is the state of hockey, and all the data shows that this is where a lot of the talent exists,” Rylan said. “It’s the right time to do it, and now here we are.”

Though there’s no formal relationship between the club and the Minnesota Wild, they’re looking forward to that potential down the road, according to Rylan, since the Wild is the ultimate hockey program in Minnesota. Two of the NWHL teams are now owned by NHL teams. Pegula Sports & Entertainment owns the Buffalo Sabres and acquired the NWHL Beauts. The New Jersey Devils formed a strategic alignment with the Riveters.

Those team relationships are a blueprint for the rest of the league, according to Rylan.

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