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## The Hockey Writers / Blue Jackets' Rick Nash Talks Learning From Waddell, Prospects & More

By Mark Scheig – January 30, 2026

Blue Jackets' legend Rick Nash is on the fast track in front office circles. He hopes to one day become a general manager in the National Hockey League. So far, he's well on his way.

Nash is currently in his second season as the Blue Jackets' Director of Hockey Operations. He's held that title since being promoted by GM Don Waddell in September 2024.

Before that, Nash spent time until then GM Jarmo Kekalainen learning about the ins and outs of the front office. In 2019, he was named special assistant to the GM. Then in 2021, he was promoted to the Director of Player Development.

Nash has excelled in every role he's had to this point in the front office. A large part of his role now is to scout especially in the college ranks both Blue Jackets' prospects and potential free agents to be. When he's not watching a game at Nationwide Arena, chances are he's on a scouting trip.

Nash talked with *the Hockey Writers* this week about a variety of topics. Our 10-minute conversation covered his thoughts on being able to learn under Waddell, some thoughts on various prospects in the organization and more.

As usual with our Q&A's, it was cleaned up for clarity and conversation.

### **Rick Nash Q&A**

**THW:** Now in your second season working with Don Waddell. What has it been like working for him? What impresses you the most about him?

**Nash:** "It's been awesome to see him work not only the business side and how he runs the day-to-day operations. To see him on the hockey side too is incredible. You look at his career coming up through Detroit and Atlanta and Carolina. He's just a wealth of knowledge. I find myself lucky to get the chance to learn and get to shadow him."

**THW:** What do you feel like has been the biggest lesson that you've learned so far from him?

**Nash:** "I think I'm pretty lucky to watch and learn the day-to-day operations. Everything from you're running a cap system of a team, but you're also running the budget of the organization. And that's been fun to watch and fun to learn from Don. And then his experience at whether it's talking to players, whether it's talking to agents, handling scouts. I think that's been the biggest eye-opener for me is just to see how he puts everything together under the president of hockey ops."

### **Identifying Talent**

**THW:** As a department, what helped you identify Mason Marchment as a trade target?

**Nash:** “First of all, you got to give credit to Don for pulling the trigger on that deal and going after a guy that he talked about that he watched for a couple years and wanted him on his team. And then our pro scouts have done a good job in seeing some projection there where a player can come in and help. For me personally, I played against him and know what kind of player he is on the ice and watched him more than enough that you know what he can bring when he’s at his best. I think he showed that over the first eight or nine games.”

**THW:** Your team was able to sign Egor Zamula as well. What factors did you see that made you feel like he would be a good fit?

**Nash:** “I think in talking to our group and Don and the coaching staff we felt like our defense just needed some depth, right? We knew injuries were going to happen as the season goes on and he’s another guy that our pro scouts picked as a player with some potential. Don saw an opening and had belief in him. So I think he’s going to be an interesting player to watch and see how he adapts to our system and our game.”

**THW:** We just saw Zach Aston-Reese and Brendan Gaunce placed on waivers. How involved are you in the process when tough roster decisions have to be made?

**Nash:** “I’m lucky Don keeps me in the loop on a lot of it. A lot of the times I’m on the road checking out prospects and doing some of my other pro scouting duties. Don really does keep me up to date and he does ask me my opinion on those things. But at the end of the day, it’s Don making these calls and as the team gets healthy, that’s just the the reality of it is that you’re gonna make hard decisions for good NHL players.”

### **Nash on Prospects**

**THW:** Let’s get into some prospects. What have you seen from Cayden Lindstrom this season? How satisfied have you been with his progress despite what the numbers might say?

**Nash:** “I think if you just look at the numbers it’s not the full picture, right? You can look at the stats and see his goals, assists, and points and it’s really not the full picture of how far Cayden has come to being a consistent player on the ice. We knew what we were getting into. We had a guy that hasn’t played games in a year and a half and he’s finally getting back to playing hockey and being a consistent practice player as well where it’s not just getting suited up for games. As Cayden grows, watching him here at Ohio State and I’ve seen him a bunch of times live this year, the encouraging thing for me is that he’s getting better and better each weekend.”

**THW:** What has impressed you about Jackson Smith so far?

**Nash:** “His skating. No question for me. He almost floats on the ice and he’s got a great stride. He’s got great edges. He’s been very impressive in just the minutes that he eats too. He eats a lot of minutes. We’ve been very happy with Jackson’s development.”

**THW:** William Whitelaw is an interesting prospect. He’s played at different schools and has overcome a lot. How far has he come development wise to you?

**Nash:** “William’s come a long ways from Youngstown. I remember watching him there and then watching him at Wisconsin a ton and then going to Ann Arbor last year a ton. Seen him a handful of times this year live and he’s really taking his game to the next level. You can see his compete, his leadership. He’s buying into what they got going on at Western Michigan. He’s a kid that has all the skill. He’s got a great shot. He’s a prospect that you talk about just going through a development plan and taking time to adjust to the college game. He’s been great.”

**THW:** There is some talk that Sergei Ivanov might come to North America next season. How much have you been able to see him and Pyotr Andreyanov? What excites you about them?

**Nash:** “We’re not sure exactly what’s going to happen as we go through it. Brad Thiessen, our goalie coach in Cleveland, helps me a lot with our development and has been working with both of those guys. It’s exciting to see what happens over this next year or so. (Ivanov’s) a guy that has been impressive in the KHL and made the All-Star game which we were excited about.”

“As for (Andreyanov) watching video on him, he just seems to have that confidence and the athletic ability that we’re all excited about. With the goalies, I go a lot off what Brad tells us and he’s excited about both those guys.”

**THW:** Couple of prospects have overcome significant injuries. What have you seen from Corson Ceulemans and Luca Marrelli since they returned?

**Nash:** “Yeah, Corson was having a great start to the season last year. He got that devastating injury. It’s tough. You miss so many games and then you try to find your groove back. With Corson, I’ve followed him since his early days at Wisconsin. When we talk about those different development paths, it’s just a different development path with Corson. And he’s taken his time, but he’s really found his defensive game. At Wisconsin it was a lot of run and gun and finding him worrying so much about offense. Now he’s really set into that 200-foot defenseman.”

“And with Luca Marrelli, unfortunately, same type thing with development camp and training camp going through a bit of an injury. Now he’s finally back to playing and just in the short amount of viewings that I’ve had of him this year, he seems like he’s fitting right in for a guy that’s missed a lot of time. Watching him in Oshawa, I saw a really good offensive minded hockey sense D that still has that grit and that edge in the D zone. We’re excited about both of them.”

**THW:** Last one. Which prospect or prospects might not be getting the attention they deserve but are going out of their way to really impress you?

**Nash:** “ I would say we have a right shot defenseman at St. Cloud State, Tanner Henricks who is a big 6-foot-4 D who actually got hurt too, unfortunately, and then missed a lot of games. But he’s on his way back eventually, hopefully in the next little bit. He’s the kind of a player that has all the tools in the basket with a great shot. We’re very excited to see his college game make some growth.”

“I think Jack Williams as well. Who’s, who’s in Cleveland. Right shot center that we got from Northeastern last year. We were excited to get him. I know he had a lot of different opportunities and I

think he's showing to jump right into a pro game where he's a player that the coaches just love to throw over the bench because they trust him so much."

## [The Athletic / Ranking all 32 NHL teams' home rinks, from Montreal to MSG and more](#)

By James Mirtle – January 29, 2026

What makes a great NHL arena?

Is there a science to it? Or is there something intangible that makes a building special?

Throughout my career, I've been to nearly 1,000 hockey games across North America, and one of the things I always enjoy is seeing how the NHL buildings are different from one another. When the time came to decide what this year's big rankings project would be, I jumped at the chance to rank the rinks.

We couldn't have done it without your help.

A few weeks ago, we put out the call for *The Athletic's* subscribers to weigh in with our first-ever NHL arena survey. Several thousand of you responded with in-depth perspectives from all 32 markets, including thoughtful commentary on all that goes into your favorite (or, in some cases, least favorite) buildings. Nearly 30 percent of responses came from readers who are full or partial season-ticket holders in these rinks, meaning they know their ins and outs better than anyone.

We've now compiled your answers in four key categories — location, amenities, atmosphere and affordability — into a "Fan Score" and combined that with our own beat writers' ranking that factors in an outsider's perspective into what makes a particular arena great. The overall ranking is heavily weighted (80 percent to 20 percent) on the fan perspective.

Here's how we interpreted those four key categories:

**Location:** As simple as it sounds. Is the building in a convenient spot? Is it near great bars and restaurants? Can you take public transit and/or is parking abundant and easy to get in and out of? Are there intangible factors that place this rink in a great area of town?

**Amenities:** This includes everything from the seating and sight lines, food and drink options, the jumbotron and anything else that makes this building special beyond the team on the ice.

**Atmosphere:** How loud and engaged is the crowd? What about the in-game experience, promotions and music? Is there a fun vibe or is it a drag to watch your favorite team play here?

**Affordability:** "Expensive" obviously is a subjective concept, but we asked fans to consider everything from ticket prices to the cost of food and beverages, parking and merchandise at the rink.

In some cases, the answers were to be expected, especially at the top of the list. But I came away surprised with a lot of what we learned here, and I think ultimately it made for a fascinating project. Hopefully you agree.

Thanks again to everyone who contributed their time to this article, as it really added a lot of depth to the process.

## **1. Bell Centre, Montreal**

**Capacity:** 21,105

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 9.6 (1st)

**Amenities:** 8.7 (6th)

**Atmosphere:** 9.8 (1st)

**Affordability:** 5.0 (21st)

**Fan score:** 8.7 (1)

**Beat writer score:** 9.9 (1)

**Overall:** 9.0

Never in doubt.

Montreal is special city for any hockey fan, and Bell Centre captures that so well, especially during a big Canadiens playoff game. Despite being a massive building, it doesn't feel too spacious because of the engaged crowd. The diehard fans are what give it an unparalleled atmosphere (ranked No. 1).

Even our crusty ol' beat writers essentially gave the building a perfect score, with two-thirds of them picking it as the best arena in the league.

The only blemish here is the cost, but if you're a traveling fan, it's worth the one-time splurge to take it all in.

### **Fan perspective:**

- "The passion of the fans really makes this arena unique. No other fans will boo the team off the ice after a bad first period, and then serenade the team so loudly when they come back and play well later in the game. It's a roller coaster, and the fans live and die with the team."
- "Best atmosphere in hockey by a wide margin, and it's based on passion and knowledge rather than on gimmicks, which you see in U.S. venues."
- "The sight lines are great. But the concessions are tight and poorly laid out. The options are very limited. The fan experience is great because of the fans, not the arena."
- "I have been to some unbelievable sports atmospheres and now nine NHL arenas, and there is nothing like watching the Habs at the Bell Centre — especially in the playoffs — in all of sports. It should be a bucket-list item for any big-time sports fan."

## **2. T-Mobile Arena, Vegas**

**Capacity:** 17,500

**Opened:** 2016

**Location:** 8.8 (8th)

**Amenities:** 9.0 (2nd)

**Atmosphere:** 9.6 (2nd)

**Affordability:** 5.8 (14th)

**Fan score:** 8.6 (3rd)

**Beat writer score:** 8.6 (3rd)

**Overall:** 8.6

The Golden Knights have done so many things right as a franchise since entering the league in 2017-18. They crushed the expansion draft, made the finals in Year 1, won the Stanley Cup in 2023 and remain contenders today.

T-Mobile Arena is part of what's worked, as it's a beautiful facility plunked right in the midst of the Vegas Strip and the in-game entertainment is second to none.

Vegas' building ranked in the top eight in every category except affordability. Our beat writers love the spectacle, ranking T-Mobile behind only Bell Centre and Madison Square Garden.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Everything is a spectacle. From the moment you enter the Toshiba Plaza, there is something to stare at. Drum line, showgirls, Chance (the mascot) with free swag. ...Then you enter the arena and it gets even more bonkers. One game I went to had Blue Man Group perform during the first intermission, and Cirque du Soleil performing during the second. ... I get three shows for the price of one."
- "The atmosphere is high energy and unique, which surely rankles some traditionalists. But it is uniquely Vegas, and it needs to be, considering the endless competition for the entertainment dollar here. Pricing is getting a bit much, however. Hockey tickets may be the only thing in California that are priced cheaper than they are in Vegas."
- "Outstanding effort by the team to provide in-arena experiences. I was a season ticket member for the first seven seasons."

**3. Benchmark International Arena, Tampa Bay**

**Capacity:** 19,092

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 9.0 (6th)

**Amenities:** 9.0 (3rd)

**Atmosphere:** 9.1 (3rd)

**Affordability:** 6.9 (5th)

**Fan score:** 8.7 (2nd)

**Beat writer score:** 6.9 (12th)

**Overall:** 8.3

The Lightning have become a world-class franchise in every respect under owner Jeff Vinik, and what was previously known as the St. Pete Times Forum and Amalie Arena is the crown jewel of what they've created in downtown Tampa.

Every year, the area around the building has improved, with more and more hotels and restaurants, including longtime hockey-themed bar Hattricks. The building itself has one of the biggest jumbotrons in the league, tesla coils that produce a real buzz, outdoor gathering areas and live music.

It's a fun place to watch a game, whether you're a local diehard or a tourist in town to visit the beach.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Thunder Alley before the game is the best! It's a great place to interact with Bolts fans and fans of the visiting team. Never had a bad experience."
- "Great downtown location where staff get to know you if you attend regularly."
- "Tesla coils go zap zap."

**4. Bridgestone Arena, Nashville**

**Capacity:** 17,113

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 9.6 (2nd)

**Amenities:** 8.4 (8th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.2 (14th)

**Affordability:** 6.4 (8th)

**Fan score:** 8.3 (5th)

**Beat writer score:** 7.6 (7th)

**Overall:** 8.2

What was a bizarre idea back in 1998 — having a hockey team based on Nashville's bar-filled Broadway area — has become a destination spot for the NHL. Live bands playing on a stage in the stands help the unique atmosphere, and the building is small enough to feel loud and intimate at the same time.

Predators fans noted they've seen the atmosphere dip over the past few years, as ticket prices have risen and the team has struggled on the ice. But the great location still bumped up Nashville's ranking into the top five.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Fun atmosphere, great game-day presentation, the location on Lower Broadway can't be beat, etc. It's held up exceptionally well for a 1990s-era arena."
- "The mini-concerts during intermissions are a particularly fun aspect of Preds games. The experience feels very connected to the city; you know you're in Music City when you're at a game. I've only been to games during bad streaks for the team, so maybe the energy is better when the team is doing better, but I was disappointed with the crowd."
- "Bridgestone Arena used to be a place with diehard fans, but they've priced out the diehard fans and the atmosphere is now more touristy. It might get better as the team gets better in the next couple of seasons."

## 5. Little Caesars Arena, Detroit

**Capacity:** 19,515

**Opened:** 2017

**Location:** 8.7 (13th)

**Amenities:** 8.9 (4th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.0 (16th)

**Affordability:** 5.2 (20th)

**Fan score:** 8.0 (8th)

**Beat writer score:** 8.0 (5th)

**Overall:** 8.0

While some folks still miss the old-school charms of Joe Louis Arena, it's clear Red Wings fans are enamored with their world-class new facility.

The LCA was ranked fourth overall for amenities and solidly average for location and atmosphere, the latter of which has only improved as Detroit has rattled off a lot of wins of late. Our beat writers are clearly won over, as well, putting it into their top five.

While there were some complaints about the steep upper bowl and a lack of development around the arena, it's clear the Red Wings did a lot right with their new hockey home.

### Fan perspective:

- "Love the pizza palace; awesome atmosphere. Only real complaint is the lack of anything around the building. District Detroit is a field of parking lots."
- "I've been to 16 NHL arenas, and the LCA has some of the best (if not *the* best) sight lines for watching the game from the lower bowl. Plus the best concourse by a large margin."
- "It's legitimately an aesthetically beautiful arena, both in the arena itself and on the concourse. I've been to around one-third of the NHL arenas, and it's comfortably the best in terms of pure aesthetics. The main weakness is the atmosphere is just OK. Some of that may simply be due to zero playoff games

ever played there. But the fact that huge swaths of the lower bowl is off at their club buffet half the time really harms the vibe."

- "The curated and commercial experience of LCA is such a stark contrast to the Joe. Its hard to accept."

## 6. Nationwide Arena, Columbus

**Capacity:** 18,144

**Opened:** 2000

**Location:** 9.4 (3rd)

**Amenities:** 8.2 (12th)

**Atmosphere:** 7.7 (20th)

**Affordability:** 7.5 (1st)

**Fan score:** 8.4 (4th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.4 (15th)

**Overall:** 8.0

Blue Jackets fans are quietly some of the best in the league, given how little they've had to cheer for in the franchise's history, and these survey results help highlight their genuine affection for their team.

Columbus folks stuffed the voting with a ton of love for Nationwide, praising the location in the bustling Arena District, the great sight lines and unique design of the building.

More winning would certainly make it a better spot, but as is, the Blue Jackets' home punches above its weight. Even if you don't love the cannon that goes off after every home goal.

### Fan perspective:

- "It's been open since 2000 and is as clean and well-maintained as the day it opened. The atmosphere for games is pretty good considering the team hasn't been very successful. Nationwide is truly a hidden gem and a must visit if you're in town."
- "Amazing fans, the unique cannon, great in-game experience. All around elite NHL atmosphere (despite the woeful team on the ice for 25 years)."
- "Very, very few bad seats in Nationwide Arena. Very family-friendly. Ticket prices are relatively low, which is both good and bad (too many away fans because it's so much cheaper to go to Columbus than their own home barn)."
- "There are *a lot* of good things about Nationwide Arena!! The bad thing: our team."

## 7. Grand Casino Arena, Minnesota

**Capacity:** 17,954

**Opened:** 2000

**Location:** 8.3 (18th)  
**Amenities:** 8.2 (11th)  
**Atmosphere:** 8.5 (10th)  
**Affordability:** 5.8 (12th)

**Fan score:** 8.0 (9th)  
**Beat writer score:** 8.1 (4th)  
**Overall:** 8.0

Lauded for its great sight lines, knowledgeable fans and terrific atmosphere for big games, the newly rechristened Grand Casino Arena scored well in most categories in our fan survey.

The 26-year-old facility was praised, in particular, for some of its unique local touches, such as the banners that hang for the Minnesota high school state champion teams.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Fantastic atmosphere driven by very passionate fans who are really into the game because, most importantly, they really understand the game... and the sight lines are terrific because this is one of the few arenas in the NHL that was primarily built for hockey."
- "Great sight lines and easy to navigate in and out of. However, the crowd is fairly sleepy, and I say that as a lifelong Minnesotan."
- "*Great* place to watch hockey. Needs some updating though, both inside and outside. Brought up to a more state-of-the-art of today, not early 2000s."
- "The arena has great sight lines and the concourse area is wide and easy to navigate. We can afford to go to a game or two, but holy crap it ain't cheap. Tickets, food, beverages and parking can run close to \$400."

**8. Climate Pledge Arena, Seattle**

**Capacity:** 17,100

**Opened:** 2021

**Location:** 8.8 (10th)  
**Amenities:** 8.9 (5th)  
**Atmosphere:** 8.5 (8th)  
**Affordability:** 4.9 (22nd)

**Fan score:** 8.2 (7th)  
**Beat writer score:** 7.0 (11th)  
**Overall:** 7.9

A remarkable renovation of historic Key Arena that dropped the floor deep into the ground created a one-of-a-kind home for the Kraken, a building that has to be seen to be believed.

Fans praised the building's location and the fact that a ticket comes with a free transit pass, and Climate Pledge scored well for its sparkling new amenities and atmosphere. The only real hit was affordability, as this is not an inexpensive place to take in a game.

**Fan perspective:**

- "You enter on the upper level and the view looking down into the ice is amazing. Overall, the aesthetics throughout the arena are top-notch."
- "Love the history of the arena with the modern update. Sight lines are great, in-arena showmanship and effects rock, and the location is perfect."
- "The structural design and interior of this arena is the best in the league."
- "Climate Pledge Arena feels like a first-class arena, but you have to pay first-class prices for this luxury."

**9. UBS Arena, N.Y. Islanders**

**Capacity:** 17,255

**Opened:** 2021

**Location:** 7.0 (28th)

**Amenities:** 9.4 (1st)

**Atmosphere:** 8.7 (5th)

**Affordability:** 5.7 (16th)

**Fan score:** 8.2 (6th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.1 (18th)

**Overall:** 7.8

Wow. OK, we hear you Islanders fans: You hate the parking situation here. Almost as much as John Tavares.

Nearly 200 of you flooded our survey with plenty of love for the new barn — after life in the outdated Nassau Coliseum and ill-suited Barclays Center — with praise for the high-end facilities and atmosphere (ranked fifth in the NHL). The location score, however, takes a big hit due to the struggle to get there, which is likely part of why the beat writer score is low.

Overall, however, this sparkling new rink is a fitting reward for fans who have longed for a home like this for decades.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Other than the parking lot being far enough that you need to take a bus to get to the arena, this place is fresh, clean, offers an amazing atmosphere and *almost* captures the noise level of the Coliseum. When the Islanders are good, the place is packed and it is a party."

- "It's world-class in every way. The food, facilities, sight lines and features are all state of the art."
- "The only way to describe the atmosphere of UBS Arena as a lifelong Isles fan is a love letter to the fans after years of uncertainty and struggle. The variety of food options, electric fans and connection to the Island make this a great destination. However, the pricing is a major concern."
- And, of course... "Parking sucks."

## 10. Madison Square Garden, N.Y. Rangers

**Capacity:** 18,006

**Opened:** 1968

**Location:** 9.3 (4th)

**Amenities:** 7.8 (16th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.0 (17th)

**Affordability:** 2.8 (30th)

**Fan score:** 7.4 (20th)

**Beat writer score:** 9.3 (2nd)

**Overall:** 7.7

MSG all the way down in 10th place? How can that be?

Perhaps it is in part due to Rangers fans being extra surly over the state of the franchise, but they knocked their building down for amenities (16th) and atmosphere (17th). The real killer, however, was the affordability score, as only Toronto and Vancouver were marked lower than MSG's 2.8 out of 10.

Our beat writers, however, love the oldest building in the league, ranking it behind only the Bell Centre. Slightly more than 25 percent of our writers believe it's the best place in the league to watch a game.

### Fan perspective:

- "Great location. The atmosphere has gone downhill due to too many corporate suits filling the seats. The average fan is being priced out."
- "Nothing beats the Garden. Been to 25 NHL arenas and nothing compares. Prime rib sandwich is the best concession item in the league."
- "There is no sporting event, other than a World Series at Yankee Stadium, that rivals a Rangers game in MSG. Atmosphere, fan involvement, all great. It is pricier than others but overall a great venue."
- "It's an unfriendly place. And I'm a Ranger fan."
- "Best arena for atmosphere and watching the game. Worst arena if you're trying to save money."

## 11. Rogers Place, Edmonton

**Capacity:** 18,347

**Opened:** 2016

**Location:** 8.8 (9th)

**Amenities:** 8.5 (7th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.6 (7th)

**Affordability:** 3.7 (26th)

**Fan score:** 7.8 (10th)

**Beat writer score:** 7.5 (8th)

**Overall:** 7.7

Edmonton's big, bold new home is an impressive state-of-the-art manifestation of Oilers fandom right in the heart of the city. Fans gave Rogers Place fantastic marks in every category except for affordability, in which the building was ranked 26th, greatly reducing its score.

But if you're willing to pay the freight, it's a fantastic place to watch a game — especially if Connor McDavid is in the lineup.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Knowledgeable fans. Loud. Great ice. Beautiful concourses."
- "Rogers Place is proof that Edmonton can build a world-class arena ... and still make you remortgage your house for popcorn."
- "Everything is expensive and keeps going up every year, but 97/29 (Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl) are worth the price of admission most nights and the building has settled in well to the point where everyone has their shortcuts and lineups and it's easier to go to a game than it was when the rink was new."

**12. United Center, Chicago**

**Capacity:** 19,717

**Opened:** 1994

**Location:** 7.4 (25th)

**Amenities:** 8.4 (9th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.6 (6th)

**Affordability:** 4.7 (23rd)

**Fan score:** 7.6 (16th)

**Beat writer score:** 7.3 (9th)

**Overall:** 7.6

The Madhouse on Madison (Part II) remains well-known for its unique anthem theatrics and generally great atmosphere, a category in which the rebuilding Blackhawks finished sixth.

The location in "a dead spot in the city," according to some fans, hurt the overall score, as did the fact that ticket prices are high for a team that hasn't won a whole lot of late. Our traveling beat writers, however, believe this remains a top-10 building to visit thanks to its cavernous size and raucous crowds.

**Fan perspective:**

- "The atmosphere is terrific, the history is always on display, the current on-ice product keeps getting better. Although the arena is very big and 30 years old, there's nothing like it when it's packed and the Hawks are really good."
- "The national anthem in the United Center is a top-three musical experience of all time."
- "The crowd atmosphere when it's sold out is second to none with the anthem. When the team is winning, this is such an electric building to be in. When the team is losing, it can get awfully quiet in a hurry, though. The overall product is good, even if the location isn't 100 percent ideal and the affordability is average compared to most rinks."
- "The United Center has really aged well. It is quite expensive, especially considering the quality of the team, but I can't really think of another negative thing to say about it."

**13. Canada Life Centre, Winnipeg**

**Capacity:** 15,325

**Opened:** 2004

**Location:** 8.3 (19th)

**Amenities:** 7.7 (19th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.4 (11th)

**Affordability:** 6.7 (6th)

**Fan score:** 7.7 (13th)

**Beat writer score:** 7.1 (10th)

**Overall:** 7.6

The smallest building in the NHL for years punches above its weight here, largely thanks to the rowdy fans who attend.

The CLC started its life as an AHL building for the Manitoba Moose but has become a destination spot to watch a playoff game, as the Winnipeg Whiteout brings with it one of the louder crowd experiences in the league. The Jets have also put more effort into fan relations of late after some attendance issues, and those have been positively received by the fans who filled out our survey.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Great views. Usually great atmosphere. Only issue is the 'tight' seating."
- "They've improved a lot since COVID. Live music pregame and at intermissions, redoing the concourse, more local food and drink options. Obviously the smallest arena in the league but fine for the size of the

city. Great location downtown connected to multiple buildings with restaurants and underground parking via skywalks."

- "If you (measure) the arena atmosphere in January, it's average or below average even based on other arenas I've visited. If you take it in the midst of a playoff run, it's punching in the top three."

#### **14. American Airlines Center, Dallas**

**Capacity:** 18,532

**Opened:** 2001

**Location:** 8.5 (16th)

**Amenities:** 7.8 (17th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.4 (12th)

**Affordability:** 5.7 (17th)

**Fan score:** 7.7 (15th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.0 (20th)

**Overall:** 7.3

While the Stars and NBA's Mavericks may be at war while in the same building, the hockey fans who attend games here regularly feel just fine about the arrangement.

The AAC landed in the middle of the pack in every category, with the atmosphere garnering the highest score. Some Stars fans are concerned, however, that the building location might move outside of the downtown core as a result of the dispute, which would change their grades.

#### **Fan perspective:**

- "Honestly, one of the best parts of the AAC is its location and how easy public transit makes it to get to it from so many different points in the DFW area. I'm crossing my fingers and begging the people in my life to cross their fingers that the issues with the Mavs don't end with the Stars leaving downtown for some place like Plano or Arlington."
- "The Stars do a good job of putting on a 'show' for the fans (music, jumbotron, etc.). It's always fun no matter how the game goes."
- "Despite the great location in the heart of Dallas, the AAC just feels like it's lacking that certain something to give both the organization and building some culture, while still charging at a premium level. Will be interesting to see how the dispute with the Mavs shakes out and where the Stars' home will be by 2031."

#### **15. Enterprise Center, St. Louis**

**Capacity:** 18,096

**Opened:** 1994

**Location:** 7.7 (24th)  
**Amenities:** 8.2 (10th)  
**Atmosphere:** 8.0 (18th)  
**Affordability:** 6.9 (4th)

**Fan score:** 7.8 (11th)  
**Beat writer score:** 5.2 (27th)  
**Overall:** 7.3

"It is perfectly adequate."

Those words from one of our fan respondents seem to sum up the vibe among the Blues' fan base when it comes to their arena. They knocked down the Enterprise Center for its less-than-ideal location, but scored it fourth in affordability and respectably in amenities and affordability.

St. Louis ranked a few slots higher than this in the Fan Score, as our beat writers were not as big of fans.

**Fan perspective:**

- "The team has done a good job updating it as it ages."
- "Outside of beers being overpriced and parking being tough, it's fantastic, clean, comfy, great sight lines everywhere."
- "Great mix of atmosphere, accommodations and fans. Not a bad seat in the house."

**16. Amerant Bank Arena, Florida**

**Capacity:** 19,250

**Opened:** 1998

**Location:** 7.0 (27th)  
**Amenities:** 8.1 (13th)  
**Atmosphere:** 8.0 (19th)  
**Affordability:** 6.9 (3rd)

**Fan score:** 7.7 (14th)  
**Beat writer score:** 5.5 (25th)  
**Overall:** 7.2

Built way out beside a swamp in suburban Sunrise, Amerant Bank feels like one of those arenas where the location could ruin everything.

While fans did ding it with a 27th-best ranking in that category, all the winning lately boosted their other scores. Affordability, meanwhile, was the biggest winner, with the two-time defending champs coming in third behind only Columbus and Anaheim.

Two of our beat writers picked Amerant as their least-favorite road building, however, largely thanks to location complaints. (Anything this close to Fort Lauderdale, however, is a win in my books.)

**Fan perspective:**

- "Even as two-time defending champs, the overall cost of attending a game is still relatively affordable compared to the rest of the NHL and the other major sports. The building is showing its age in spots, but there have been vast improvements over the last handful of years (sound system, video board, LED strips, premium areas, game presentation, higher quality food offerings, etc.)"
- "It's one of the most affordable things to do in South Florida. There isn't a bad seat in the arena, and there is an underrated home atmosphere that exists. Yes, sometimes we have large pockets of away fans (especially Toronto, Montreal, Boston and both New York teams) but the Cats have created something special. There is truly nothing like it."
- "The location out in the Everglades is not the best; however, it's generally easy to get to and the traffic and parking are fine. It would be nice to have the arena closer to the bars and restaurants in downtown Fort Lauderdale and/or Las Olas. But it is hard to complain about anything the last few seasons."

**17. Ball Arena, Colorado**

**Capacity:** 18,007

**Opened:** 1999

**Location:** 8.5 (15th)

**Amenities:** 7.3 (21st)

**Atmosphere:** 8.5 (9th)

**Affordability:** 5.5 (19th)

**Fan score:** 7.5 (17th)

**Beat writer score:** 5.8 (23rd)

**Overall:** 7.2

While Avalanche fans love the good vibes the crowd builds behind one of the best teams in the league, they are clearly much less enamored with how much things cost at Ball Arena and with the now 27-year-old venue's aging amenities.

Our beat writers are big fans of work trips to Denver, but feel the arena is below average, scoring it 23rd overall.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Atmosphere and general hockey involvement are great. Food options improving year over year, but still similar to other arenas. This year's addition of half a dozen \$5 items (hot dogs, popcorn, etc.) and \$10 draft beers was helpful."
- "They kind of just miss by a bit on everything."

- "Winning hockey makes everything better."

## 18. TD Garden, Boston

**Capacity:** 17,565

**Opened:** 1995

**Location:** 8.8 (11th)

**Amenities:** 7.1 (24th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.1 (15th)

**Affordability:** 2.9 (29th)

**Fan score:** 7.0 (22nd)

**Beat writer score:** 7.8 (6th)

**Overall:** 7.2

TD Garden came in lower than expected here, especially considering our beat writers ranked it the sixth-best place to watch a game.

Boston's unbelievably rowdy crowds contribute to that score, for sure, but the fans ranked the atmosphere as merely middle of the pack in their accounting, perhaps due to the Bruins' downturn last season. And TD Garden took a hit in affordability, where it ranked fourth-last.

Overall, however, this is typically a very fun place to watch an NHL game. Just be careful about wearing the visiting team's jersey when you do.

### Fan perspective:

- "Bruins fans like to complain about everything. You can't beat the location. They do a good job with the in-game experience, and there are lots of upgraded food and drink options. It's really expensive, though."
- "Unbelievable experience at unbelievably high prices."
- "There is literally nothing like the Garden during a game. Yes, everyone is drunk. Yes, everyone is having the best and worst night of their lives. Also: They just got the novelty [beer hockey sticks](#). I think it is one of the most expensive arenas in sports in general, so I guess that's what happens when it's home to legendary teams."
- "When the Bruins crowd get going, the arena's shakin'."

## 19. Lenovo Center, Carolina

**Capacity:** 18,680

**Opened:** 1999

**Location:** 7.0 (26th)

**Amenities:** 7.3 (20th)

**Atmosphere:** 9.0 (4th)

**Affordability:** 6.1 (9th)

**Fan score:** 7.4 (18th)

**Beat writer score:** 5.8 (23rd)

**Overall:** 7.1

The location — a bit removed from the city core — hurt the Lenovo Center, as did a lowish amenities score. The rocking atmosphere, both in the building and outside in the tailgate, however, provided Carolina with a big boost. And most fans feel that while ticket prices have risen, it's still somewhat affordable to take in a 'Canes game.

An ambitious plan to improve the building and the area around the arena in the coming years will likely lead to high rankings in future years.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Fans are great, but a lot of the facilities and seating could use an upgrade. The good news is that a big renovation has just started."
- "I don't think I've ever attended a game at the Lenovo Center where my ears haven't rang for the next day. It might be the acoustics of the arena, but it gets ridiculously loud in there."
- "Middle of nowhere (location) lends itself to a fantastic tailgating culture, and in-arena amenities are good with renovations underway. The game environment is unmatched despite everything: consistent winning, (some) postseason success and a consistent player core have earned the 'Loudest House in the NHL' claim."

**20. SAP Center, San Jose**

**Capacity:** 17,435

**Opened:** 1993

**Location:** 8.4 (17th)

**Amenities:** 7.9 (14th)

**Atmosphere:** 8.2 (13th)

**Affordability:** 6.1 (10th)

**Fan score:** 7.7 (12th)

**Beat writer score:** 4.7 (29th)

**Overall:** 7.1

There's no arena quite like the Shark Tank, which can feel like a huge, electrified tin can for big games. (Mostly in a good way.)

It's one of the oldest buildings in the league, and some fans feel those years are starting to show. Overall, however, Sharks fans ranked SAP in the middle of the pack in most categories, expressing affection for its various quirks.

Our beat writers, however, were less kind (ranking it 29th), which dropped San Jose down from the middle of the pack.

**Fan perspective:**

- "The Tank just feels shabby at this point. And now the concourse is crowded. It's still a better deal and easier to get to than the 49ers' stadium down the road or Chase Center in San Francisco, but those stadiums are much shinier and newer. In the upcoming renovations, if they could keep the more intimate atmosphere of the Tank but make it feel less dated, that would be ideal."
- "When it's rocking, the Tank is one of the top five loudest (arenas) in the sport. At times possibly top two. In the sad years, it's been very sad indeed. ... Having been to other barns, I'd say the Sharks fan experience may be slightly lagging behind by five to 10 years. However, the noise is the most important and Macklin (Celebrini) and Co. are bringing that part back pretty quickly."
- "It isn't too big. Even the last row can see the ice pretty well."

**21. Delta Center, Utah**

**Capacity:** N/A

**Opened:** 1991

**Location:** 8.6 (14th)

**Amenities:** 6.5 (27th)

**Atmosphere:** 7.3 (22nd)

**Affordability:** 6.6 (7th)

**Fan score:** 7.4 (19th)

**Beat writer score:** 5.0 (28th)

**Overall:** 6.9

The Mammoth likely deserve an "incomplete" here instead of this low-ish ranking, given the circumstances.

For an organization that had a shotgun start into an NBA arena not built for hockey, they've done a solid job getting the market engaged. Most fan responses, however, pointed out the upcoming renovations are badly needed given sight-line issues throughout the building.

And they feel the franchise is still finding its way in terms presentation and in-game entertainment for an NHL crowd. Utah scored the highest in affordability, where owner Ryan Smith has made considerable efforts to be best in class.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Once upper-bowl renovations are complete and the surrounding sports complex/district around the arena is complete, it'll be top 10."
- "They are just getting started... Hard to compare it to arenas originally built for hockey until the renovations are done. Great atmosphere from the crowd makes it fun."
- "The in-game experience still feels like they are trying too hard to figure things out two years in and it feels a bit amateurish compared to other buildings. ... That said, I'm so thrilled to have NHL hockey in SLC that I gladly suck it up!"

## **22. Xfinity Mobile Arena, Philadelphia**

**Capacity:** 19,537

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 8.3 (20th)

**Amenities:** 7.7 (18th)

**Atmosphere:** 7.5 (21st)

**Affordability:** 4.4 (25th)

**Fan score:** 7.1 (21st)

**Beat writer score:** 5.4 (26th)

**Overall:** 6.8

Wholly average.

That was the verdict from the majority of Flyers fans, who have often given their home barn a hostile atmosphere for visiting teams over the years but seem to have lost their passion for the rink itself. Xfinity's lowest scores were reserved for atmosphere and affordability, both likely somewhat related to the Flyers' five-season playoff drought.

Ownership plans to have a new building open by 2030, which was welcomed by a lot of our respondents.

### **Fan perspective:**

- "It is a soulless, multi-use arena akin to the cookie-cutter football/baseball stadiums of the 1960s and 70s. There is no personality to it."
- "It's not a bad place to watch a Flyers game, but much like the team that plays on the ice, it's mostly average: Some nights it's very good, some nights it's bad, but mostly just average."
- "Can't believe they're getting rid of this completely fine, serviceable and actually good arena. Senseless! It's completely fine and the renovations were great."

## **23. PPG Paints Arena, Pittsburgh**

**Capacity:** 18,187

**Opened:** 2010

**Location:** 6.7 (30th)

**Amenities:** 7.8 (15th)

**Atmosphere:** 7.2 (23rd)

**Affordability:** 4.7 (24th)

**Fan score:** 6.8 (24th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.1 (19th)

**Overall:** 6.7

Still one of the NHL's relatively newer buildings, PPG Paints Arena nonetheless has lost its luster with Yinzers. Many reported in our survey that the new arena lacked the character of the old now-demolished Igloo and felt the area around the rink was never developed properly.

PPG Paints scored in the league basement for location and wasn't much better in terms of atmosphere or affordability, two categories likely affected by all the losing in recent years.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Seeing what Seattle did turning Key Arena into Climate Pledge, it makes me wonder 'what if?' with the Igloo. I had hoped for something like Nationwide Arena in Columbus, and what we got is a Home Depot with some windows."
- "The lack of options outside the arena is abysmal. They do a nice job during the game, but the crowd itself is generally very blah due to the high ticket prices."
- "Unless it's playoffs, it's dead in the arena. Even during sellouts. We've been spoiled by having Crosby and Malkin for so long that people don't get excited as they used to."

**24. Prudential Center, New Jersey**

**Capacity:** 16,514

**Opened:** 2007

**Location:** 6.9 (29th)

**Amenities:** 7.2 (22nd)

**Atmosphere:** 6.9 (24th)

**Affordability:** 5.7 (15th)

**Fan score:** 6.9 (23rd)

**Beat writer score:** 4.4 (31st)

**Overall:** 6.4

No fan base was more critical of the food and drink options at their NHL arena than Devils fans, and they also reported the atmosphere has declined in recent years, in part thanks to the in-game entertainment.

That, combined with a tough location in downtown Newark, hurt New Jersey's ratings overall. Our beat writers, in particular, were hard on the Prudential Center, putting it in second last.

**Fan perspective:**

- "The Rock just doesn't have much that stands out. Pretty small footprint and not a lot of fun design/decor. ... The food is also pretty terrible."
- "I just wish it wasn't so loud every second of every minute. You can't talk to the person next to you."
- "There were three goals called back for the Devils (one game) and there were beers and chicken tenders flying all over the place. Overall, when the Devils do good, this place is electric. But they will turn on their team if it starts to go downhill."

**25. Scotiabank Saddledome, Calgary**

**Capacity:** 19,289

**Opened:** 1983

**Location:** 8.1 (22nd)

**Amenities:** 5.9 (31st)

**Atmosphere:** 6.4 (26th)

**Affordability:** 6.1 (11th)

**Fan score:** 6.2 (27th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.7 (13th)

**Overall:** 6.3

There was actually a ton of love for the old 'Dome in the fans' comments, but it also came with acknowledgement that it's time for an upgrade. The only category that Calgary's throwback barn scored well in was affordability, with fans pointing out they can often get tickets for a song on a game night.

Only the beat writers' score, in which the 'Dome was ranked the 13th-best building — largely thanks to its enduring charm (and dizzying press box view) — helps bump up this building out of the bottom five.

Scotia Place, the Flames' new home, is set to open in the fall of 2027, so there's still time to take in a game here if you've never been.

**Fan perspective:**

- "I know it's old and rundown, but they have great amenities, great location, great atmosphere, and they aren't so overpriced I feel taken advantage of. Prices are high, as in any pro sport, but reasonable. I enjoy every game there, and I'll be sad when they blow it up. I've seen games there since I was a kid. It's old, but it's home."
- "The Dome is a classic arena and really feels like a true hockey experience every time you walk in. I'm looking forward to the upcoming new arena, but definitely going to miss the charm and atmosphere of the Dome."

- "I know it's old and being replaced, but a lot of what makes it good can be attributed to the fans who attend the game. The pyrotechnics when the Flames score, the iconic name and shape ... all add up to equal a very fun night out. Last time I went, I was up in the nosebleeds and even there, I could see very clearly."

## **26. Honda Center, Anaheim**

**Capacity:** 17,174

**Opened:** 1993

**Location:** 7.9 (23rd)

**Amenities:** 6.6 (25th)

**Atmosphere:** 6.2 (27th)

**Affordability:** 7.0 (2nd)

**Fan score:** 6.8 (25th)

**Beat writer score:** 4.5 (30th)

**Overall:** 6.3

An enormous, ambitious renovation has the Honda Center and area around it going through a major transition right now, which dramatically affected the results in our survey.

Ducks fans, however, voted it as the second-most affordable place in the league to take in a game, behind only Columbus.

### **Fan perspective:**

- "The ongoing construction work, which has closed most of the food concession stands, as well as the team store and multiple seating sections, has made the experience suboptimal this season. It is likely that once the OC Vibe project is completed, the experience will significantly improve."
- "It's an incomplete survey. ... In about two years, this could be the premier hockey arena in the entire league."
- "Easy in, easy out. It was designed specifically for hockey. Good sight lines. They have seat pricing for all."

## **27. Capital One Arena, Washington**

**Capacity:** 18,506

**Opened:** 1997

**Location:** 8.9 (7th)

**Amenities:** 6.1 (30th)

**Atmosphere:** 6.5 (25th)

**Affordability:** 3.7 (27th)

**Fan score:** 6.3 (26th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.2 (16th)

**Overall:** 6.3

The Capitals have had a nice resurgence on the ice recently, and the Stanley Cup win in 2018 still brings warm and fuzzy feelings. But the fans are very down on their home rink, which scored poorly in every category except location.

While our beat writers felt Capital One was a middling barn, Washington fans voted it 26th overall thanks to a variety of complaints, including expensive and lackluster food options, loss of the organist and a new premium-seat section called The Vaults that often sits empty during play.

**Fan perspective:**

- "It's a good location but badly needs the refresh that's underway. Good atmosphere."
- "They added new super-expensive seats on one side of the arena that have been 90 percent empty this season, which has killed some of the atmosphere."
- "Has gone downhill since the Cup win. Bring back the organ, discontinue high-priced empty seats, don't ban the horn guy, give us better food options."
- "If you enjoy waiting in long lines for overpriced food and consuming it in a tiny seat where the music blasted during each stoppage is so loud that you can't hold a conversation with your seat-mate, then Capital One Arena is your destination."

**28. Scotiabank Arena, Toronto**

**Capacity:** 18,800

**Opened:** 1999

**Location:** 9.1 (5th)

**Amenities:** 7.2 (22nd)

**Atmosphere:** 4.2 (32nd)

**Affordability:** 1.5 (32nd)

**Fan score:** 5.6 (30th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.7 (13th)

**Overall:** 5.8

As someone who has attended many, many games here as a media member since 2004, I am not surprised the Leafs are this low. In fact, I wondered if they might challenge for last place.

Not because Scotiabank Arena isn't a perfectly fine modern arena, with some great food options and gathering areas. But because ticket prices in Toronto are as outrageous as they get in the NHL and, on many nights, it can be a very corporate crowd and fans sit on their hands.

Toronto was voted last in both atmosphere and affordability, and it was not particularly close with second-last Vancouver.

While the Leafs have been a good regular-season team for nearly a decade and Scotiabank Arena is in a terrific location, right next to the main transit hub in one of North America's largest metro areas, the fact that they haven't had playoff success and the building itself and the area around it has been under construction in recent years haven't helped, either.

**Fan perspective:**

- "The place feels stale. Overpriced. Enjoy going to other arenas to watch the team. Many are more enjoyable and less expensive."
- "Possibly the worst game ops in the NHL. Dead crowd on most nights made worse by extreme loud music that prevents any potential atmosphere from developing. No longer a knowledgeable hockey crowd. Entire empty rows of last-row standing room tickets are unsold this season for most games because prices are way too high. Bizarre lower-bowl crowd that leaves early no matter what the score is."
- "Platinum seat ghosts are well-documented. As a diehard Leafs fan, when I have managed to score tickets in the 100s. I receive eye-rolls, 'embarrassed-for-you' and annoyed glances from the suits in response to my normal fan behaviors."

**29. Rogers Arena, Vancouver**

**Capacity:** 18,910

**Opened:** 1995

**Location:** 8.7 (12th)

**Amenities:** 6.5 (26th)

**Atmosphere:** 5.2 (31st)

**Affordability:** 2.5 (31st)

**Fan score:** 5.7 (28th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.2 (17th)

**Overall:** 5.8

It's tough times in a lot of ways for Canucks fans. The team just traded a star player. They're in last place in the standings. They're not happy with ownership.

And they don't like their rink anymore, either.

Rogers Arena was a huge deal when it replaced the Pacific Coliseum in the mid-1990s, and for its time, the atmosphere for games and concerts was excellent. But that time was more than 30 years ago now, and compared to more modern buildings, the concourse is cramped and hard to navigate. The fact that the Canucks have struggled for years and ticket prices are so high has also contributed to a steep decline in game atmosphere.

While our beat writers felt it was still a middling barn, Canucks fans ranked it 31st in atmosphere and affordability and 26th in amenities.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Obviously, the atmosphere is hurt by the Canucks being a horrible team since 2013. Really, there's nothing especially good or bad about Rogers Arena, besides the concourse being incredibly cramped compared to most arenas I've been to."
- "Rogers will never rank high simply because of its physical size. Being squeezed between two viaducts means tight concourses, which feels like you are constantly being pushed through a toothpaste tube. Visiting other arenas like Climate Pledge you notice that difference immediately."
- "Amazing location downtown and the new seats and video board are fantastic. But the building itself is nothing special, and the music and game ops people still think it's 1996. In as much as this team doesn't accept reality on the ice, there's a similar lack of innovation and trendsetting that permeates the fan experience."
- "I worry with ownership what will happen with this arena over time. ... Arenas have an expiry date."

**30. Crypto.com Arena, Los Angeles**

**Capacity:** 18,188

**Opened:** 1999

**Location:** 6.5 (31st)

**Amenities:** 6.4 (28th)

**Atmosphere:** 5.5 (29th)

**Affordability:** 3.4 (28th)

**Fan score:** 5.7 (29th)

**Beat writer score:** 6.0 (20th)

**Overall:** 5.7

It was a bit of a surprise, as an outsider, to see the Kings down this far, although crowds have been surprisingly quiet for any recent games I've attended — even with a lot of rowdy fans of the visiting team in attendance. (Beat writers who have attended all 32 arenas rated the building just below average.)

The LA Live area is an interesting retail, restaurant and hotel complex around the building that accommodates tourists well, but getting in and out can be painful because of traffic and high-priced parking.

And many Kings fans who responded complained about the in-game experience overall, which is a contributing factor to placing 29th in atmosphere.

**Fan perspective:**

- "Artificial noise piped in, and artificial fans that would rather be seen than heard. It is usually a coffin inside the former Staples Center."
- "The in-game experience is unnecessarily loud, distracting and grating on the nerves. The flashing lights and club music are seizure-inducing. The jumbotron seems oversized and has too much going on at any given time, often making it impossible to find basic game information. ... As a lifelong hockey fan, I prefer watching the game at home."
- "Traffic is a nightmare, parking is expensive and often requires a long walk. Concession prices are outrageous. The in-game entertainment is so loud you have to wear ear plugs. But at least it's better than the Honda Center?" (Writer's note: Not according to our rankings!)

### **31. KeyBank Center, Buffalo**

**Capacity:** 19,070

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 8.3 (21st)

**Amenities:** 5.2 (32nd)

**Atmosphere:** 5.3 (30th)

**Affordability:** 5.8 (13th)

**Fan score:** 5.6 (31st)

**Beat writer score:** 6.0 (20th)

**Overall:** 5.7

KeyBank was a fun place to watch games 20 years ago, when the Sabres were a top team and the building was rocking. All the years of losing have obviously had an impact on the fans. Even with Buffalo winning again, however, there are plenty of complaints about how far the arena and in-game experience have declined.

Fans voted KeyBank last for amenities and third-last for atmosphere, with many filling our survey responses with colorful descriptions of how bad the seats are (both in the stands and the bathrooms!).

Here's hoping, after so many years in the wilderness, that the Sabres can continue to fix more than just the team's record.

#### **Fan perspective:**

- "Fans make it good. The ownership not willing to spend money to improve arena keeps the condition of the arena in very poor shape."
- "It's a dump, but winning fixes a lot of things."
- "Barebones arena built out of necessity, but lacks anything to make it unique. I miss the Aud."
- "Too expensive to get in. Even worse after you're inside."

## **32. Canadian Tire Centre, Ottawa**

**Capacity:** 18,652

**Opened:** 1996

**Location:** 2.5 (32nd)

**Amenities:** 6.1 (29th)

**Atmosphere:** 5.8 (28th)

**Affordability:** 5.7 (18th)

**Fan score:** 5.1 (32nd)

**Beat writer score:** 4.3 (32nd)

**Overall:** 4.9

The Senators' rink was built out in the suburbs of Kanata, one of the original sins that the franchise is still struggling with. The CTC received a 2.5 score for location, which is a full four points lower than the 31st-place team. Other than affordability, Ottawa ranked in the NHL's bottom five in every category, including 28th for atmosphere.

Beyond the location complaints, many fans noted the bathrooms lack hot water and said parking is a nightmare.

A new building is coming at some point, but for now, this is a team making do with a less than ideal situation.

### **Fan perspective:**

- "An NHL home game shouldn't feel like a road trip."
- "You sit for 45 minutes just to leave the parking lot and drive. Bring it to LeBreton (close to downtown) and I'm a half-season ticket holder for sure, but in Kanata, I go to a handful of games per year. I hope they blow that building up once they build at LeBreton. It can't come soon enough."
- "Location, location, location. I have struggled to give away excellent seats at times."
- "Ottawa has some of the very best sight lines in the NHL: There isn't a bad seat in the house. I'm often able to find affordable solo or group tickets close to game time. When the team is playing well, the atmosphere in the building is loud and energetic, and it's one of the best playoff barns in the NHL. Of course, location nearly kills every aspect of that. I think this instantly becomes one of the best rink/fan-base combos in the NHL once the move to LeBreton is completed."