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**MINNESOTA**  
**SPORTS AND EVENTS**  
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**JACQUELINE NOWAKOWSKI OF LINO LAKES CROWNED  
2026 HOCKEY MOM OF THE YEAR AT MALL OF AMERICA®**  
Minnesota Sports and Events, WCCO-AM, and Mall of America Celebrate the  
Heart of the Hockey Family as Part of the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship Lead-up

**SAINT PAUL/MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota** – In a night filled with laughter, tears, and the unmistakable spirit of the State of Hockey, **Jacqueline (pron. jack-LEEN) Nowakowski of Lino Lakes, Minn.**, was crowned as the **2026 Hockey Mom of the Year** during the **Hockey Mom Face-off** at the Huntington® Bank Rotunda inside Mall of America.

Hosted by WCCO-AM's **Vineeta Sawkar** and **Kristi Plante**, hockey mom of 2025 World Junior gold medalist **Max Plante**, the event brought hockey family, friends and fans together to celebrate the unsung heroes who make youth hockey possible.

Nowakowski was selected from five incredible finalists who shared powerful, heartfelt stories about what hockey means to their families and communities. In the contest coordinated by Minnesota Sports and Events (MNSE), WCCO-830 AM and Mall of America, each finalist competed in lighthearted, hockey-themed challenges on stage, earning cheers and laughter from the crowd before Nowakowski was announced as the 2026 Hockey Mom of the Year.

“This contest shines a light on the real MVPs of hockey - the people who make it possible for kids to play the game they love,” said **Vineeta Sawkar**, WCCO-AM morning show host and Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge co-chair. “Jacqueline embodies the resilience and spirit of hockey moms. Each of the finalists was so impressive. It’s been a wonderful experience getting to know all of them.”

“Every story we heard tonight was inspiring,” added **Kristi Plante**, co-chair of the challenge and Duluth native. “These moms represent everything we love about this community - joy, resilience, and that special kind of love that shows up no matter how early the game or how long the road trip.”

### **2026 Hockey Mom All-Star Finalists**

- **Deanna Brewer** (Somerset, Wis.) – For Deanna, the road trips and laughter between games are just as special as the goals scored, symbolizing the bond and resilience hockey builds in families.
- **Deanna Hernandez** (Elk River, Minn.) – Known for her boundless energy and dedication - from blizzard drives to team breakfasts - Deanna proudly calls herself “the hug that heals” for her hockey family.
- **Emmy Loycano** (Maple Plain, Minn.) – After losing her daughter in a tragic accident, Emmy’s hockey community became her family’s lifeline. Her son’s hat trick tribute with a purple-taped stick remains one of the most powerful moments shared in the contest.

(more)

- **Jacqueline Nowakowski** (Lino Lakes, Minn.) – A mom who balances hockey life with strength and grace while undergoing breast cancer treatment, Jacqueline finds joy and community through her son’s love for the sport.
- **Jamie Schnacky** (Hudson, Wis.) – From hosting a backyard rink featured on “Access Hollywood” to hosting a junior hockey player, Jamie embodies the joy and connection hockey brings to families.

## Grand Prize

The 2026 Hockey Mom of the Year receives:

- VIP recognition during the **2026 IIHF World Junior Championship**
- Four passes to Host House and in-arena hospitality
- \$500 Mall of America gift card
- Professional photo shoot and print by **Deb Schroeder**, hockey mom to three including 2010 World Junior gold medalist and professional **Jordan Schroeder**.
- HEDi-PACK EXPLORER backpack from **HEDi Gear** founder **Bret Hedican**, Stanley Cup champion and two-time Olympian for Team USA.
- Two dozen **Original Hockey Mom Brownies**
- The official **Hockey Mom All-Star Trophy Stick**

## About the Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge

Launched by MNSE, WCCO-AM, and Mall of America, the Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge celebrates the spirit, sacrifice, and humor that make hockey families special. Nominations were submitted across Minnesota and surrounding states, honoring the ultimate champions who keep youth hockey thriving.

The contest is part of the countdown to the 50th edition of the IIHF World Junior Championship featuring the best men’s hockey players under 20 competing for gold. From **Dec. 26, 2025 – Jan. 5, 2026**, games will be held at Saint Paul’s Grand Casino Arena (formerly Xcel Energy Center) and 3M Arena at Mariucci in Minneapolis, with exhibition games in Bemidji, Duluth, Mankato, and Rochester, dubbed the World Juniors Pre-Tournament Series presented by Delta Dental of Minnesota.

Minnesota Sports and Events is partnering with USA Hockey, the Minnesota Wild, Grand Casino Arena, University of Minnesota, Visit Saint Paul, Meet Minneapolis, and Mall of America to host the 50th edition of World Juniors.

**Tickets and information:** [2026.worldjunior.hockey](https://2026.worldjunior.hockey) | [WorldJuniorsMN26.com](https://WorldJuniorsMN26.com). Follow MNSE on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

**MEDIA NOTE** - Digital assets available for download:

- [Slide show from Hockey Mom Face-Off Event \(includes winner and finalist photos, TikTok videos\)](#)
- [Hockey Mom Finalists PDF](#)
- [Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge Logo](#)
- [News release: Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge](#)
- [News release: Hockey Mom Finalists Announced](#)
- [Footage: 2025 World Junior Championship Highlights \(Ottawa\)](#) – courtesy: NHL Network

### Media Contacts:

**Kathy Ross Pavek**, PR Consultant  
Minnesota Sports and Events  
[kross@mnsportsandevents.org](mailto:kross@mnsportsandevents.org)  
612-805-6599, cell

**Francis Forte**, Brian Fishman Communications Coordinator  
USA Hockey  
[francis.forte@usahockey.com](mailto:francis.forte@usahockey.com)  
719-538-1172, direct

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### About Minnesota Sports and Events

Minnesota Sports and Events is an independent 501c6 organization designed to bring significant economic, reputational, and social impact to the region through the attraction, promotion, and execution of world-class events. MNSE also advances community initiatives associated with each event with a focus on underserved communities and statewide engagement. For more information, visit [www.mnsportsandevents.org](https://www.mnsportsandevents.org).