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Did we make
Nickelback
famous? (Pg. 13)



Found in Alberta's mountains and boreal forests, the Great Grey Owl uses elusive hunting techniques like snow diving to capture prey. Photo courtesy of Amir Said

Calgary journalist shares his passion for wildlife reporting

Finding inspiration in one of journalism's lesser-known beats

Bella Coco

News Editor

Calgary journalist Amir Said spends his days covering everything from municipal politics to breaking news, but it's the stories with feathers, fur and conservation stakes that truly drive his passion.

A reporter and editor with CBC Calgary, Said describes himself as a generalist by assignment, yet his reputation among readers increasingly rests on his wildlife reporting. He pitches most of the stories himself, spotting angles others might overlook and translating a lifelong passion for nature into journalism that reaches well beyond Alberta.

A childhood curiosity that never faded

Said's interest in wildlife started early with a childhood fascination with dinosaurs. That curiosity later evolved into a deep interest in birds, which he jokingly calls "living dinosaurs," and into a broader passion for animals, ecosystems and environmental issues.

That background now shapes how he sees the world. Where others might notice a bird on an evening walk and move on, Said sees a potential story.

"I'll think, 'What is that bird? How did that bird get here? What is the history of that bird? What is the conservation status of that bird? What have humans done to lower this bird's population? Or conversely, what have humans done to increase that bird's



While a writer of all trades, chances are the byline under a CBC wildlife story belongs to Amir Said. Photo courtesy of Amir Said

population and have it rebound from conservation threats and issues that it may have been facing?" Said explains.

He says that approach allows him to chase and write stories that other people wouldn't think of, which leads to interested readers and other media outlets catching on.

A snowy owl shift

Said traces a turning point in his career back to his time at the Western Wheel, a community newspaper in Okotoks, Alta. Asked to write a holiday feature, he pitched a story on snowy owls: where to find them in Alberta and the conservation challenges they face.

The reaction surprised him. "The response I got to that story was mind-blowing. I

had so many people reaching out to me by email, by social media, asking me questions, and following up with my article" says Said. "I had never received that kind of feedback."

That reaction showed him there was a real appetite for wildlife journalism — not just as "feel-good" content, but as reporting that could inform people about environmental issues and shift how they understand the world around them.

Reporting that travels

Some of Said's most memorable feedback has come from far beyond Calgary.

He recalls writing a story for the Western Wheel about an "irruption" — a phenomenon in which certain owl species

move closer to populated areas when food is scarce in their usual habitat. The piece was widely picked up and circulated online.

Later, while photographing owls, Said met two men visiting from the United States. They told him they had travelled to Alberta specifically because they had read an article about increased owl sightings.

"At that point, I was writing for a community newspaper, right? Serving Okotoks and Foothills County, that's a small newspaper circulation of 17,000 print copies. So for that article to have been read by people in the States who then flew up to Alberta to look for these owls themselves after reading my article, it really goes to show that these stories can really go beyond a local audience," says Said.

Balancing storytelling with science

Said is careful to stress that effective wildlife reporting requires more than passion. While his passion for the beat stems from personal knowledge, he relies on a broad network of scientists, naturalists, biologists, and conservation experts to ensure accuracy.

"I would never call myself an expert," he says. "But I have a vast network of people I can call to fact-check and add scientific legitimacy to the stories."

That attention to accuracy becomes especially important when covering serious incidents such as bear attacks. Said says those stories should include sensitivity and an explanation of why incidents occur and what people can do to stay safe, rather than simply reporting the incident itself.

A shift in perspective

While the animal photography in his stories may be cute and cuddly, Said explains that he aims for his wildlife stories to go beyond the label of "soft news." Instead, he sees them as another way to serve the public with knowledge and to give them a chance to critically examine their environment.

"I want to tell stories that resonate with people and actually make you stop and reconsider how you look at the world around you."

Waiting in the cold: safety concerns on Calgary Transit

Transit safety goes beyond the roads with student safety

Amal Mouaouia

Contributor

For many Mount Royal University (MRU) students, the commute to campus is both a daily routine and the most vulnerable part of the day.

As evening classes end and daylight fades earlier during the winter season, bus shelters around MRU can feel exposed, poorly lit, and isolated, especially compared to the direct train access enjoyed by students at other Calgary post-secondary institutions.

“I think everyone has had an instance where they felt the need to be more alert while riding transit,” says second-year MRU student Liana Manai. “I mean, that’s expected to occur at a reasonable amount in a major city, but people’s frustrations with transit mainly come from a lack of improvement despite rising fare prices. Having to wait for a bus for a prolonged period of time is not only inconvenient but raises a risk for dangerous interactions, especially for those who commute when the sun is down.”

Student concerns on campus align closely with how Calgary residents report feeling about transit safety more broadly.

According to the City of Calgary’s most recent public-safety survey, while a large majority of residents feel safe

riding transit during the day, that confidence drops sharply at night. Only about half of respondents say they feel safe riding a bus after dark, and just over one-third feel safe waiting alone at a bus stop at night.

For students whose schedules extend into the evening, this drop in perceived safety is felt daily.

MRU commuters in particular are served entirely by bus routes, with no direct train access to campus. Students rely on roadside shelters along sidewalks, often fully exposed to traffic, wind, cold and consistently longer wait times.

Other campuses, in contrast, are integrated into the CTrain network, offering frequent trains, well-lit stations, and indoor waiting. These features provide students with both warmth and a greater sense of security.

The result of MRU’s lack of reliable transport is more students standing alone for longer periods of time, particularly in the winter when cold temperatures discourage lingering crowds.

Students say that this combination, darkness, isolation, and weather, heightens both anxiety and risk.

“I can definitely see how frequency is a safety

measure,” says Hardeep Toor, a third-year commuter student. “From 1 to 4 p.m. there’s never not a huge crowd at the bus stop in front of the school waiting for Max Yellow. It’s strange that there’s even enough of a wait time between buses that there becomes an opportunity for such a massive crowd to form.”

The Max Yellow bus stops at 6th Street Station, where many students then transfer to a CTrain, highlighting a clear demand for direct rail access and a large population of students who are relying on buses to bridge this gap.

Student concerns about transit safety are well aligned with broader city trends. Calgary Police Service (CPS) reporting shows that public assaults have increased in 2025, with downtown and transit corridors identified as being priority areas for targeted enforcement. At the same time, Calgary Transit operators and their union have reported a rise in verbal and physical incidents involving drivers and passengers, prompting further calls for protective measures and faster safety upgrades.

In response, the city has rolled out a public transit safety strategy that includes expanded CCTV coverage, increased transit

peace officer presence and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) improvements such as better lighting and sightlines. Calgary officials reiterate that safety requires both outreach to vulnerable populations and design changes that reduce isolation.

Notably, MRU continues to support its students’ safety here on campus by offering SafeWalk services, escorting both students, staff, and faculty to any on-campus destination. SafeWalk services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, where anyone can request an escort using the MRU Now App or by calling (403) 440-6897.

What further complicates the issue of transit safety is fare costs. Calgary Transit raised its adult single-ride fare to \$3.80 in 2025 and again in January 2026, with a single-ride adult fare now costing \$4.

The city frames these increases as necessary to keep pace with operating costs and to continue servicing a growing city. For riders who aren’t covered by a student UPass, such as part-time students, these rising costs, coupled with growing living and tuition expenses, alter everyday choices. Fewer trips to campus for events, stacking schedules to be at school only

half the week, and opting for less safe walking routes to save money.

Calgary already has some of the highest transit fares among major Canadian cities — including Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg — and many riders say higher prices have not translated into more consistent service or safer waiting environments.

“Raising fares when all other conditions remain the same is just going to make it harder for people who rely on transit,” Toor says. “You either wait longer in the dark or pay more for another option.”

For many MRU students, it seems that transit safety has become a series of daily calculations. Which stop is brighter? Should they call someone while waiting? Do students leave early to avoid standing alone? Do they skip a late class altogether?

“Being a girl on transit means you’re always thinking one step ahead, where you’re standing, who’s around you, and how quickly you can get out if something happens,” says MRU student Amira Abluafia.

While the implementation of a CTrain line to MRU is certainly a long-term project that many are hopeful for, students feel that immediate improvements also have the potential to make a meaningful difference. Improvements such as increased evening bus frequency, better night lighting, and greater accuracy on the real-time arrival displays.

As the city continues to refine its transit safety strategies, MRU commuters are watching closely. For students, increased safety won’t be felt in more press releases or fare increases, but in fewer nights waiting alone in the cold, and a safer, more predictable way home.



While many Calgarians rely on buses to commute, higher fares and lower temperatures make the journey more difficult. Photo courtesy of PICRYL

Opinion: Curbing lions uproar, Mullahs' slaughter of Iran

Internet blackouts, mass arrests, and forced confessions as the tools of a regime desperate to hide its brutality from the world

Vlad Semeshoko

Staff Writer

For decades, the true nature of Iran and its people has been obscured by misconception and propaganda. While the Islamic regime in control of the Iranian government presents itself as the voice of the nation, the reality is that it heavily relies on ruthless repression and fear to maintain power.

Independent estimates of the religious makeup of Iran show that approximately 32.2 per cent of its population is Shi'ite Muslim. When combined with the five per cent of Sunni Muslims, the religious followers only constitute a marginally larger share than secular segments of Iranian society.

Despite representing only a plurality of Iran's population, the Islamic regime imposes one of the most extreme interpretations of sharia law in the region on a non-Muslim majority. In terms of state brutality, it is often compared only to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan.

Through the stories of Iranian women defying



Protestors gather across the world in solidarity with the people of Iran. Photo courtesy of Pexels

gender-based violence, compulsory hijab laws and their deaths that followed their activism, the world occasionally caught a glimpse of the day-to-day reality of Iranians and their ongoing struggle with the brutality imposed by their government.

Supreme Leader of Iran,

Ali Khamenei, presents the regime's repressive actions as righteous through religious fundamentalism, grounding its most recent slaughter of thousands of protestors in the violent and revolutionary founding of the regime itself.

"Everyone knows the Islamic Republic came to

power with the blood of hundreds of thousands of honourable people; it will not back down in the face of saboteurs," Khamenei said in response to U.S. President Donald Trump's recent calls on Iranians to continue the demonstrations and seize control of their institutions.

The internet blackout imposed by the Islamic regime is intended to conceal the scale of the massacres carried out by the state and limit communication both within its borders and with the outside world.

With very limited ability to reach their friends and families, Iranians living abroad are left to speak on behalf of their friends and family members who are firsthand witnesses to the human rights violations of the regime.

Recently, Iran has aired 97 coerced confessions on state television as proof of the state's claim to the narrative of a foreign plot fueling the riots. Human rights groups and former detainees say the statements are coerced under duress or torture, serving to legitimise mass arrests amid ongoing internet blackouts.

Iranian authorities have since warned that punishment is "only just beginning" for those detained, signalling expedited trials, harsher sentences, and expanded asset seizures. Officials have framed the crackdown as a

matter of national security, reinforcing claims of foreign interference.

Following a streak of strategic setbacks in the region, including defeats of Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and the fall of Assad's regime in Syria, the Islamic Republic of Iran finds itself increasingly isolated and vulnerable against its geopolitical adversaries.

Israeli and American actions in the region do not stem from genuine concern for the people living under these regimes. This is demonstrated by Israel's aggressive incursions into Lebanon and Syria, as well as the bombing of civilian centres in Tehran, the Iranian capital, during the 12-day war in June 2025.

As internal resistance continues to grow and regional influence erodes, the gap between the state and its people becomes increasingly unsustainable. While external powers pursue their own strategic interests and point to the possibility of regime change, the reality remains unchanged: Iran's future will ultimately be decided by its people, not by the regime that seeks to silence them.



Demonstrators against the Iranian regime march in Gothenburg, Sweden. Photo courtesy of Crannofonix News via Wikimedia Commons

What do chinooks mean for Calgary?

An MRU professor explains what chinooks mean for Calgary's winter weather

Anais Loeppky

Staff Writer

This winter in Calgary has been noticeably more delicate than most—and it's not just a feeling.

According to Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), Calgary experienced record-breaking temperatures this January. These unusually warm conditions are often linked to chinooks, a weather phenomenon common in Southern Alberta.

What is a chinook?

Susan Reid, a professor of earth and environmental sciences at Mount Royal University (MRU), explains that chinooks occur when westerly winds are forced up and over the Rocky Mountains.

"In Southern Alberta, the air has become very dry," says Reid. "We end up with this warm, dry wind after it flows over the mountains."

Reid notes that while chinooks are not solely responsible for the warmer-than-average temperatures this January, they have been a noticeable contributing factor.

Impact of chinooks

One of the most evident impacts of chinooks is the welcome break they bring from winter cold. While chinooks are often seen as a positive phenomenon, they can take a toll on both people and local ecosystems.

Reid says one of the main concerns is their impact on vegetation. She explains that when chinooks occur later in the winter, warm spells can cause plants and trees to

begin budding early, leaving them vulnerable to damage and frost when temperatures drop again.

Many Calgarians also speak about having headaches and migraines as a result of chinooks.

Migraine Canada found that while 80 per cent of Albertans linked their migraines to chinooks, only 20 per cent truly showed reliable sensitivity to them.

Reid explains that when people experience migraines from chinooks, it is a result of the air pressure change.

Another concern is the rapid melting and refreezing of ice with the temperature change. Reid says it's important to be mindful of slippery ice following a chinook.

Reid highlighted that

specific conditions have to take place in order for chinooks to form, which require partnership between the wind and the mountains.

"There has to be consistent air flow coming from the west and then forcing that air up over the mountains, because it's all about the elevation change," she says.

How chinooks create warmth

Though rooted in thermodynamics, the process by which chinooks create warmth can be explained in relatively simple terms. At its core, the phenomenon is driven by changes in air pressure as air moves over the Rocky Mountains.

"It's under pressure and can expand as a result," says Reid.

"As air expands, it cools. So it rises and cools up at the top or the peaks, and because it's cooled off, any water vapour that's in the air can condense and turn into clouds that later produce precipitation."

Once the air mass begins to cross the mountains, it experiences increased pressure and compression. Reid added that once the air finally makes it over the mountains and descends on the east side, higher pressure causes stonger compression.

As a result, Reid noted that with higher temperatures, moisture is lost, leading to the warm, dry air characteristic of chinook events in Calgary.

Chinooks and climate change

Reid says chinooks are

a regular feature of winter in Southern Alberta and can occur multiple times each season when the right atmospheric conditions are in place.

She also emphasised that while warm spells in Calgary are often associated with chinooks, they are not always the cause and can result from other weather patterns.

She also acknowledged that "everyone is very interested in global warming," adding that "we need to separate the individual weather events from the overall warming."



A partnership between the wind and mountains is crucial when it comes to chinook formation. Photo by Landen Melnick



While the weather may feel particularly warm for a Calgary winter, chinooks are a common phenomenon that occur multiple times in Southern Alberta. Photo by Bella Coco

Paring back the price of produce: SAMRU and Fresh Routes Mobile Grocery Store

The Fresh Routes grocery initiative offers students healthy options for affordable prices

Karra Smith

Staff Writer



Fresh Routes Mobile Grocery Store runs in MRU's Wyckham House every Thursday.

Photo by Karra Smith

As prices for essentials continue to rise across the nation, food insecurity is becoming a larger concern. According to a 2021 article by MacLean's, roughly 40 per cent of post-secondary students deal with food insecurity — but Mount Royal University's (MRU) student association (SAMRU), in partnership with Fresh Routes Mobile Grocery Store, is working to provide students with affordable options.

In 2024, Alberta Health Services and PROOF reported that almost one in three households in the province experienced food insecurity daily, and with grocery prices continuing to rise in the constantly shifting economy, access to healthy food at reasonable rates is becoming harder to find.

However, Fresh Routes Mobile Grocery service is working with the community to relieve some of the burden. The program is designed to provide affordable food to individuals across Calgary. The not-for-profit organization focuses on making healthy, fresh options accessible to all — including individuals here at MRU.

Konyinsola Dasilva, volunteer and support services coordinator with SAMRU, says part of what

makes this initiative so effective is the ease it provides students.

"So since we're always there on Thursdays and students are always on campus, they can easily access the market," says Dasilva.

Kat Barry, a student shopper at the mobile store, says that although the market isn't her primary source for groceries, it is very helpful for adding something extra to her Thursday lunch.

"I'd probably have more use for it if I lived on campus because it can be a bit hard getting home everything from here with transit," says

Barry.

For some post-secondary students, nutritious meals are few and far between, which is another key reason Barry appreciates the work done by SAMRU and Fresh Routes.

"I think it's a great initiative to be having on campuses as well, because frankly, I don't think there are enough university students who eat vegetables," says Barry.

The accessibility of this program is only part of the appeal for the market goers. Dasilva says one major aspect that sets the mobile grocery store apart from the average food retailer is the prices.

"I believe we try to be either 30 or 40 per cent less than regular grocery stores, or at least match the price if we cannot be lower," says Dasilva. "So, you know, if a student is struggling with food security, we are able to make it a bit more affordable for them."

Another MRU student, Marye Bakker, says the quality of Fresh Route's produce makes shopping here her first choice.

"I feel like a lot of grocery stores overcharge, and a lot of their food is more rotten, so I feel it's better here," she says.

For Bakker, the only suggestion to improve the Mobile Grocery Store going forward is to add variety, while Dasilva says the only detail she would change is the hours of operation.

"I think maybe making it a bit longer, but because we are in partnership with Fresh Routes, we have to stick to a certain time," says Dasilva.

As for the future of this program within SAMRU, Dasilva says they hope to remain in association with Fresh Routes and continue providing ongoing food support for the students of MRU.

"We do plan to continue it as much as possible, but again, that doesn't depend only on us."



The mobile grocery store aims to be an easy stop for commuting students or those living on campus. Photo by Karra Smith

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From Electric to 11 Avenue

How Calgary's nightlife has changed over the years

Emma Voelpel

Staff Writer



Skyline of downtown Calgary as seen during sunset. Photo by Patrick Dunn / Pexels

Calgary is widely known as a big city with a small-town feel. With a population that's increased by nearly 20 per cent since 2020, both the number of residents and land mass were the largest in Alberta last year.

As its population has grown, the city's culture has shifted dramatically—as has its nightlife, which has bounced from one street to another. But while one might estimate that more people lead to a bustling nightlife, a night out in Calgary seems to have gone from over-the-top and wild to demure and modest.

Today, 11th Avenue is a quiet, peaceful road lined with cafés, restaurants, galleries and nail salons. However, in the 1980s and 90s, the atmosphere of the street was completely different.

Electric Avenue—as it was so affectionately called—was the epicentre of Calgary's party scene. One block consisted of 22 bars that people packed each day.

The strip first gained recognition in 1986, when the Calgary Flames beat their rival, the Edmonton Oilers, in the National Hockey League playoffs. Places like Bandito's, Coconut Joe's and the Manhattan Club saw massive amounts of people flocking to the block for not just a good

time, but a long time.

A look back at Electric Avenue

Owner of 17th Avenue's Trolley 5 Brewpub, Ernie Tsu, remembers when it was normal for bars to be open and filled with people until 2 a.m. every night of the week.

"The nightlife back then was definitely night and day to the nightlife now," he says.

Decades ago, Tsu worked at many locations on the infamous Electric Avenue. He credits the strip's success to Calgary's mayor at the time.

"Back when Ralph Klein was around, he wanted to almost turn Calgary into a little mini Vegas," says Tsu.

With the popularity of Electric Avenue came the typical hiccups familiar to those in the hospitality industry—brawls, over-consumption of liquor and the police being a constant presence on the street.

By the time the mid-90s rolled around, fights were a regular occurrence, and crime was up by 90 per cent. The Calgary Police Service described the avenue as a "place to go for a good time where the rules of the city no longer applied."

In 1994, Calgary's city council began to reshape 11th Avenue's purpose, leading to major zoning changes that prevented any new clubs

from opening after one would close. Their goal was to turn it into an artsy street filled with galleries, furniture stores and independent shops.

The street that had once exploded onto the scene would slowly fizzle out into oblivion. In 1999, Coconut Joe's was the last bar to shut down, and with it went the high energy of Electric Avenue.

Exit Sandman, enter the 2000s

Though Electric Avenue was gone for good, there were still issues in the nightlife that lingered after it.

In the early 2000s, when the Cowboys Dance Hall first opened, there was still an incessant culture of binge drinking that not just the city, but also the province, was attempting to forgo.

Many places would have deals such as 10-cent highballs, 50-cent shots and other egregious prices that some would argue would encourage patrons to drink heavily and constantly. Even cities such as Winnipeg and Edmonton reported that their nightlife would get out of control from these deals.

It wasn't until 2008 that Alberta implemented laws that capped alcohol prices and set minimum prices bars and restaurants can charge for certain drinks. Currently,

an ounce of liquor in Alberta has a minimum price of \$2.75—making a 10-cent shot a thing of the past.

Between drink deals and downtown destruction, the concept of a street like this is almost uncanny in the present day, where many laws stand in the way of letting clubbing in Calgary be what it once was.

What a night out in Calgary looks like now

Today, weeknight drinking is rare, and the establishments tend to be more polished, featuring cocktail bars and sit-down pubs.

Nightclubs are still present but not as prevalent. Places such as the renovated Cowboys Dance Hall, Commonwealth Bar and Stage and Ranchman's Cookhouse and Dancehall have that vibrancy first established in the 1980s. What's different is how they've been dispersed throughout Calgary.

Even the streets that are argued to have replaced Electric Avenue, such as 17th Avenue or Stephen Avenue, don't bring in the same crowd. New practices like cover charges and the lack of actual dance floors make going out feel more casual than a big event.

Tsu argues that the

pandemic has had a major impact on how the younger generation hits the town, with businesses having to comply with social distancing laws and government-mandated curfews in the early 2020s.

"What has changed is [that] the nightlife is just pinned down to Thursday, Friday and Saturdays," says Tsu.

Bars and restaurants don't stay open until 2 a.m. on a daily basis as they did back in the day. Most places shut at 12 a.m. during the week, and even then, not many people make it till closing time.

Though there are still crowds, cheap drink deals, and live music, the shift in culture has altered people's evening plans.

The responsible driver's winter survival guide

How to prepare for the unpredictable roads ahead

Karra Smith

Staff Writer



Snow coats the suburbs of Calgary on Dec. 4, 2016. Photo courtesy of Daniel / Wikimedia Commons

Driving in the winter can be intimidating, no matter how skilled you are behind the wheel. Snow and ice can make road conditions hazardous and increase the number of vehicle collisions.

Such was the case in Calgary so far this winter. According to an email statement from the Calgary Police Service (CPS), 52 per cent of all collisions reported in November and December 2025 occurred when there was slush, snow or ice on the roads.

Although the chances of a collision are unpredictable, in the event of an accident, it is best to stay calm and be prepared.

What to keep in your vehicle

Although in emergency situations, you can never be too careful, and the more stuff you have, the better. Here are some of the basics recommended by the Canadian Automobile Association (CAA), Canadian Safety Supplies and the Government of Alberta.

With Canadian winters getting pretty chilly, it's always good to keep extra

snow gear—coats, gloves, toques, boots and blankets—for a little warmth. As well as a candle and some matches for an extended heat source.

On the safety side, it's a good idea to make sure you have a flashlight, first-aid kit, multitool, booster cables, tow rope, a snow brush, and a bag of abrasive material for traction (TIP: avoid sidewalk salt, as it may rust your vehicle). It is also suggested to have reflective triangles you can place outside your car to alert other drivers as to where you are.

If you find yourself in a situation where your vehicle is stuck beyond the point of shovelling out your wheels and rocking back and forth, the CAA recommends calling for assistance and hanging tight. Make sure your tailpipe is not blocked by anything to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning, and roll a window down slightly to keep fresh air flowing and to keep you awake.

What to do after a collision

Unless you have been in the situation before, it's hard to know what to do in the

event of an accident—but here is the key information broken down, according to the Government of Alberta and CPS.

Not all accidents need to be reported to the police. If anyone is injured, if one or more of the parties involved does not have a

driver's license or proof of insurance, or if damages exceed \$5,000, contact authorities immediately. If the vehicles are not drivable, CPS recommends calling its non-emergency line at (403) 266-1234.

Before you proceed with exchanging insurance, safety

is key. Make sure your hazard lights are on, that you and the other vehicle are pulled off to a safe location, and that you do not stand between or behind either vehicle.

Take pictures of the damage on the scene and get the insurance and contact information from anyone involved in the accident. If there are any witnesses, collect their contact information as well. For a better idea of what you should gather, check out the Government of Alberta auto collision steps and worksheet.

Call your insurance company as soon as possible and report what happened.

Finally, arrange for any repairs your vehicle may need following the incident.

“Do not admit fault, take responsibility, or sign any statements. Do not pay for damages or make promises at the scene. Never agree to forget the collision or accept money to settle it,” reads the Alberta government's website.

Keep calm, stay safe and drive responsibly.



Keeping safety items like flashlights or first-aid kits is essential for winter driving. Photo courtesy of Kendra Williams / Wikimedia Commons

still stories

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Portrait of the Scott Monument in Edinburgh, Scotland. Photo by Emma Marshall



Canadian pop band Men Without Hats performs at Mount Royal University's Bella Concert Hall on Jan. 20, 2026. Photo by Mia Smith



Portrait of the Scott Monument in Edinburgh, Scotland. Photo by Emma Marshall



Lone duck sits beside the river at the Inglewood Bird Sanctuary in Calgary on May 26, 2025. Photo by Greg Derer

Canada and the Middle East: A new era of air travel

Services to 'city of the future' set to expand trade, transportation opportunities

Julia Finot

Staff Writer



Aerial view of downtown Dubai on April 15, 2018. Photo courtesy of Christoph Schulz / Unsplash

In an effort to expand the aviation industry, Canada is strengthening its travel ties with the Middle East.

Calgary and Vancouver hope to join the already established services in Toronto and Montreal, flying to a couple of Middle Eastern hot spots, following a new air transport agreement signed by the Canadian government on Dec. 1, 2025.

The agreement between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia increased the number of passenger and cargo flights between the nations.

With Dubai being considered an international travel hub, the new air transport agreements, infrastructure and flying partnerships mean Canadians will have more international destinations than ever before.

Trapezing trade transportation

For flights to the UAE, the maximum number of commercial flights per week is 35, while service to Saudi Arabia allows up to 14 per week. Both of the agreements permit unlimited cargo transportation.

With top exports such as defence products, vehicle parts, machinery and

pharmaceuticals, cargo will strengthen Canada's trading ties with the Middle East. In return, Canada receives advancements in engineering and aerospace technologies, as well as in seafood and agriculture.

"The expanded air transport agreements with Saudi Arabia and the UAE will open new access for Canadians to key destinations in the Middle East," said Maninder Sidhu, Canada's minister of international trade. "By deepening our commercial ties with long-standing partners, we are creating new opportunities for Canadian businesses and exporters to grow, meet rising global demand, and build lasting connections."

Dubai builds biggest airport yet

Dubai has quickly expanded its travel industry. It is commonly referred to as the 'centre of the world' because it lies between Asia, Africa and Europe. It has become an essential stop on international travel routes.

In April 2024, Dubai announced the expansion of Al Maktoum International Airport, also known as Dubai World Central (DWC).

Situated just outside the city, it was originally developed as a cargo hub.

The expansion is the biggest single planned urban development project in southern Dubai and is set to include over 400 gates, with over 260 million travellers expected annually. The five-runway project, estimated at 70 square kilometres, is intended to replace Dubai International Airport once complete.

Today, the world's busiest airport is Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, which reported serving 108 million passengers in 2024.

DWC is designed to handle more than double the passenger volume in Atlanta, which has only 192 gates, and it most often sees mid-sized jets with seating for up to 330 passengers. Meanwhile, Dubai most frequently sees jumbo jets such as an Airbus A380. These airliners hold up to 550 passengers per flight.

Upgrades to Dubai's airport infrastructure come as the outdated Dubai International Airport continues an upward trend in volume, having handled 5.5 million seats in the first month of 2026—a four per cent increase compared to last January.

Still, Dubai's current airport ranks second to

Atlanta as the world's busiest, and with bigger jets and more gates, the new airport will quickly become a mega hub for travellers when it opens in 2032.

Connecting Canadians

With Dubai quickly becoming a gateway to the world, Canada's airlines are capitalising on the opportunity.

The luxury, Dubai-based airline, Emirates, decided to move forward with its partnership with Air Canada late last year. First launched in December 2022, the two companies signed a three-year agreement to become Aeroplan partners.

Aeroplan is Air Canada's loyalty program, where flyers can accumulate points through purchases, which later grant them discounts on hotel bookings and rental cars, upgrades on flight packages, and bookings with partner airlines.

For travellers, the Aeroplan partnership offers easy baggage transfers, frequent flyer benefits (for either airline) and a singular itinerary.

This partnership has added more than 225 new destinations worldwide and strengthened travel ties

between Canada and the Middle East. The extended partnership will last until 2032, aligning itself with the opening of the first phase at DWC.

Canadians can book a single ticket from either Toronto or Montreal and stop over in Dubai to access far corners of the earth.

For Canadians, this makes travelling hassle-free rather than requiring multiple layovers with multiple airlines.

With WestJet operating long-haul flights to countries like Japan and Brazil, the market for international travel in Calgary is quickly climbing. Air Canada can add more flights to Calgary, and this expansion opens the door not just to Calgarians but to everyone in the Prairies.

With the expanded air transport agreement, construction of DWC and the extended partnership, Canadians can reach further destinations more efficiently. Thanks to the benefits of Aeroplan and faster long-haul travel options, Canadians will be closer than ever to the exciting world of aviation and international travel.

Opinion: How the strong do what they will

Analyzing America's invasion of Venezuela's impact on world politics

Ryan Montgomery

Staff Writer

Standing high in the sky in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Mark Carney made a speech to the World Economic Forum on Jan. 20, where he sounded more like a prophet and less like a former banker: like he was gazing into a crystal ball instead of a balance sheet.

"It seems that every day we're reminded that we live in an era of great power rivalry," he said. "That the rules-based order is fading, that the strong can do what they can, and the weak must suffer what they must."

For all of human existence, the relationship between different tribes, nations, and empires has been characterized by strength or its lack. And for the past 80 years, the international system has been governed by something rare in history: rules.

This was the norm for essentially all of human history. The idea of an 'international' law was absurd, law and rules were something that states imposed on their citizens, not something that applied to states themselves.

That was, until after the Second World War, when a new system was built from the ashes of the old, one based on international law. Amid the rubble of Europe and Asia rose a system in which all states were equal based on their inherent right

to exist, not based on the strength of their armies.

A system where disputes between states would be hashed out on the United Nations' (UN) debate floor, not on the battlefield. Where democracy, free trade, and universal law would usher in an equal new order.

This was a shift so seismic in international relations that it's almost difficult to explain how unique the past 80 years have been. The idea that bigger states shouldn't bully smaller ones, that every state, no matter the strength or size, is equal, was nothing short of revolutionary.

Origins of the rules-based system

China, a superpower of 1.4 billion individuals, is equal under the law to Micronesia, a minuscule island nation with about the same population as Red Deer, Alta. This was a radical idea in diplomacy.

From this change, international borders calcified, and the age of conquerors was over. The new campaigns were to be made on the field of commerce, not battle. Countries focused on integration rather than competition, and traded conquest for global prosperity.

The last time such an international regime was attempted was after the

First World War, when the League of Nations, a sort of prototype of the UN, sought to govern the world based on international law rather than strength. This system, however, was deeply flawed and met its end at the hands of dictatorial expansionism.

There is a principle in debate known as Godwin's Law. This axiom states that as an online argument goes on, the chance of someone bringing up the Nazis to prove a point exponentially increases. The comparison between Adolf Hitler and President Donald Trump is used to such a nauseating extent that I feel lazy even insinuating it. But, if you'll indulge me for just a bit, I swear I have a good reason for doing so.

In 1936, Hitler demanded from the Western allies of Britain and France the green light to annex the Sudetenland, an area of Czechoslovakia (modern-day Czechia) inhabited by a majority of ethnic Germans.

With Hitler threatening invasion, the Allies held a conference in Munich to negotiate with the Germans, and by negotiate, I mean they gave Hitler everything he wanted.

The Munich Conference is famous because Britain and France failed to uphold the post-First World War balance of power. They tried to meet military force with diplomatic

negotiation, and they bent like reeds in the wind.

Munich is important because it was the time and the place where Hitler learned he could take what he wanted, and no one would stop him.

For President Trump, that revelation came at Caracas.

America takes a new path

On Jan. 3, the American army attacked the Venezuelan capital of Caracas and kidnapped the country's president, Nicolas Maduro.

This was not the first time the U.S. has ever invaded a Latin American country and replaced its leader, far from it in fact. The difference between those varied 'interventions' and this one is the U.S. government's justification for it: they didn't have one.

In the Americans' previous escapades in Latin America, they always had a reason. Whether it was a weak justification, they at least felt the need to construct a narrative beyond 'we wanted it, so we took it.' Whenever a state sought to violate international law, it had to be rigorously justified. The facade of the rules-based order was always carefully maintained.

Even the blatantly dictatorial Russian President Vladimir Putin made up altruistic justifications for

his imperialist invasion of Ukraine, claiming that they were invading Ukraine to protect the rights of the local Russian population and to 'de-Nazify' the country. Both noble goals on paper, which crumble under the slightest scrutiny.

Compare this to Trump's justifications for Caracas, which were that the U.S. would "run" Venezuela with the explicit purpose of selling its oil reserves to American corporations.

When the U.S. president is more blatant about his conquests than the Russian dictator, that's when you know that the rules don't matter anymore.

In response, no one did anything. Not the UN, not other countries, nor the American Congress. America, the steward and leader of the old world system, invaded a sovereign nation for expansionist ideals, and there were no consequences. Like the Roman god Saturn, who devoured his own son, the United States destroyed its own world order.

In the weeks since the invasion, the president has significantly ramped up his sabre-rattling rhetoric against Canada and Greenland. On Greenland, Trump said that he "no longer felt an obligation purely to peace," and that Greenland is "our territory." Could you imagine a democratically elected leader saying that 10 years ago?

The question that remains is, now that the world system is dead, what will rise in its place? A world of competing great powers carving up the world like a roast at a dinner party?

Canadians have long prided ourselves on our peaceful manner and renunciation of all things martial and bellicose. But in a world where words don't stop bullets anymore, where we can't count on the true meaning of friendship to protect our borders, what is to be done?

Maybe the only thing to do is keep your chin down, have your feet shoulder-width apart, and put up your dukes.



Prime Minister Mark Carney speaks at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on Jan. 20, 2025. Photo courtesy of Denis Balibouse / Reuters

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From student-centred concerts to a cultural cornerstone

What happened to live music for students at Mount Royal University?

Avarie Mckinnon-Forgeron

Staff Writer

Mount Royal University's (MRU) reputation as a major live music venue in Calgary was not accidental. It was formed through sustained institutional support, clear cultural priorities and a student body that valued live performance.

Since the establishment of Mount Royal College, music has played a central role in defining the priorities of the administration. The Conservatory was formed as one of the institution's original divisions and accounted for a significant portion of early student enrolment. This legacy shaped how MRU engaged with the arts and explains why live music was a key aspect of campus life.

When Wyckham House opened in 1987, the space became a thriving venue hosting regular concerts for students. Over time, the student centre evolved into four different renovated bars and was the primary site of student-centred live music on campus for decades.



MRU was known for hosting famous bands for students to enjoy. Photo courtesy of Facebook / @samrubuzz

The legacy evolved as the school hosted bands that went on to have great success in the broader Canadian music scene. These included Dear Rouge, Arkells, Headstones, 54-40, Nickelback, Feist, Tokyo Police Club, Mother Mother, and Tegan and Sara.

These performances reinforced MRU's reputation as an institution where emerging and established

Canadian bands could connect directly with students. The live music events brought students together and facilitated a student-driven arts culture.

Another major milestone for live music at MRU was in 2015 when the Bella Concert Hall opened. This addition to the campus symbolised the university's commitment to preserving the arts in

Calgary. The Bella Concert Hall strengthened MRU's institutional commitment to music, marking a shift at the university toward more formalised and curated performances.

Now, at West Gate Social and Wyckham House, students continue to enjoy campus events. These spaces enhance campus life and remain a staple of the student experience, even as live music plays a less central role.

While MRU continues to host concerts, the form and purpose of live music on campus has changed. Student-centred music festivals and intimate live shows have become less common and this shift reflects a broader change in university culture.

Today, the social experience of these events often takes precedence over the live music for students. What makes an event successful now depends on convenience, scale and digital engagement. Large informal live music events on campus are unpredictable, resource-intensive and attendance-

dependent.

From an institutional standpoint, uncertainty about student turnout makes it difficult to justify investing in informal concerts. If attendance cannot be guaranteed, allocating limited resources to live music becomes a risk many organisations are reluctant to take.

Economic realities have also played a role in fewer live performances for students at MRU. An important live-music event for students at the university was UFest, which attracted larger, more popular bands. Established as a welcome back festival and barbecue for students, the event was last held in 2017. Although UFest was a popular event in the past, student-focused events have since diversified.

Live music at MRU has not disappeared. Rather, its role has shifted from a student-driven arts culture to a more selective and institutionally managed presence shaped by changing student priorities and economic realities.



MRU was known for hosting famous bands for students to enjoy. Photo courtesy of Facebook / @samrubuzz

OUT'N ABOUT

Winter Frost Indigenous Market

In collaboration with Chinook Blast, the Winter Frost Indigenous Market features over 40 artists from local communities. From handmade beadwork to powwow demonstrations, the market brings community and Indigenous culture into focus. From Feb. 6 to 8, with free admission all weekend.

Calgary Tattoo and Arts Festival

Back for another year, the Calgary Tattoo and Arts Festival is set to return from Feb. 6 to 8 at the Big Four Roadhouse. Focusing on local artists and a range of styles, the event features walk-up tattoo artists and exhibits available for purchase. Tickets available at albertatattooshows.com.

Mecha Mayhem

The largest robotics competition in Canada, Mecha Mayhem returns from Feb. 6 to 8. Including more than 200 teams from all over Canada, the tournament challenges teams to go head-to-head for the championship title. The event is free to attend, with spectator registration available at mechamayhem.ca.

Groundhog Day at The GRAND

To celebrate the end of January, The GRAND presents another classic film, Harold Ramis' *Groundhog Day*. Partnered with The GRAND, Portland Street Pizza will be serving pizza for purchase when the doors open at 5:30 p.m. Tickets are available at thegrandyyc.ca, starting at \$15.

Pulling teeth with TimberFang

How the band is turning local roots into something loud and unforgettable

Emma Voelpel

Staff Writer



TimberFang performing at The Palomino Smokehouse. Photo by Daryl Weasel Child

After a two-year hiatus, the Calgary and Siksika Nation-based alternative rock band TimberFang is back on stage. Popping up at local venues, the band has brand-new music and a promise to deliver recorded tracks to their fans.

The three-piece band consisting of lead singer Lyle Breaker, bassist Justin Wolfleg, and drummer Shane Rowse made their return to The Palomino Smokehouse this month. The performance marked their second show since taking an extended break from performing live.

Who is TimberFang?

Having loved music their whole lives, TimberFang found their sound in different eras and genres.

Breaker traces his influences back to the explosion of the early '90s grunge era and the indie-rock scene of the early 2000s. Citing bands like Nirvana, Soundgarden, and Mudhoney as what gave him his sound.

"I grew up in that era right when hair metal was dying out, and the Seattle scene was taking over," says Breaker. "Then in the early 2000s, I got into all the indie bands, Interpol, Yeah Yeah Yeahs, The Strokes. That all shaped how I write."

Wolfleg credits his dad's taste for '70s and '80s classic rock that first got him into music.

As for Rowse, a child of the '90s, he found his love for music in the surge of alternative rock that overtook every radio station.

"I feel like these guys are more into the niche kind of music," says Rowse. "I like the heavier, more mainstream kind of stuff."

Despite having different musical backgrounds, they managed to find a sound that encapsulates all their niches. This blend of influences gives TimberFang its distinctive edge—music that feels both familiar yet unconventional, dynamic yet grounded.

"It's very alternative, kind of funky, kind of grungy," says Breaker.

"There's also some clean parts where it's like the calm before the storm."

Beginnings

The band initially developed in 2015 under the name The West End Rangers, consisting of Breaker,

Wolfleg, and a few of their childhood friends. The band had a more metal sound and would play in various bars around Calgary before they disbanded a few months later.

Not wanting to give up on their music, Breaker and Wolfleg—along with bandmate Gerrence Sitting Eagle founded TimberFang in 2018. It was then that they adopted a more alt-rock sound.

The band toured and played at local bars and music festivals in the Canadian West from the late 2010s till after the pandemic. However, in 2022, their bandmate Gerrence unexpectedly passed away.

"It was pretty devastating because Gerrence was not only a bandmate, but a brother and a real good friend of ours," says Breaker. "We were kind of just licking our wounds there for a bit and kind of wondering, 'should we continue with music or not?'"

Post-pandemic

After taking some time off, Breaker soon reconnected with his former coworker, Rowse. The two had worked together at a fuel yard in Carseland, Alta., a few years prior, and Breaker remembered Rowse's interest in music and performing.

"A few years later, we ran

into each other again," says Breaker. "You meet people for a reason, you know?"

Breaker posed the question to Rowse, and before they knew it, TimberFang was performing live venues again, with Rowse taking a seat behind the drums.

"I knew I wanted to keep playing. Once we started rehearsing everything just clicked," says Breaker.

Second hiatus

TimberFang continued playing festivals such as Sled Island, the Big Winter Classic, and MomentsFest before they took another hiatus in mid-2024 when bandmates Wolfleg and Rowse became first-time fathers.

At the end of 2025, the band made their grand return to the stage and came back swinging with a gig at the Rockin' 4 Dollar\$ festival.

"There was like a guy crowdsurfing," says Breaker. "We definitely generated a little bit of buzz off that initial show."

Their return to the stage at Rockin' 4 Dollar\$ got them their most recent gig at The Palomino, where they performed alongside local bands like the Emblematics and Little Super Dangerous.

"The crowds are always amazing, the sound techs take great care to make sure everything feels right," says Rowse. "It's just a good vibe

all around."

What's next for TimberFang

The upcoming year is looking to be a big one for the group.

The band has already begun performing new songs, and they explain how they're eager to get into the studio to finally record some of their work for the fans.

The band's sound continues to evolve, and Breaker finds he's only finding more inspiration for his writing.

"I find my songwriting has always started off very abstract, but as I progress as a musician, I like my songs to be a bit more personal and a way to connect with people," says Breaker. "I find music is always about people."

Though parenthood has made it difficult for them to meet up and perform more often, the bandmates make a point of meeting weekly to rehearse.

"It's just an effect of being a parent, it kind of matures you," says Rowse. "That kind of takes place in your music."

Despite the transformations, name changes, and challenges the group has endured, the things they can always rely on are their sense of humour and their love for music.

The importance of local talent

YYC Songwriter Showdown is back with an expanded list of venues and fresh Calgary talent

Lacey Holowaty

Contributor

After audiences packed Inglewood's Cafe Gravity during its first run in 2024, the YYC Songwriter Showdown is back this February for another year of showcasing local musical talent.

The YYC Songwriter Showdown will take place over 12 weeks, starting on Saturday, Feb. 7, with the finale on May 2. It will be at various locations across the city, including Cafe Gravity in Inglewood, the National Music Centre, the Attic Bar and Stage, and Festival Hall.

The event consists of four rounds, with the pool of artists getting smaller as they are eliminated through a combination of audience and judge voting.

The president of Blue Willow Entertainment (BWE) and the main presenter of the competition Seth Anderson says he didn't expect the Showdown to be a recurring event when they put it on the first year.

According to Anderson, the event started as a partnership between BWE and Cafe Gravity with the idea that bringing in musical talent would generate more revenue for the business. They had also received funding from the Calgary Arts Foundation.

Anderson's initial idea was to simply book different musical acts to perform each Saturday for 12 weeks—then, they'd compare the 12 weeks with music to 12 weeks without to see the economic impact.

But they wanted to do something unique. So they pivoted and came up with the idea for a March Madness-style bracket tournament in which local songwriters could take the stage and showcase their artistry to a live audience.

The first Showdown kicked off with a Round of 32, which consisted of four different Saturdays hosting eight performers per show. Following that was the Sweet Sixteen, which also lasted four weeks with only four performances per show. The third round, called The Elite Eight, went on for two weeks and gave way to a single event showcasing the Final Four. Finally, The Showdown came, where the last two artists prepared a full set to present to the audience and judges.

According to Anderson, each event filled the cafe, with the final performance having the best turnout of all.

"I don't think you could've

crammed another person in there," Anderson says.

The success of the first Songwriter Showdown meant Cafe Gravity was able to double its topline revenue in those 12 weeks, according to Anderson.

"It made all the sense in the world to bring it back," he says.

One of the biggest changes to this year's event is the venues. According to Anderson, many of the artists performing got their start at Cafe Gravity, so it made the most sense to start there again this year, even as the competition expands.

Calgary-based songwriter and musician Devin Foster is returning to the Showdown this year after performing in last year's event and making it to the second round.

"Last year's experience was, in one word, riveting," Foster says.

According to Foster, while his experience last year was anxiety-inducing, it was also



CELIN, a local singer-songwriter, playing King Eddy.
Photo by Mia Smith

incredibly rewarding. He says the connections he made during his time performing in the Showdown—both judge and fellow artist alike—have made the most impact on him as he continues his music career.

Going into this year's event, Foster says his motives are less focused on winning, as his goals have shifted to furthering his connections in Calgary's music scene.

While sharing original songs can be particularly nerve-racking, Foster says he embraces the vulnerability, as most of his songs explore his own struggles with mental health.

"Every time I get up on stage, I'm accessing that vulnerable part of myself, and I always think that makes me sing more passionately about the subject because it is personal to me," Foster says.

This year, Foster will be performing in the second week of the Round of 32, which also happens to take place on Valentine's Day. He's looking forward to expanding his comfort zone and exploring more "lovey-dovey" themes in his second-year debut.

"I made sure that was the date they were putting me on to play because I was like, 'I write too many sad songs. Give me a chance to like, put out love songs, you know, put me on Valentine's Day,'" he says.

Four artists are eliminated during each week of the Round of 32, which cuts the pool in half before the next round. Eliminations are based 80 per cent on judge scores, while the other 20 per

cent is based on live-audience voting. Foster says the split is great for smaller artists' recognition, as it ensures the event doesn't turn into a "popularity contest."

Kenton Dobrowolski, a Calgary-based music producer with over 15 years of industry experience, is returning as a judge this year for a few of the later dates.

He says the highlight of judging last year's performances was seeing their stripped-back nature. According to him, a good song doesn't require elaborate production—usually, vocals and a single instrument like guitar or piano are enough to get him invested. He also says he's a "sucker" for the story behind a song.

"I just love seeing an artist get on stage, shake the nerves, and really just kind of lose themselves in the song," Dobrowolski says.

Dobrowolski says that, in recent years, the music scene in Calgary has experienced a "renaissance." Due to the diversity of genres and niches in the city, the musical community in Calgary used to be divided into subsections, but with emerging events like the Songwriter Showdown, which encourages artists of all genres to come together to share their work, artists are realising the potential Calgary has to offer as a music hot spot.

"And I think that's just so empowering to artists, you know? Just kind of take the power back," he says. "Take over the reins."



Event sponsors Seth Anderson (left), Mackenzie Walsh, Matthew Kramer and Joanne Defoe (right). Photo by Mia Smith

Records refuse to quit

Why vinyls never seem to go out of style

Anais Loeppky

Staff Writer

Despite being entrenched in the digital era, vinyl sales have steadily increased over the past decade. One can't help but wonder why the physical form of media continues to be so popular, even with its impracticalities.

The hidden cost of vinyl

A little-known fact is that records are actually toxic. Since the 1940s, vinyls have been manufactured using PVC—the world's most dangerous plastic. Luckily, the highest risk of exposure is during the actual record pressing, and there is little to no risk when spinning a record in your living room.

Nonetheless, vinyl records still carry significant environmental impacts. The process of pressing a single record releases approximately 1.15 kilograms of carbon dioxide, which adds up to over 140 million kilograms of greenhouse gas every year. However, studies suggest that once a record is played around 20 times, its overall environmental impact becomes lower than that of streaming, making vinyl a more eco-friendly option over time.

Sustainable sound

Even with the sustainable longevity of spinning records, there are more eco-friendly vinyl options available. Good Neighbour is a vinyl company

that produces 100 per cent recyclable records without PVC. The company works to create records using injection moulding, rather than the traditional hydraulic press.

Eco Vinyl is another alternative that has recently become available. This production process can reduce emissions by up to 85 per cent by eliminating the use of natural gas and steam. Instead of traditional PVC, eco vinyl uses PET resin to create a more sustainable product.

More than just music

Despite the known consequences of vinyl records and their production, they remain a popular physical medium backed by a strong, music-loving community. This can be attributed to a number of factors. For starters, many believe that records produce better sound quality, offering a slice of music as it was indeed meant to be heard.

However, the more impactful reason may be the tangible and social aspects of collecting. Physical records—each with unique album art and carefully selected to reflect individual music tastes—offer a more engaging, experiential alternative to streaming. Beyond the records themselves, Facebook groups, record fairs and other community gatherings



Vinyls are the latest vintage trend that has come back to life. Photo by Aiden Johner

bring people together to connect over shared passions and interests.

Inside Calgary's vinyl scene

Blackbyrd Myoozik, the beloved record store on 17th Avenue, offers insight into the city's vinyl culture and what keeps records—and the shops that sell them—so relevant.

Miles Xavier has been working at Blackbyrd for two years and brings with him a deep passion for music and the community that surrounds it.

When asked why people continue to purchase vinyl in an era dominated by streaming services, Xavier

points to the importance of tangibility.

"Being able to hold something in your hand is a big reason," he says, explaining that records offer a sense of ownership that digital platforms cannot.

He recalls how Neil Young removed all his music from Spotify back in 2022, noting how many collectors felt proud to physically own records that could simply disappear from a streaming library. Much like CDs or cassettes, Xavier says vinyls provide a lasting form of ownership—something tactile that can't be taken away.

Xavier doesn't see vinyl as a passing trend. He believes records are a permanent fixture in music culture, saying they have always been cool. According to him, record stores—and records in general—have long served as a foundation of the music industry.

For Xavier,

Calgary's record scene also offers a strong sense of community. He explains that Blackbyrd is particularly focused on jazz and hip-hop, noting that "jazz tends to be overlooked in Calgary." He adds that the store goes the extra mile to represent and support local artists, helping to keep those communities visible and connected.

When asked about the future of vinyl, Xavier says he believes it will always remain relevant.

"There's always this historical thing where vinyl stays permanent—it'll always be cool in a way," he explains.

He adds that many new artists continue to press records, proving that the demand is still very much there.

Despite its environmental flaws and impracticalities, Xavier believes physical media is worth it in every sense.

"There's such a huge sense of ownership," he says, noting that collectors take pride in what they own.

In an era where everything is at our fingertips, there is something romantic about stepping into a local record store and thoughtfully selecting a vinyl. The nostalgia and sense of community shared among music lovers make record collecting something worth holding onto.

"Vinyls become part of people's identity," says Xavier.



Vinyls never go out of style. Photo by Aiden Johner

Burning up at Block Heater

The winter music festival returns to Calgary

Katrina Ebuenga

Staff Writer



Kate Stevens at Block Heater 2025. Photo by Jarrett Edmund

Celebrating the season, Block Heater is a one-way ticket to heat up this winter.

Presented by Calgary Folk Music Festival, Block Heater will illuminate The Confluence in East Village on Feb. 6 and 7, with a kick-off party on Feb. 5 at Festival Hall.

Celebrating its 11th anniversary, the winter festival is making its venue debut at the historic site and parkland. Experience live, outdoor music in a community-bound heated tent, as well as on the surrounding indoor stages.

In charge of curating the memorable weekend, artistic director Kerry Clarke has hand-picked artists from all over North America, emphasising the homegrown talent of Calgary.

“It reflects Calgary’s art scene because we hire a lot of Calgary artists and Alberta artists, putting them on stage with artists from across the country and internationally,” says Clarke. “It’s broad and diverse, and includes a lot of different styles and genres, and we try to cover artists that are newer, as well as artists that have had longer careers.”

With four stages across The Confluence, there are many opportunities to rock along with music makers. However, if the stage isn’t your thing, a small theatre will also showcase short films

crafted by local filmmakers, expanding the creative outlet Block Heater provides for artists.

“There’s a 50-seat theater, and on Friday and Saturday night, we’re showing some really cool short films. Some of them are about skateboarding, some are animated films, some of them are local artists’ films, and so it’s a whole variety,” says Clarke.

With outdoor amenities—such as food trucks, fire pits and a skating rink—that can be accessed free of charge, the weekend will be full of activities to explore.

Clarke describes this year’s focus as “a heartwarming and soul-affirming festival in the middle of winter.”

She explains how they aim to embrace winter activities that are more family-oriented, leaning into the possibilities the festival provides.

With the new format shaping this year’s music programming, Block Heater is also set to be a bigger festival than ever before.

The lineup is packed with bands and solo artists waiting to blaze their talent across the stage. Creating a space that encourages musical and cultural diversity, Block Heater offers a variety of avenues to explore.

“We’re enhancing the scene as well as reflecting it,” says Clarke. “It is very much a

festival of discovery. We try to bring in some people that we see as marquee artists or headliners, and those would be Joel Plaskett, Goldie Boutelier, Fruit Bats, and Jeremy Albino.”

With each artist holding a unique flame, the festival stages will feature 27 different artists, five of whom are Calgary-based.

“We want to have a good gender balance, lots of different genres, lots of Indigenous artists, and some world music artists—a real diversity that reflects the festival and the current times,” says Clarke.

Calgary-based artists to look out for on the stage are Astral Swans, a melancholic indie musician telling compelling narratives through his song; Sargeant X Comrade, a lo-fi duo binding together elements of jazz, soul, funk, and hip-hop into a rich array of sounds, and sean beaver, a Cree techno/electronic artist enticing the crowd with his unique beats.

This year, the festival is split into programming blocks, with full-day passes and festival passes available for purchase starting at \$30. Youth, student and senior discounts are also available on all ticket types.

Plan ahead by using the

Continues on Pg. 18



After a three-year break since his last album, The Kid LAROI released his album *BEFORE I FORGET* on Jan. 9. After scrapping his original project *Watch This!*, LAROI changed directions and released an album following his breakup with fellow artist Tate McRae.

This emotional shift is a big change from his earlier work, but it also shows his growth as an artist, even if the switch-up has left some fans divided.

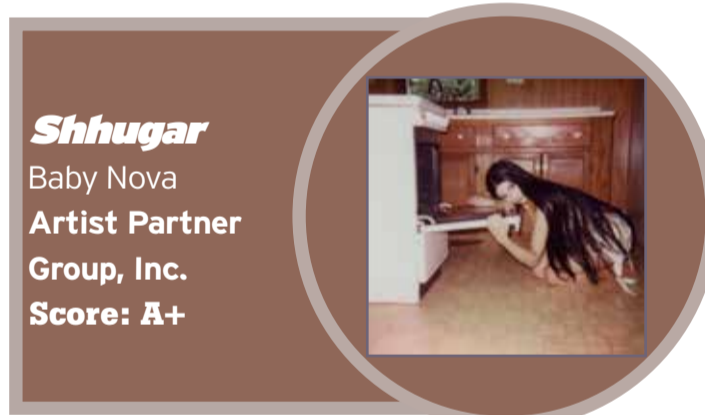
On this album, LAROI stays true to his Australian roots. On “RATHER BE” featuring Lithe, everyone involved is Australian, which adds a personal, homegrown touch to the song. At the same time, *BEFORE I FORGET* is still very clearly a breakup album. Almost every song reflects on his past relationship, showing the different emotions that came with his heartbreak.

Tracks like “A PERFECT WORLD” focus on wanting

things to work and holding onto an ideal version of love, while still acknowledging the issues and shared blame in the relationship. As the album goes on, songs like “NEVER CAME BACK” show LAROI starting to accept that the relationship is over. This change in tone makes the album feel like a story of acceptance.

Overall, *BEFORE I FORGET* feels like a project LAROI made more for himself than for his fans. The album feels honest and personal, even if it’s heavier than what some listeners expected. If you’re going through a breakup yourself, this album could definitely help with coming to terms with those emotions.

— Abby Weidman



On Jan. 16, Baby Nova released her first studio album, *Shhugar*, after only debuting as an artist one year ago. Including tracks she previously released as singles, the album has great diversity, and each song is uniquely its own. Whether you need to break out in dance or sit with your feelings, *Shhugar* has a track for every mood.

One part of the album that stood out to me was how different each track is, but it never felt like the album wasn’t cohesive. Songs like “Broke Bitch Boogie” make you want to go to the club and dance, while tracks like “Killed for Sport” reminisce on cyberbullying and women’s health. Each track has its own aesthetic, showing just how versatile Baby Nova is as an artist and songwriter.

My favorite song off the album was “Dodge.” I loved the lyricism and how it’s packed with metaphors. The song talks about being stuck in a cycle of pain, but still leaves room for different interpretations. This track really highlights the

depth and creativity in Baby Nova’s lyricism and again shows the diversity highlighted throughout the album.

Overall, I really enjoyed *Shhugar*, and it exceeded my expectations. Baby Nova shows a lot of potential and proves she’s a strong female artist who has what it takes to succeed not just in the Canadian music industry, but to break through in the U.S. as well.

— Abby Weidman

Continued from Pg. 17

schedule to secure a place up close to the highly awaited and loved artists coming to heat the stage.

“It’s an offering in the winter that lightens people’s lives and provides a reprieve from all the craziness going on in the world,” says Clarke.

“It opens people’s ears to different ideas and cultures.”

And if you’re looking for a kick-start to the weekend itself, Block Heater will be working alongside Chinook Blast on Jan. 30, hosting a free outdoor showcase at Eau Claire Plaza featuring performances by L’omelette and Tribe Artist Society.

“I think that we provide something unique, and anytime someone’s introduced to a new art form or new artist, it can be really wonderful for them and for the artists,” says Clarke.



Block Heater is known for showcasing local, national, and international talent, like the Calgary-based band Sunglaciers. Photo by Jarrett Edmund

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One city, one rink: The Crowchild Classic returns



Over the past 12 seasons, MRU and UofC have met on neutral ice at the Scotiabank Saddledome to battle it out in one of the most intense games of the season...

Continues on Pg. 20

Heated rivalry hits the dome

Men's playoff race at boiling point ahead of Crowchild Classic

Naomi Campbell

Staff Writer

Continued from Pg. 19

The Crowchild Classic pulls friends, family, fellow students, and even the general public from all over Calgary and the rest of Canada. On Thursday, Jan. 29, the two teams will go head-to-head in hopes of bringing home bragging rights and adding two more points to the win column of the season. Last year's match-up sold out the Scotiabank Saddledome with a record-breaking 13,139 fans. With tickets selling out more than two weeks before this year's game, the two schools are looking to set yet another record in 2026.

The Mount Royal University (MRU) men's hockey team is heading into this year's Crowchild Classic coming off a 4-0 loss to the University of Calgary (UofC) Dinos in last year's clash as they aim to return to the win column for the first time since their shootout win in 2024. Heading into this Crowchild weekend, the Dinos hold the number one spot in the Eastern Division, with the Cougars sitting in the middle of the pack after a shaky start to their regular season.

Veteran fourth-year defenceman, Remy Aquilon, has taken the year by storm, with a noticeable jump in his game and confidence alongside it. Aquilon plans to leave everything out on the ice heading into his final Crowchild Classic.

"It is my last year, so I want to leave everything I got out there," Aquilon says. "I think the coaches have been super [good], and the team is super tight this year, with a lot of depth as well. That helps, as well as playing with good players, so I'm pretty excited and want to give it my all."

The Crowchild Classic is as memorable a game for the athletes as it is for students at MRU and UofC. After breaking the U SPORTS attendance record last year, the game is the biggest moment of their regular season, but the fans are what make it an energised party. One of Aquilon's favourite moments comes from his first year and speaks volumes about the energy from the fanbase littered throughout the stands.

"In my first year, I can't remember what song it was,



The Cougars and Dinos are tied for points in the East Division of Canada West, meaning that this Crowchild Classic weekend could have serious implications for playoff positioning. Photo courtesy of MRU Cougars

but they were playing it, and then it turned off, but everyone was still singing," Aquilon says. "It was still so loud."

For rookie Alex Izyk, he goes into the night not knowing what to expect other than the stories he's heard from his fellow teammates. From playing in the British Columbia Hockey League (BCHL), he never had the opportunity to play in the Saddledome, but he has played in some larger tournaments and arenas in his time in junior hockey.

"Coming into the team, the guys tell you just how exciting it is, and how the schools rally around it, with the cultures, the fun of it, and the bit of shenanigans that goes along with it," Izyk says.

"Other than the playoffs, it's the biggest game of the year. So it's pretty

exciting, and the adrenaline, it's a game like no other in U SPORTS, so I'm excited for that."

Izyk has been an integral part of the team's defensive core, but has found his way on the forward lineups as a left winger. Izyk's ability to step up to play different positions is his way of showing adaptability and team-first mentality on and off the ice.

"Obviously we have some pretty good [defence], and I was like, 'if you ever need me up front and there's not much room back there, I'm happy.' I'm glad to play forward," Izyk says.

Similarly, Tanner Komzak and Ty Gibson are heading into this weekend with only teammates' stories. Gibson, who previously played for the Everett Silvertips in the WHL,

jumps back onto Saddledome ice, which should fit to be a familiar space for him. For Komzak, who played his junior career in the Alberta Junior Hockey League (AJHL) and the BCHL, the Saddledome is a new arena he can add to his collection of ice surfaces he's played on. Yet the size and fan energy won't be too different after playing in one of the nicest arenas, with the University of North Dakota, over the last two seasons.

The Cougars roster for the 2025-26 season is stacked with veteran players, icons that spent the last four to five years building MRU's now-legendary reputation. Defencemen like Team Captain Kyle Walker and Michael Ladyman, goalies Shane Farkas and Riley Sims, and forwards Spencer Moe and Blake Stevenson leave their hearts and souls on the ice at Flames Community Arena every season. With it being their last and final Crowchild and one of the last at the Saddledome, alongside Aquilon, the plan to come out on top is strong for every one of them.

The teams have met four times this year, splitting their matchups in a heated race to the Canada West Playoffs. Both Izyk and Aquilon shared their insights from the previous meetings heading into the weekend.

"We've wished for a better outcome both weekends. We're always hoping for the sweep every time, and I think that last game kind of gave us a taste of what we can do," Izyk says.

"It's tough because I thought we played pretty well both games. Just the one game we lost in the shootout. So it's unfortunate, but we always bounce back the next game," Aquilon says.

This Cougars group has worked hard to earn a playoff position in Canada West. With the grit and determination to make a run at finals once again, this would be for redemption after losing in game three to the University of Saskatchewan Huskies in 2024-25.

Saddled up for revenge

MRU women looking for redemption and first Crowchild win since 2023

Naomi Campbell

Staff Writer



The Cougars hold the top spot in Canada West's East Division, but will need to handle business against the Dinos at the Crowchild Classic to stay in the lead. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @dinoswhky

The MRU women's hockey team has had a groundbreaking start to their season, sitting first in the Eastern Conference and second in the Canada West league, just behind the University of British Columbia (UBC). They head into the Crowchild weekend after losing last year's tilt 1-2 in a shootout.

Fifth-year veteran and Team Captain Kaia Borbandy is showing up to the weekend with excitement for her final Crowchild Classic.

"I'm really looking forward to soaking in my last Crowchild, taking in the atmosphere for the last time, and just enjoying the experience with my teammates. Every year feels unique, but this year I just want to take it all in and enjoy playing in front of such a passionate crowd," Borbandy says.

In those five years, she has been fortunate enough to play with her younger sister, Abbey Borbandy, for the past two seasons. The two play different positions, with Abbey on defence and Kaia as a forward, but are known to play off each other's energy and share tips and tricks from their opposing skillsets on the

ice.

"Even though we play different positions, we always seem to find each other on the ice. We feed off each other's energy and play in a connected way that's hard to describe. I know I can always lean on her, both on and off the ice," Abbey says.

Second-year forward Lyvia Butz is no stranger to the atmosphere of the Crowchild Classic, as her sister MacKenzie Butz played her entire university career with MRU as one of the top defencemen.

"I was pretty young, so I don't really remember it that well, but I just remember the atmosphere being crazy. It was so cool, and now just the roles are reversed, she's in the alumni box watching," Lyvia says.

For the female athletes, this is one of the biggest stages they'll ever have the chance to play on. Lyvia believes the atmosphere at her first game last year was very different from any game she's played in.

"We kind of started out with a smaller crowd, but then as the game went on it got packed in there, just got loud. I've never had anything like that before, so that was different, and even just the

nerves before, kind of like past tournaments, like big games," Lyvia says.

With the women having met UofC four times this season, MRU has won three out of four games.

"I think we should probably stick to like our normal weekend because not getting too anticipated for it and just getting focused on the crowd, the new atmosphere, and just sticking to our game, playing like we have been, which will hopefully get us the win this year," Lyvia says.

"Coming off a few really strong weekends, I think our group is in a great place. We're ready to have a strong couple weeks of practice, and I feel confident in our ability to win the Classic on Thursday night.

"If we continue playing the way we have been and keep building, we'll put ourselves in a great position," Kaia says.

The women started the season with a larger group of rookie players, after losing key members of their U SPORTS National Tournament-winning team, like goalie Kaitlyn Ross and forwards Athena Hauck and Aliya Jomha. With new additions and tough veteran losses, the women have not let that affect how they show up and prove

to the other teams that they are a force to be reckoned with.

Rookie Isa MacPhee has taken the league by storm as a top reliable defenceman, playing 21 of 22 games this season, putting up her first Canada West goal on Jan. 10, to put the Cougars ahead 3-2 for a beautiful regulation win to start off the 2026 half of the season. Keyana Bert has also been a strong addition to the forward core this year, playing alongside Lyvia and connecting with her for a handful of points to put the Cougars ahead of the Dinos all season.

Veteran forward Allee Gerrard and second-year defenceman Breanne Comte have been a part of the large growth inside of Cougars Women's hockey program on and off the ice. Gerrard was a part of the U SPORTS championship team back in 2022-23, and has accumulated almost 50 points in her career in under 100 games.

Comte joined the roster in 2024-25 and made her mark on the blue line. She finally banked her first CanadaWest goal against the University of Saskatchewan on Jan. 17 in a 5-1 regulation win. Comte is known for being a

stay-at-home defender, but finally added a new stat to the scoresheet.

After falling short to the University of Alberta Pandas in the Canada West semi-finals, the Cougars are aiming for redemption, with hopes of winning their first Canada West Championship.

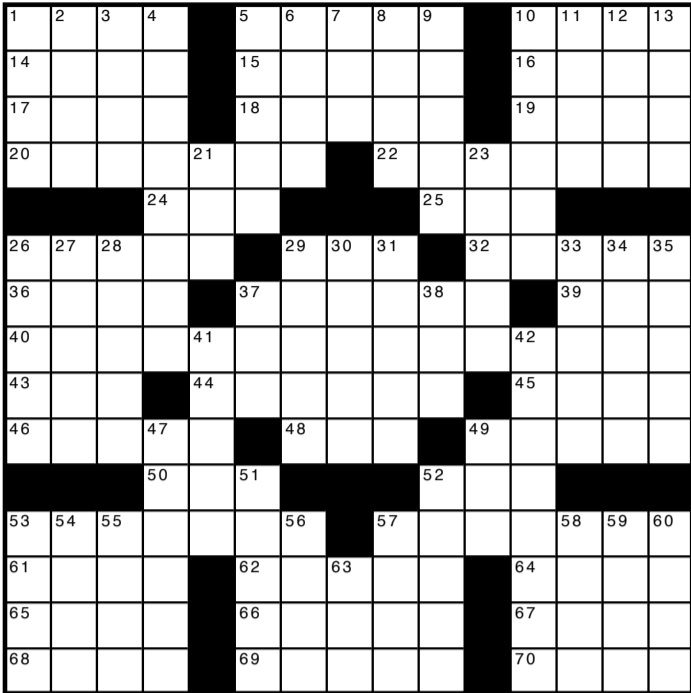
With the Crowchild Classic only two weeks before the end of the regular season, the playoff atmosphere between these two teams is evoking equal parts excitement and stress — more than some other high-stakes matchups, according to Kaia.

"I definitely feel more nervous and anxious for this game than I do during the playoffs. There's always that thought in the back of your mind that everyone is watching, which can feel overwhelming, especially early in the game," Kaia says.

"Playoffs feel different; the focus is entirely on winning and building momentum game by game. During playoffs, nothing else matters except the end goal and it's a different type of hockey all around."

The Crowchild Classic is one of the biggest games of the season for these two teams, and you won't want to miss it. If you didn't get tickets, you can tune into CanadaWest TV and CBC Sports on Thursday, Jan. 29, at 4:30 p.m. for the women's game and 7:30 p.m. for the men's game.

REFLECTOR DIVERSIONS



Crossword puzzles provided by BestCrosswords.com (<https://www.bestcrosswords.com>). Used with permission.

ACROSS

- 1 Good fortune
- 5 Tropical eel
- 10 Tooth
- 14 Casa cookware
- 15 Like Santa
- 16 Golden calf
- 17 The Tower of Pisa does this
- 18 Lab work
- 19 Verdi opera
- 20 Very long

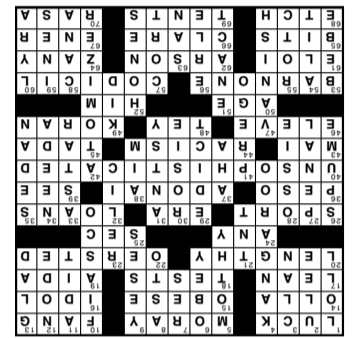
- 22 Unit of magnetic intensity
- 24 At all
- 25 Jiffy
- 26 Recreation
- 29 Memorable time
- 32 Bank offerings
- 36 100 centavos
- 37 Title of reverence for God
- 39 Notice
- 40 Naive
- 43 ___ tai
- 44 Intolerance
- 45 And here it is!
- 46 Parisian pupil
- 48 Mystery writer Josephine
- 49 Sacred text of Islam
- 50 Tree-ring indication
- 52 That guy
- 53 Without exception
- 57 Appendix
- 61 "The Time Machine" race
- 62 Favored crime of pyromaniacs
- 64 Madcap
- 65 Pieces partner
- 66 Irish county
- 67 Steven Chu's cabinet

- dept.
- 68 Engrave with acid
- 69 Camp sights
- 70 Tabula ___

DOWN

- 1 Hang loose
- 2 Peter Fonda role
- 3 Scottish social unit
- 4 Leaping marsupial
- 5 Like wool sweaters in storage
- 6 Follow instructions
- 7 Hi-___ monitor
- 8 Respecting
- 9 Affirmatives
- 10 Ignominious failure
- 11 Passage into a mine
- 12 Lymph ___
- 13 Delighted
- 21 Blasting stuff
- 23 Revered remnant
- 26 Froth
- 27 Pertaining to punishment
- 28 Actor Davis
- 29 Proclamation
- 30 Comic O'Donnell
- 31 Restless
- 33 ___ Is Born
- 34 ___ lift?
- 35 Four-door

- 37 Eureka!
- 38 Align the cross hairs
- 41 Ragu competitor
- 42 Medicinal application spray
- 47 Disappear
- 49 Rib
- 51 Make into law
- 52 Sharpens
- 53 Nixon pal Rebozo
- 54 Landed
- 55 Campus mil. group
- 56 First name in courtroom fiction
- 57 Bud of "Harold and Maude"
- 58 Scene of first miracle
- 59 Supermodel Sastre
- 60 Vega's constellation
- 63 ___ Remo



SUDOKU

Easy

	7		3	6	2			4
6	3	1	5	8				9
						6		
1			2		6			5
	5			7			2	
2			1		9			8
		5						
3				9	1	4	5	2
7			8	4	5			3

Medium

7	1		6	8				
			2				8	
	3					1		
			5				2	
1		4				8		3
	8				7			
		6					9	
	2				6			
			1	9			3	5

Hard

7		6						1
	9			4			5	
	2				9	6		
6				3				7
1				5				8
		9	1				5	
		5		7			4	
1							2	3

WORD SEARCH

Football

G K B O P E N A L T Y P S E E
 P T P O I N T D E F E N S E L
 P I G S K I N X K I C K O F F
 C M R F O U L V O E F N O D N
 E E O F O O T B A L L L F R H
 N O A T A C K L E D E T F S F
 T U G U A R D K Q G G C S P F
 E T A B D W J E B O M U I I F
 R Q U A R T E R B A C K D K F
 O C R E F E R E E L B J E E S
 O W X M V O L U N T E E R S S
 W G E N G K I C K E R G O A L
 G R I D I R O N Y O H Y G L J
 S N A P O F F E N S E P U N T
 T O U C H D O W N O M B X W L

CENTER
 DEFENSE
 FIELDGOAL
 FOOTBALL
 FOUL
 GOAL
 GRIDIRON
 GUARD
 KICKER
 KICKOFF
 OFFENSE
 OFFSIDE
 PENALTY
 PIGSKIN
 POINT
 PUNT
 QUARTERBACK
 REFEREE
 SNAP
 SPIKES
 TACKLE
 TIMEOUT
 TOUCHDOWN
 VOLUNTEERS

The 2026 Olympics for Canadians

Events to watch and Canadians to cheer for in Milan

Julia Finot

Staff Writer

The road to Milano Cortina is heating up. As the 2026 Olympic Winter Games approach, Canada is once again preparing to make its mark on the world's biggest stage. As one of the most successful countries at the games historically, Canada is entering Milan with high expectations, consisting of a team of seasoned veterans and emerging talents.

Canada will compete in 16 events in Milan, aiming to keep up their success from past games. At the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, Canada walked away with 26 medals, a milestone this year's team would like to surpass.

Navigating the Olympics can be quite overwhelming, and with immense talent representing our country across almost every discipline, it can feel impossible to watch every event. However, some Canadian athletes and some Olympic events will be impossible to miss.

Men's ice hockey

Men's hockey fans already got a sneak peek of Canada's potential roster during the 4 Nations Face-Off in 2025. Although Canada won, the Olympic roster features some new players who bring fresh passion and skill.

The most notable addition to this roster is 19-year-old forward Macklin Celebrini. The Vancouver native was selected first overall by the San Jose Sharks in the 2024 National Hockey League (NHL) Entry Draft. Since joining the league, Celebrini has put up impressive numbers and is currently ranked in the NHL's top five in points, earning the role of assistant captain with the Sharks.

Celebrini has yet to win gold in his hockey career wearing Canada's jersey, but earned bronze back in 2023 at the IIHF World U18 Championships.

Women's ice hockey

Few Canadian women

embody athletic success quite like Marie-Philip Poulin. As one of the most accomplished women to ever play the sport, she will lace up her skates for the fifth time at the Winter Games. In each of her Olympic appearances, she has won Canada a medal—three gold and one silver.

Poulin currently captains the Montreal Victoire of the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL) and remains a largely prominent figure in Canada's hockey community.

Entering Milan, she is just two goals shy of the Olympic record for most goals, currently held by Hayley Wickenheiser with 18.

Mixed doubles curling

Canada's mixed doubles pair in curling will be represented by married couple Brett Gallant and Jocelyn Peterman. Both athletes bring Olympic experience, having competed in Beijing in 2022. Gallant won bronze with Team Brad Gushue, and Peterman placed fifth alongside Team Kaitlyn Lawes.

Beyond the Olympics, the pair have deep roots in Southern Alberta. Not only do they represent the town of Chestermere, but they also represent the University of Calgary. Peterman is the head coach of the Dinos Women's Curling team, while Gallant is the skills development coach.

Gallant will also compete in the men's curling event as he is the second on Team Brad Jacobs.

Figure skating

Canada is entering Milan as one of the strongest figure skating teams. The team is led by familiar faces, including ice dancing pair Piper Gilles and Paul Poirier, alongside women's single skater Madeline Schizas.

The most remarkable story on this roster belongs to pair skaters Deanna Stellato-Dudek and Maxime Deschamps. At 42, Stellato-Dudek retired from the sport



San Jose Sharks superstar Macklin Celebrini became the youngest player to ever join Team Canada at the Olympics and brings a youthful scoring punch to Milan. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @sanjoshesharks

in 2001 and has made her return after 16 years. She dreamed of competing in the 2006 Winter Games in Turin and is now making her Italian Olympic dreams a reality 20 years later.

Stellato-Dudek and Deschamps won the world championship in 2024 and have continued to build momentum for the games. Stellato-Dudek has not only made history as the oldest competitor, but also as the first skater in history to perform an assisted backflip in competition.

Milan will also be Deschamps' first time competing at the Olympics.

Snowboarding

Multi-medalist Mark McMorris has established himself as one of Canada's premier snowboarders. Milan will compete in his fourth Olympic Games, and he is aiming to win his first-

ever gold. In every winter games he has competed in, McMorris has earned himself a bronze medal.

McMorris often came second-best to another Canadian snowboarder, Max Parrot. With Parrot not competing in Milan, McMorris has the opportunity to establish himself as Canada's top male snowboarder in the Slopestyle and Big Air events.

Hailing from Regina, McMorris shatters doubts about the Prairies' ability to develop snowboarding talent and is sure to put on a show in Milan.

Speed skating

In 2022, Steven Dubois left Beijing with three Olympic medals around his neck; one gold, silver and bronze. Dubois is a versatile short-track speed skater representing Canada in some of the biggest events. At the last winter games, Dubois

competed in the Men's 500m, 1500m, 5000m relay, and team relay.

Dubois is one of the most decorated short-track skaters in Canadian history, after only competing in one Olympics.

He is returning to the Winter Games along with teammates Maxime Laoun and Jordan Pierre-Gilles, who hope they can once again capture gold in the 5000m relay.

Whether it's the veterans chasing history, newcomers fighting for their first medal, or athletes having their dreams come true, the 2026 Milano Cortina Olympics are bound to bring moments that will define athletes' careers and moments Canadians will never forget. As the games quickly approach, all eyes will be on Team Canada to bring home as many gold medals as possible.



2 touchdowns scored in the New England Patriots' AFC Championship win over the Denver Broncos, setting up a rematch against the Seattle Seahawks

19 three-pointers made by the Cougars women's basketball team in their back-to-back home wins over the Brandon University Bobcats

21 goals scored by the Cougars men's hockey team in two wins over Regina, including a 12-1 beatdown that saw 9 different skaters score and Justin Lies get a hat trick

16 consecutive games won by the SAIT men's basketball team, who are five wins away from an undefeated season

Four the final season

All eyes on the iconic careers of the fifth-year women's hockey graduates

Naomi Campbell

Staff Writer



Sydney Benko's final season as a Cougar has been electric as she ranks third in the conference in goals, helping send the graduating core of the women's hockey team off on a high note. Photo courtesy of MRU Cougars

For university hockey players, each is given five years of eligibility to be rostered on a team while attending school full-time. Most use four of those years before graduating, but for these four women, they couldn't leave without making use of their full time in a Cougars uniform.

Fifth-year players Abbey Borbandy, Kaia Borbandy, Sydney Benko, and Jori Hansen-Young described their experience as a Cougar in one to two words.

Abbey felt overwhelming and exciting described her experience best, while Kaia and Benko called it enjoyable, and Hansen-Young characterised it as memorable as well as too fast. Each word has a similar meaning, but feels different for each of these women.

Coming into the team at the ages of 17 and 18 years old, it was a brand new experience for all of them. Benko and Kaia showed up alongside each other, before Hansen-Young and Abbey followed them the year after. As rookies, Benko looked up to then-fifth-year veteran Tiana Ko, while Hansen-Young chose Tori Williams because of their hometown connection.

Abbey quickly picked Emma Bergesen, while Kaia

struggled to narrow it down as there were so many great players her first year, yet landed on Morgan Ramsay.

"I connected with how I played with Morgan, because we were both grinders, battlers, and we knew our role versus other people who didn't play similar roles," Kaia says. "I think maybe focusing on some of the other girls that played similar roles as me. I aspired to be like them in my last year."

Looking back on their five-year careers, they each had a special, significant season where they could say everything finally 'clicked.' For Abbey, her third season was the turning point of her career. For Benko, it was her first official year when she made the travel roster to head to the University of British Columbia.

"I'd say in my third year, it finally clicked, and I played for myself, and just put everything behind me," Abbey says.

"For me, it was my first year actually playing, and it was when I made the travel roster to go to UBC. I got to play both games that weekend and just got to be in the lineup more consistently after that. After a tough first semester, that was my moment," Benko says.

As a captain, fans see Kaia as the sole leader of the team,

and the girls look up to her. She believes that she couldn't have stood where she stands without the help of the other three girls, let alone with the C on her sweater.

"I feel like regardless if there's a letter on my chest or not, like us four, I feel like not only did we go through moments of really rough leadership on our team or not knowing what the leadership group would look like. I feel like together we have built a culture that not only can we leave behind strong voices, find our ways on the team, encourage younger girls to speak up and not be afraid to speak up," Kaia says. "I just think that without the help of these three specifically, we wouldn't have been building a culture where we could walk away from it one day and say like, we've made an impact."

Always standing perched behind the bench every game is Head Coach Scott Rivett, who has been a part of the last five years with these girls, helping guide them to where they want to end up in life on and off the ice. The girls each speak very highly of Rivett in his capabilities to turn this team around in so many different ways.

"Scott kind of has built this program from being a team that doesn't really contend to

playoffs to being consistently in the top of the league. So I think that speaks to his ability to recruit people, his ability to get us to play the right way and get us to buy in," Hansen-Young says.

"I think his expectations have always been clear since the first day all of us showed up at the rink. And that's something I always really appreciated and someone you could always have a conversation with if needed. And he was going to be honest with you, and I think that's kind of what you need from a coach and someone that we've all learned to respect over the years," Benko says. "He cares about us as people before hockey players, I don't think anyone could ever question that."

Back in the 2022-23 season, all four of these girls were a part of the U SPORTS Championship team, which each of them called their favourite and most successful year. Yet when they talked about the amount of fun they've had in a specific year on the team, this year takes the cake for all four girls.

"From a most fun team year, with coming to the rink every day, with a smile on your face, it would be this year for me. It's a tight-knit group and we haven't had any issues and everyone's just getting along

really well," Benko says.

"Yeah. I think also with that, like we all know that we're coming to the end of our careers here at MRU. So it's easier to not grip your stick as tight and like to be able to focus and live in the moment," Hansen-Young says.

With the season quickly coming to an end, all four girls have officially reached the 100 game mark in their university careers, with Kaia being the first on Oct. 17, 2025. Abbey celebrated on Nov. 29, 2025, Hansen-Young grabbed hers on Dec. 5, 2025 and Benko finally joined the club on Jan. 17, 2026.

The women play their final regular season games on Feb. 13 and 14 on the road against the University of Saskatchewan. With their top spot on the leaderboard, they look to take on the Canada West playoffs before returning to the U SPORTS National Tournament.

The women celebrated their senior night on Saturday, Jan. 23. Don't worry if you missed it, there's still a couple more games left in the season, and you can catch them in the Canada West playoffs starting the third week of February.