

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**MINNESOTA**  
**SPORTS AND EVENTS**  
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## **Five Finalists Announced for 2026 Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge** **Fans Invited to Mall of America® Nov. 13 to Cheer on the** **Finalists as They Compete for the Title of 2026 Hockey Mom of the Year**

**SAINT PAUL/MINNEAPOLIS, Minnesota** – [Minnesota Sports and Events \(MNSE\)](#), [WCCO-830 AM](#) and [Mall of America®](#) have announced the five finalists for the 2026 Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge, a statewide celebration honoring the unsung heroes of youth hockey.

The five finalists - each sharing inspiring, heartfelt stories about what hockey means to their families and communities - will now advance to the **Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge** event on **Thursday, Nov. 13, at 5 p.m.**, at the [Huntington® Bank Rotunda](#) at Mall of America.

Hosted by contest co-chairs **Vineeta Sawkar**, WCCO-AM's Morning Show host, and **Kristi Plante**, hockey mom of three including 2025 World Junior gold medalist **Max Plante**, the finalists will take part in fun, hockey-themed challenges and share their personal stories live on stage before one is crowned the 2026 Hockey Mom of the Year.

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

### **Fans Invited to Join the Celebration**

The public is invited to Mall of America to cheer on the finalists as they compete for the Hockey Mom of the Year title. The event is free and open to all, with photo opportunities, giveaways, and appearances by special guests.

The grand prize winner will receive:

- Recognition throughout the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship and invitation to select games
- Four (4) passes to Host House and in-arena VIP hospitality

(more)

- \$500 Mall of America gift card
- Professional photo shoot by hockey mom and photographer **Deb Schroeder**, hockey mom to three including 2010 World Junior gold medalist **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**
- Official Hockey Mom Hockey Stick trophy

### **About the Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge**

The finalists were revealed live on Sawkar's WCCO-AM's Morning Show and with guest **Debbie Estes** from MNSE. Estes spearheaded the initiative as part of the lead-up to the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship coming to Minnesota this December.

The Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge celebrates the spirit, sacrifice, and humor of those who make youth hockey possible – moms, dads, grandparents, and guardians alike. Nominations were submitted across Minnesota, featuring stories that highlight the heart of the hockey community.

"This contest is about shining a light on the real MVPs of hockey - the people who make it possible for kids to play the game they love," said **Sawkar**. "These finalists represent everything that makes Minnesota's hockey families so special."

In addition to being a hockey mom, co-chair **Kristi Plante** is a Duluth native and University of Minnesota Duluth Athletics Hall of Fame inductee. She's also married to former professional player and 1991 World Junior alum **Derek Plante**, so she knows firsthand the sacrifices and joy behind the game. "Hockey families give so much of themselves. This is our chance to celebrate them in an unforgettable way."

Learn more at [worldjuniorsmn26.com/hockeymom](http://worldjuniorsmn26.com/hockeymom).

### **About the 2026 IIHF World Junior Championship**

The IIHF World Junior Championship features 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](http://2026.worldjunior.hockey) | [WorldJuniorsMN26.com](http://WorldJuniorsMN26.com). Follow MNSE on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

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

- [Hockey Mom Finalists PDF](#)
- [Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge Logo](#)
- [News release: Hockey Mom All-Star Challenge](#)
- [Video: Kristi Plante – Life as a Hockey Mom](#)
- [Footage: 2025 World Junior Championship Highlights \(Ottawa\)](#) – courtesy: NHL Network

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#### **About Minnesota Sports and Events**

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