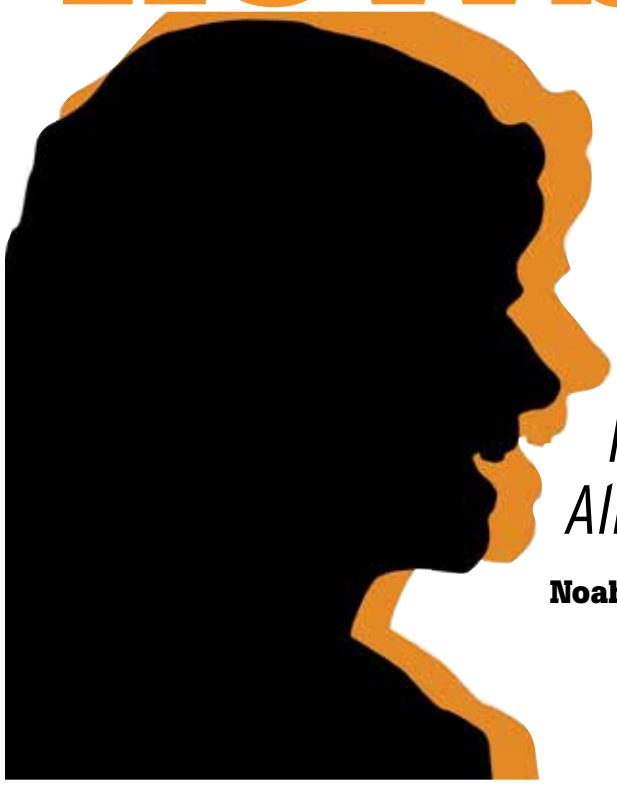
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More photos inside! (Pg. 9)

News Editor
Karra Smith
newseditor@thereflector.ca



Rachel Notley and Jason Kenney: foes to friends?

Former political rivals join forces to advocate for Alberta's place in Canada

Noah Mulhern, Contributor



Forever Canadian volunteers wave Canadian and Albertan flags in Cochrane on Sept. 5. Photo by Noah Mulhern

Unlikely allies Jason Kenney and Rachel Notley. Graphics courtesy of Lace Holowaty

Rachel Notley and Jason Kenney are political adversaries, but a common threat has formed an unlikely partnership. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has launched a new campaign, Alberta and Canada: Stronger Together, with the former premiers as co-chairs.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce announced the campaign on August 25, 2026. The goal is to bring communities and businesses together to create a stronger and more stable economic future for Alberta and Canada. The campaign will focus on engaging Canadians in discussions about Alberta's importance within a united Canada. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce recognises the concerns about public policies but assures that division isn't the answer.

Alberta and Canada: Stronger Together is not the first campaign to highlight the strengths of a united nation. Other campaigns such as Forever Canadian have been advocating against the separatist movement.

"Do you agree that Alberta should remain in Canada?" This was the question Thomas Lukaszuk asked when he began Forever Canadian. Signature collection began July 30, 2025. Elections Alberta certified the Forever Canadians petition with 404,293 verified signatures on December 1, 2025. Over 10,000 volunteers came together in the shared goal of keeping Alberta a part of Canada.

Alberta and Canada: Stronger Together may serve a different purpose than Forever Canadian. However, they fundamentally follow the same principles and deliver the same results for Canadians: the power of unity.

"I'm so glad to see that political adversaries from the past are now working together," said Lukaszuk. "Nobody has a monopoly on loving Canada."

Both former premiers have been very clear about their dedication not only to Alberta, but also to Canada as a whole.

"To our fellow Canadians, we Albertans are proud Canadians," said Kenney in his election victory speech on April 16, 2019.

Notley and Kenney have a shared commitment to Albertans and Canadians alike. Their respective parties, Notley's New Democratic Party and Kenney's United Conservative Party, reflect different values and beliefs. Those differences are still present, which is why their willingness to work together highlights the importance of whether Alberta should remain a part of Canada.

"It's as if hell froze over," says Lukaszuk.

The campaign will gather organisations, businesses and community leaders from across Canada that may be affected by questions like provincial unity or identity.

"Politics should be about hope. It should be about optimism. And it should be about the wherewithal to build something better," said Notley during her election victory speech in 2014.

Referendum

Question 10 of the upcoming referendum is on everyone's minds.

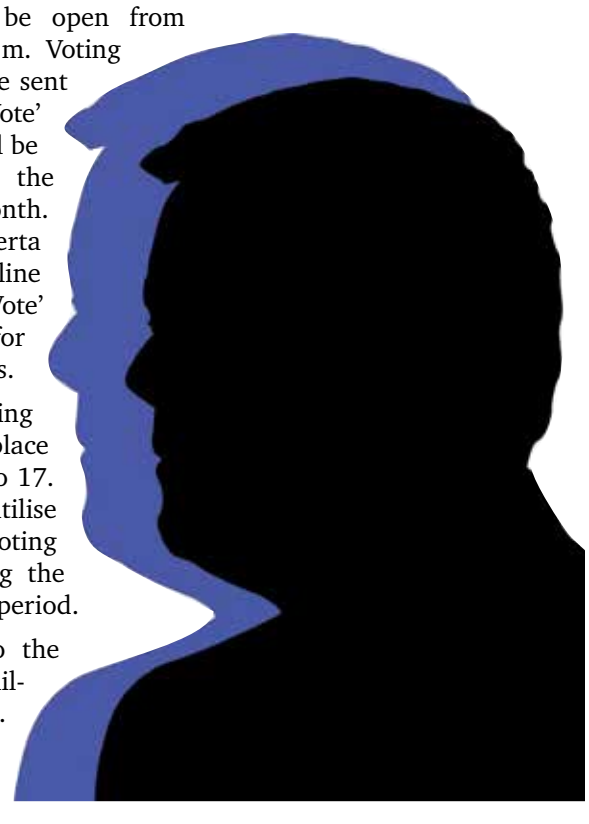
"Should Alberta remain a province of Canada, or should the Government of Alberta commence the legal process required under the Canadian Constitution to hold a binding provincial referendum on whether or not Alberta should separate from Canada?"

Attached to the question are two answers. The first is in support of Alberta remaining a part of Canada. The second option is in favour of beginning the legal processes of creating a binding referendum for Alberta sovereignty.

The Alberta referendum is scheduled for Oct. 19. Voting locations will be open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Voting locations will be sent on a 'Where to Vote' card, which will be distributed at the end of the month. Elections Alberta has an online 'Where to Vote' tool available for anyone to access.

Advance voting will take place from Oct. 13 to 17. Voters can utilise any advance voting locations during the advance voting period.

There is also the option for mail-in ballots. Requests can be made until Sept. 25 and must be sent to Elections Alberta by 5 p.m. on Oct. 16.



Can Alberta's water supply keep up with AI?

Water availability continues to be a growing concern for Albertans

Julia Finot, Sports Editor



A large-scale AI data centre uses roughly the same amount of water per day as a town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000 people. Photo courtesy of Pexels

As Alberta continues to plan to house several artificial intelligence (AI) data centres, many are questioning whether the province's resources can handle the sudden demand of the industry.

Large AI data centres reportedly use millions of gallons of fresh water a day, and in a dry province like Alberta, it's unclear if those requirements can be adequately met for the planned centres.

Alberta is no stranger to water problems. Between dry summers, water main breaks, and a lack of accessible drinking water, the province is consistently challenged in supplying citizens with one of the most important resources.

Albertans across the province are wondering if AI centres will affect their access and use of fresh drinking water.

Seventy-one per cent of Earth is covered in water, but only 0.5 per cent is safe for human consumption. Most of the world's fresh water is locked in glaciers and ice caps, but some can be found in groundwater and on the surface layer of lakes, rivers and swamps.

AI data centres require the same type of fresh water that humans drink.

Provincial water problems

Canada is home to about 20 per cent of the world's freshwater, and Alberta ranks sixth among provinces, with 19,351 square kilometres of this supply, but this is not enough to support its citizens.

It seems like every summer Alberta is at risk of drought. Between the province's insufficient rainfall and the lack of local freshwater sources, Albertans are encouraged to stay mindful of how much they use.

Besides the cities in the province, most of the land consists of forests and prairies, two of the largest sectors in Alberta's economy.

Because Alberta has dry summers, fresh water is used to maintain crops and support vegetation. Rainfall does not consistently provide enough water to keep Alberta's agriculture alive. Nearly 50 per cent of Alberta's water is used for agricultural irrigation.

Fighting Alberta wildfires also requires fresh water.

As a landlocked province, firefighters must use local fresh water sources, as any salt water found in Alberta is located underground.

In recent years, Calgary has also struggled with water main breaks. Calgary and the surrounding areas receive water from the mountains via the Bow and Elbow rivers, but the pipes that bring the fresh water into the city are a concern.

With the problematic infrastructure, millions of gallons of water have been lost.

Data centres in Alberta

The province uses water in many different ways, but with the introduction of AI data centres, it's unclear what the future of water will look like. Data centres use water to cool their computer systems.

Large data centres use up to five million gallons of water a day, which is equivalent to the daily water usage of Alberta cities such as Leduc, Okotoks or Cochrane.

Once water passes through the systems, most evaporates due to the heat generated by the computing system, while the remaining water is discharged into local wastewater facilities.

Albertans are concerned about how much water will be allocated to the data hubs.

During a question period with Premier Danielle Smith, Albertans voiced concerns about water usage and previous water restrictions, and how these will pair with future data centres.

Smith addressed callers' questions by stating that Albertans can still use water like normal, coinciding with data centres, but she didn't answer the question if Alberta can keep up with the projected water demands.

According to the Government of Alberta's website, "outdoor air can do the cooling in the right climate, using almost no water." In the winter months, Alberta's climate can cool AI technology, but in the summer months, no one knows what water consumption will look like.

Alberta's average summer temperature is between 20 C and 25 C, and in a study by Equinix, AI data centres are typically kept between 17 C and 28 C. In Alberta's summer months, fresh water will need to cool the technology, as the weather will be too warm to maintain a reasonable temperature.

The projected amount of water that Alberta AI data centres are expected to use is unknown. With more than 25 centres planned, the province can expect up to millions of gallons a day to be directed to the hubs.

Increased tariffs fuel affordability and job loss fears for students

Post-secondary students are feeling financial pressure as the ongoing trade war creates uncertainty

Faith Naslovar, Contributor

The Government of Canada has introduced new counter-tariffs on $27.6 billion in U.S. imports, matching U.S. levies on Canadian goods dollar-for-dollar, as post-secondary students face growing concerns about the rising cost of living.

The retaliatory tariffs took effect on Sept. 8, after the U.S. imposed 50 per cent tariffs on Canadian goods on Aug. 22.

Given the long history of trade between the two countries, the escalating trade war has caught many Canadians off guard.

"The trading relationship with Canada and the U.S., particularly post-World War II, has been exceptional," says Mount Royal University policy studies professor Duane Bratt. "But this is probably the worst moment in Canadian U.S. relations, probably since the War of 1812."

The latest economic standoff follows lengthy disputes between the U.S. and Canada that began in February 2025. U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order imposing 25 per cent tariffs on Canadian imports—citing border enforcement and drug trafficking concerns as the primary motivations.

After negotiations resumed in August 2026, the two countries made progress towards an agreement, but Canada ultimately walked away.

"They asked too much and offered too little," said Prime Minister Mark Carney during a public address on Aug. 22.

In that same address, he explained that Canadian officials were willing to remove retaliatory tariffs on strategic sectors, given that the U.S. had significantly reduced its baseline tariffs. Canada also offered to encourage provincial liquor boards to return U.S. alcohol products to store shelves.

However, Canadian officials walked away from negotiations, insisting that there would be no compromise on sovereignty, key industries or the protection of the French language and Canadian culture.

The Government of Canada subsequently released a list of products subject to counter-tariffs, including food items, toiletries, technology and clothing—essential products that could add to affordability concerns for post-secondary students.

"When you're a student, everything's expensive in the first place so it's tough to manage," says Katie Turley, a student at Mount Royal University. "I'm sure most of us are struggling with that."

Bratt says it's hard to distinguish whether the rising costs are directly linked to tariffs or other economic factors, including the war in Iran and its effect on oil prices.

"There will be rising costs, and affordability is going to continue to be a problem," says Bratt.

However, he says the shifting job market poses a far more immediate threat to post-secondary students and recent graduates.

"Typically when there are job losses, they are hit by the youngest," Bratt says.

According to Statistics Canada, Canadian employment declined by a total of 42,000 in August of this year—of that, 19,000 were youth aged 15 to 24.

Despite that decline, employment was still up 0.3 per cent in comparison to August 2025.

Still, in response to the tariffs, the Government of Canada has also announced Rapid Response Supports for Workers and Employers. The $3.5 billion initiative includes adjustments to reduce employment insurance waiting periods and extend benefit periods.

The program targets workers in industries directly affected by tariffs like steel, aluminium, and automotive manufacturing. Indirect industries may receive little support while still facing job losses.

"The restaurants and the retail stores where nobody's buying anything may have layoffs as well," says Bratt. "They're not going to get direct support."

As the counter-tariffs remain in effect, the trade tensions between Canada and the U.S. continue to create uncertainty for Canadians.

For students like Turley, that uncertainty adds to existing financial pressures.

"It's just kind of frustrating, and it kind of seems pathetic."



Tensions continue to rise as U.S. President Donald Trump's tariffs on goods cause financial instability nationwide. Photo courtesy of N1info

THE REFLECTOR

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EDITORIAL STAFF:
Publishing Editor: Bella Coco
Managing Editor: Ivar Bergs
News Editor: Karra Smith
Features Editor: Emma Voelpel
Arts Editor: Rylie Perry
Sports Editor: Julia Finot
Photo Editor: Serena Kanji-Ramji
Layout Editor: Acacia Carol
Web Editor: Anais Loeppky
Cover: Serena Kanji-Ramji

Contributors: Hannah Flemmenspeck, Noah Mulhern, Faith Naslovar, Nadoo Abaagu, Naomi Campbell, Katrina Ebuenga

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The Reflector welcomes newsworthy submissions from all students and community members. While the right of editorial comment is reserved for editors of The Reflector, opinion pieces may be submitted as letters to the editor, and may be published on the editorial page as such. The Reflector reserves the right not to publish submissions deemed by the Publishing Editor to be offensive.

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the reflector
Wyckham House
Mount Royal University
4825 Mount Royal Gate SW
Calgary, AB T3E 6K6
All depts.: 403.440.6268
Fax: 403.440.6762
TheReflector@TheReflector.ca

features

Features Editor
Emma Voelpel
featureseditor@thereflector.ca

They're always watching

How social media has encouraged surveillance culture

Serena Kanji-Ramji, Photo Editor

In 2026, it is easier than ever to keep a pulse on what's going on in the world at large. Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok are just a few platforms with a constant flow of evolving content on a diverse range of topics.

The benefits of these platforms seem endless. Individuals can keep in touch with their friends and family, stay up to date with current events or even just watch cat videos. On the flip side, on these apps, anything and everything can become content.

In recent years, there has been a massive surge of 'influencers' recording people they don't know, or who have not consented to being recorded in public places.

Dance like everyone's watching

In his article for The Guardian, journalist Jason Okundaye recounts the time he caught a stranger filming him dancing in public.

Although the video never surfaced, Okundaye felt uneasy about where it went.

"For months I looked over my shoulder when dancing. "

Okundaye also chronicles another similar incident with 64-year-old Michael Peacock, who was filmed dancing at the fabric London nightclub. However, unlike Okundaye's video, which was likely never uploaded, Peacock's was.

The video was uploaded accompanied by the caption "Yo I'll never be going fabric again." The wave of hate that followed was swift and brutal, with X users being both homophobic and ageist.

When asked about the incident, Peacock described his heart sinking as he watched the video of himself on X.

Has the internet become a tool of surveillance?

It's easier now than ever to record something, with cameras built into our phones, and it only takes a single click to upload it to the internet.

Innocent bystanders being recorded aren't the only victims of surveillance culture.

An individual's own identity is more affected by this phenomenon than they might realise. An article from Brock University further describes the issue, discussing how being watched changes the way we see ourselves. When people are aware of the fact that they are being watched, they become more restrained in the way they present themselves and are overall more self-conscious

The article explains that surveillance culture is creating fear among youth about what happens if they don't present as perfect all the time. Sometimes that fear becomes paralysing.

Sharina Cheng, a student at Mount Royal University and former influencer, says that during the time she was creating content, she felt pressure to always be perfect for the cameras.

"I did care a lot about what people thought about me, and I really disliked that," she says. "I always wanted every reel to be picture perfect, and I've had one type; I felt like I was a bad person, or I wasn't good enough."

When talking about why she stepped back from social media, she also cited feeling surveilled.

"It did make me feel like everybody was watching me. I felt like when I was in school, people looked at me more, 'cause I was making content about MRU," she says.

Now, with the release of the new and improved Meta Glasses, there is always a possibility that someone is watching you.



In a time of social media and Meta's AI glasses, people are feeling more watched than ever before. Photo courtesy of Arno Senoner / Unsplash

The Meta Glasses of it all

Since the September 2021 release of Ray-Ban Stories, the company's first generation of smart glasses, Meta has been making strides towards developing wearable, discreet recording technology.

However, Meta's newest smart glasses release in March 2026 has garnered its share of criticism. Dubbed 'pervert glasses' by some internet users, there have been massive privacy concerns.

In an interview with the BBC, David Kessler, an attorney who is at the forefront of the US privacy practice at Norton Rose Fulbright, shared his concerns with this new technology.

"There are some pretty dark places we could go here," says Kessler. "I'm not anti-technology in any sense, but as a societal matter…will I need to think [of being recorded] anytime I go out in public?"

This is a shared notion amongst most people who encounter Meta Glasses in the wild. Some even go as far as expressing their distaste for the glasses by breaking them.

Last December, a Tik Toker known as @eth8n_____ claimed that he was assaulted unprovoked by a woman on the New York subway who broke his Meta Glasses. The viral video showed Ethan holding his broken glasses, talking about getting insurance while bystanders laughed.

In a video shared later, Ethan provided context, sharing that he was using the glasses to record a video where he was making what he described as "sound that I and others thought was hilarious for a video to post". He went on to claim that the reaction was unprovoked.

While the context video was made to garner sympathy for Ethan its unintended effect was cementing the woman in his video as an online folk hero, with commenters under the video showing support for the woman.

"I hope she called him a dork for wearing them before she broke them," a user commented.

"Imagine being this based, gorgeous, tall, and cool," another user replied.

In response to the woman breaking the glasses, Ethan filed a claim with the police that would result in a misdemeanour charge if the woman was identified.

It is safe to say that in our current reality, surveillance culture won't be a problem tackled overnight. However, with enough pushback, anything can change. So if people don't like being constantly watched, maybe one day they'll turn off their recording devices too.

Is Banff tourism getting out of hand?

The effects Banff's tourism industry has on its locals and wildlife

Emma Voelpel, Features Editor

The millions of visitors that prop up Banff's economy are now testing the limits of the environment of the town and national park itself.

The overtourism phenomena

Banff National Park continues to see an annual increase in visitation every year. In 2025, the park broke its record with a whopping 4.5 million people visiting the Rockies.

The Skijoring event in Banff in January 2026 stretched the town's resources thin, with congested traffic, illegal parking and a slew of public safety concerns. The chaos of the show led the town to cancel future Skijoring events in the park.

Reno Sommerhalder, a bear specialist and conservationist, has been living in the Rockies for 40 years and has witnessed firsthand the influence of the tourism industry in the park.

"Even a few years ago you were able to drive up to Lake Louise or Moraine Lake and didn't have to wait in line," he says.

The constant influx of people makes it so things like going grocery shopping, grabbing a coffee or dining out become almost impossible for a local.

Daniel Rudel, a local since 2009 and the host of the "Overheard in Banff" podcast, has faced similar challenges. As a long-term local of the area, he's also experienced the benefits and drawbacks of living in a tourist location.

"I would never point the finger at tourism as this big bad thing. It's more so managing it," he says.

Rudel has noticed that, with tourism as its biggest economic driver, Banff's infrastructure primarily caters to visitors and short-term residents.

In 2025, Banff had a less than one per cent vacancy rate. This issue was brought up by the town council in 2025, where Councillor Hugh Pettigrew attempted to bid for a capacity-based planning method that would ensure human management within the town's threshold.

"Housing keeps going up, up, and up," says Rudel. "When you have other renters that are willing to pay that extra amount, it kind of prices out your long-term locals over a long period of time."

A fed bear is a dead bear

However, it isn't just the locals in town who are affected; the animals whose habitats are disturbed are as well.



A rainy bike ride in Banff. Banff National Park covers over 1.6 million acres with 96 per cent of the park being protected wilderness. Photo by Emma Voelpel

In 2024, a white grizzly bear and her cubs were struck and killed by a car in the Lake Louise area.

The incident raised concerns about how bears and other wildlife should be protected from highways. As a result, mandatory speed limits and no-stopping zones have been implemented on Trans-Canada Highway 1. However, frequent use of the highway still leads to such incidents.



A grizzly out for a stroll in Banff. Over 1,200 animal species call Banff National Park home. Photo courtesy of Sydney Jacobson

Species that frequent the national park, such as wolverines, grizzly and black bears, are forced to retreat from certain areas as more and more hikers veer off trail.

"Life is hard for the animals here," says Sommerhalder. "And so by adding more stress by having more people on these trails, it makes it almost impossible for some of these animals to exist."

Sommerhalder does stress that there are positives to having wildlife be in the presence of humans. The more often bears are around people, the more tolerant they are of people.

Nevertheless, this can lead to issues like people mistakenly giving food to the wildlife.

Human food is highly toxic to wild animals. The food lacks nutrients that are required for wildlife, which results in them becoming malnourished and aggressive, putting both themselves and people at risk of harm.

Feeding wildlife is prohibited by law and enforced by both the national parks and the provincial government. However, this issue persists as visitors continue to leave food and litter for animals.

As for Sommerhalder, he believes the solution is to further restrict some trails to protect habitats.

"We really have to sacrifice our freedom for these animals if we decide we want to have them around in the next several 100 years," he says.

Can Banff change?

While the national park continues to rely on tourism to keep its economy afloat, it's unlikely major changes will be implemented.

In spite of that, locals are still calling for big changes to be made for the sake of not only the town, but the wildlife in the surrounding area.

"We have to ask ourselves what a national park is supposed to be," says Sommerhalder. "Right now, it sure seems the present priority is given to tourism as opposed to ecological integrity."

MRU looks back on 2016

As 2016 makes a generational comeback, students reflect on why the era felt so special

Anais Loeppky, Web Editor

This year, we have seen 2016 make a comeback stronger than a 90s trend.

There has always been a bit of a 10-year microcycle in trends. What was once considered outdated suddenly becomes cool again once enough time has passed.

But 2016 seems to be having a particularly strong moment.

From songs like Zara Larsson's "Midnight Sun" finding their way back into the spotlight to the return of the infamous unicorn frappuccino, we seem to be fully committed to curating the perfect 2016 vibe.

On Tuesday, Sept. 8, The Reflector asked more than 50 students at Mount Royal University about what they miss most about 2016.

Students were excited to talk about it, and the most common thread was social media.

Bring back casual posting

The nonchalant use of social media in 2016 was a prominent topic of conversation.

Students remembered a time when Instagram felt more like a scrapbook than a formal résumé.

Posting a picture of your morning coffee or a selfie with the classic puppy dog filter did not require a carefully curated feed or a 30-minute debate over whether the photo was 'on brand.'

"I miss when Instagram was almost conversational, rather than this heavily curated platform it is now," said one student.

Today, social media is widely accepted as far from realistic. We have become accustomed to carefully edited photos, sponsored posts and algorithms that somehow know exactly what will make us keep scrolling.

In 2016, things felt a little more chaotic. But what feels like chaos in hindsight was truly just authenticity.

The shameless use of Snapchat filters and the willingness to post something simply because you thought it was funny all contributed to a version of social media that felt more collective and lighthearted.

When social media was social

Something students often mentioned was Pokémon GO.

The 2016 mobile game became a cultural phenomenon almost overnight, sending people into parks, neighbourhoods and public spaces in search of virtual Pokémon.

"It was so groundbreaking for its time," says one student. "It's the only video game I can think of that brought people together to such an extreme degree, literally flocks of people walking around together."

Pokémon GO is seeing record numbers since its original popularity in 2016.

The game has continued to generate billions in revenue since its launch, with the player base growing by over seven per cent in a single month recently, adding over 2.3 million brand-new or returning users.

Students also brought up the seemingly endless stream of viral challenges that took over the internet, most notably the Mannequin Challenge. The internet was full of these sorts of challenges, where people would flip water bottles and do the Running Man.

"It was so different because social media was actually physically bringing people together," a student explained.

The soundtrack of 2016

Students described the sound of 2016 as being entirely its own era.

"Something about that trashy house music was actually addictive," one student said.

There was something different about music culture in 2016. Songs could become massive shared cultural moments, with people hearing the same tracks everywhere.



In 2016, Snapchat recorded 158 to 161 million daily active users. Photo courtesy of Anais Loeppky

Whether you were at the grocery store or a house party, you were bound to hear the likes of The Chainsmokers, Drake or Sia.

Today, our music consumption is increasingly personalised. Streaming apps know exactly what we listen to, and TikTok knows which 15 seconds of a song we like.



With the loss of short form video app Vine, social media felt slower ten years ago. Photo courtesy of Pixabay / Pexels

Algorithms decide what gets pushed onto our screens.

Our advanced algorithms have made it easier to discover music that is more specific to our interests. They have also helped us find smaller up-and-coming artists who may have otherwise gone unnoticed. However, this has also made many music communities more niche than they were before.

In 2016, it felt like everyone was listening to the same songs.

Maybe that collectiveness is part of the nostalgia.

Before everything got weird

When students were asked why they think people are so nostalgic for 2016 right now, another theme came up time and time again: it was directly before the world took a chaotic turn.

2016 was pre-COVID-19. It was pre-AI. It was before the world got so serious.

Perhaps this is simply a generational perspective, since Gen Z was experiencing their early teens in 2016.

For many people, it also represents a period before the political and social divisions of the late 2010s and early 2020s became so pronounced.

The world was not perfect in 2016. There were plenty of problems, and nostalgia has a funny way of giving the past a rose-coloured filter.

But the difference is that—looking back from 2026 — 2016 can feel like the calm before the storm.

Technology alone has evolved an insane amount in the last decade. Our algorithms now know us better than some of our own friends. We are constantly being recommended content specifically designed to appeal to us, from the music we listen to and the products we buy to the opinions we are exposed to.

Before this, people were all being shown many of the same memes, videos, and trends. That meant that when something went viral, it actually felt viral.

And then there is the extreme extent to which AI has changed everything.

2016 was a time before AI-generated videos, AI-written captions and the increasingly unavoidable 'AI slop' that seems to find its way onto our feeds every day.

Maybe people miss the chokers and Pokémon GO. Maybe some even miss the unicorn frappuccino. Maybe some are fine leaving that particular trend in 2016.

But arguably the best part of seeing 2016 come back is getting to bring a little bit of its fancifulness with us.

This 2016 revival truly seems to be people taking the parts we loved most and giving them a new life in 2026.

samru students' association of mount royal university

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Arts Editor
Rylie Perry
artseditor@thereflector.ca









arts



















Thank you to everyone who visited our booth at both BrainPOP and the Welcome Back Campus Carnival this academic year. We started the tradition of The Reflector photo booth last year to capture memories, meet new students, catch up with old friends, and kick off the new year. This gallery attests to the lively and incredible Mount Royal University community, and The Reflector is extremely grateful to be the sole independent student voice for this campus. If you can't find your photo in this printed gallery, the entire collection is available at thereflector.ca.

Want to contribute? Join us for weekly pitch meetings held Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. in room Z002 (located in the Wyckham House basement).

– Bella Coco, Publishing Editor

Layered wilderness

How Alberta-based multimedia artist brings texture to life

Katrina Ebuenga, Contributor

There is a moment of silent tension between human and animal in the Canadian wilderness.

Samantha Walrod, an Edmonton-based artist, captures this intimate encounter in her layered mixed-media portraits, depicting a single animal caught in motion.

In her solo exhibition, Off The Beaten Path, held at Newzones Gallery of Contemporary Art in Calgary from Sept. 12 to Oct. 10, Walrod freezes the interaction between the human and animal gaze.

Drawing inspiration from her real-life experiences, Walrod produces multi-layered artworks that focus on the captivating qualities and gestures of the animal emerging from the unknown wilderness.

"There's a certain history of the marks that are underneath the top layers," says Walrod.

Walrod's work focuses on singular animals, as well as blooming floral branches made up of a variety of lively patterns and materials. In this solo exhibition with Newzones Gallery, however, her focus is on the direct perspective of the unknown distance between human and animal.

Whether it is a bear, elk or wolf, the fleeting moment is captured through her ever-changing and layered approach to medium.

"I've always worked with mixed media, I've always worked with layering, and I've always been interested in that luminosity that's created by layering," explains Walrod. "It's just my bag. It's what I do—I love it."

Her approach to mixed media blends elements that work in unison with one another, while also preserving the integrity of each element as an independent piece of the puzzle. Walrod's technique includes various forms of paint, photography, ink and paper materials that craft textile layers, which create a story all on their own.

"I start with the idea, which is the flower and the branches, but then I just let it go and put paint down and see what happens," she explains. "I'm always pleasantly surprised by the result."

By playing with a medium that has the ability to foster its own narrative, Walrod crafts complex material-driven pieces that come to life despite being still moments.

With a preference for viewing the animals she depicts from a safe distance, Walrod finds the unique experience very exciting, especially as the animals come to the roadside. Travelling often to Jasper and Banff, she has also developed an interest in studying animal bridges and overpasses, where animals and humans can safely cross paths together.

This interest, coupled with her appreciation for the Canadian Rockies, has become the focal point of her work, especially with her solo exhibition.

"I feel very lucky when I see [these crossings]—I think it's very spiritual," she says.

For Walrod, despite that initial moment of tension, the gaze shared between viewer and animal becomes the distinctive experience that she draws from. On top of having nature as a vessel for her inspiration, constantly working and improving her craft in the studio is something that is very important to her.

"I've been doing it for so many years, and to see what happens when materials are layered together, doing something new and unexpected is still exciting," she says.

Painting professionally at Newzones Gallery since 2008, Walrod has honed her skills in experimenting with all sorts of materials and layering. With a background in fine arts and teaching at the University of Alberta, Walrod has always had a love and passion for painting.

"When you get to see the work in person, even more so than online, it is really worth seeing in the gallery," she explains.

Located along 11 Ave, Newzones Gallery of Contemporary Art has been a cultural hub for over 30 years, showcasing more than 300 different exhibitions since its inception.

Founded by Helen and Tamar Zenith in 1992, the contemporary gallery has been a spotlight for international and local artists, with a high emphasis on the importance of creating a space for Canadian art and artists.

In addition to her exhibition, Walrod will be giving an in-depth talk about her art and artistic journey on Sept. 26 between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. at Newzones Gallery. Viewers will have the opportunity to see her work up close and hear more about her work.

"I think it's so important that people of all stripes go in person to galleries because it's such a different experience than on a computer and/or on a phone."

"I love luminosity and transparency that is created through layering tissue papers, gel mediums, and paint."



The studio installation of Samantha Walrod's "Wolf Sitting–White, 2026." Photo courtesy of Samantha Walrod



Inside Samantha Walrod's new solo exhibition, "Off the Beaten Path," at Newzones Gallery of Contemporary Art in Calgary. Photo courtesy of Newzones Gallery

Is indie cinema seeing a comeback?

Why small projects like Obsession and Backrooms are setting industry records

Nadoo Abaagu, Contributor

The 2025 horror film *Obsession* was shot for less than a million dollars but recouped its budget over 500 times through domestic and international sales. However, *Obsession* is just one of many indie films that have done phenomenally at the box office in 2026.

From January to August, audiences saw *Iron Lung*, *Obsession*, *Backrooms*, *Leviticus* and *Hokum*, to name a few. While some of these films were more successful than others, all were produced with exceptionally low budgets.

Each movie was produced for less than $10 million, with the lowest being *Obsession* at $750,000.

For a decade now, the worldwide box office has been dominated by major studios, established directors and big-budget movies.

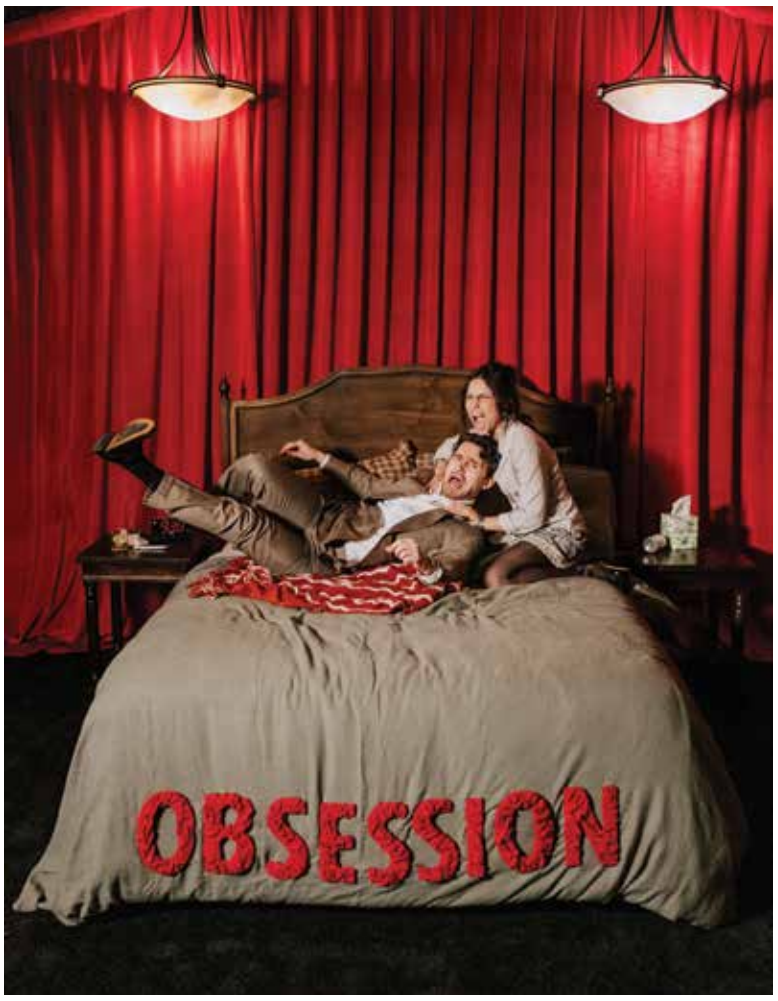
For most major film studios, the average production budget starts at $65 million, with an additional $35 million for marketing and distribution.

In the 90s and 2000s, the box office was littered with mid-budget movies guaranteed to break even, but according to actor Matt Damon, those films are no longer considered profitable.

While Damon built his career on mid-budget movies, he says studios now need something more widely accessible.

"You're looking for a home run that can play in all these different territories to all these different ages," said Damon in an interview with The New York Times Magazine. "You want the most accessible thing you can make, in terms of language and culture. And what is that? A superhero movie."

Superhero movies are large in scale and budget, but the risk comes with great reward. Blockbuster movies tend to make close to a billion dollars for studios.



Obsession stars Michael Johnston and Inde Navarrette promoting the film ahead of the theatrical debut. Photo courtesy of Facebook / @Obsessionmovie

In a 2019 BBC article on 2010s film, journalist Nicholas Barber defined the decade by its superhero movies, Disney remakes and spectacular blockbusters. The enormous success of these movies throughout the 2010s has made big concepts and big budgets the profitable norm rather than the exception.

Then *Obsession* comes along

According to director Curry Barker, in an interview with The Hollywood Reporter, Focus Features bought the movie for $15 million, and in a four-month run in theatres it made over half a billion dollars at the box office.

Iron Lung and *Backrooms* saw similar success. Although *Iron Lung* was self-financed and independently distributed, it got an international release and made $50 million worldwide. *Backrooms*, on the other hand, became studio A24's highest-grossing release, making over $300 million at the box office.

The achievements of these movies come up against a studio filmmaking ethic committed to big budgets, franchises and established intellectual property.

Obsession, *Backrooms* and *Iron Lung* challenge everything Hollywood thinks audiences want.

The success of these movies also goes beyond profit. *Obsession* began its theatrical release in May with little fanfare or marketing, but gained traction through reviews and word of mouth.

"When it made $27 million,

Continues on Pg. 12



Chuck Timely & the Hourglass

Role Model

Interscope Records

Score: A-

In his third studio album, Role Model takes on the persona of a time-travelling alter ego: Chuck Timely. Through this character, he explores the ups and downs of relationships and single life, showcasing how it is a universal experience that transcends time.

One of the album's main strengths is its fun. The air of playfulness throughout the album hints that he enjoyed writing, singing and producing these songs, which makes for a joyful listening experience.

Role Model's voice really suits the upbeat country and pop influences that run through the album like "High Hopes 3000," "Song Is All You Get," and "Joy."

I found that when it came to the ballads, although the lyrics are heartfelt and emotional, his voice's capabilities just fell flat for me.

However, I did enjoy the diversity the ballads gave this album. A song like "Love I You" is reminiscent of the early 2000s style of Jason Mraz, followed by a stronger country sound with "Chasing Midnight," and contrasted with a slower piano-heavy song like "Good Thing."

I think the strongest part of this album is the songwriting—sometimes playful about a drunken one-night stand, and sometimes deep and introspective about love and cynicism.

Overall, this album was a fun listen and is a successful continuation of Role Model's discography, especially as he continues to shift into the country and folk sound that boosted him into fame with his 2024 album, *Kansas Anymore*.

—Hannah Flammenspeck



Lost Weekend

Phoebe Bridgers

Dead Oceans

Score: A-

Releasing her first solo album in six years, Phoebe Bridgers brings us an emotional, cohesive record about grief, relationships and isolation.

Backed by ambient sounds, her voice carries a mystical feeling that makes me want to explore a forest or run in a meadow.

I particularly liked songs like "The Governor's Waltz," where the lyrics seem to allude to her former fiancé, Paul Mescal, and his new girlfriend, Gracie Abrams, with lyrics like "she took my place in my bed on that stage."

The song is then followed by one of the more upbeat songs in her discography, "Bobby," about her new love with Bo Burnham and finding a flow as she settles into domesticity.

The most heart-wrenching song on the album is "Never Going Back!," in which she grapples with the loss of her father. It includes a voicemail at the end from her father, which gives a glimpse into their disconnected relationship, in which she is grieving the person who died but also the relationship she wishes she had.

In the ninth track, "Still Standing," we get a glimpse into her childhood with a violent father who threatens to leave at any moment. The lyrics "sometimes I want you back/but not today" really encapsulate her relationship with her father and how complicated grief can be.

Although the lyrical and mystical-folk track is beautiful, the album runs a bit long and, in turn, becomes a bit redundant, making me wish there were a bit more variation in sound.

—Hannah Flammenspeck

Continued from Pg.11

I couldn't believe it. I didn't know that was an option," said Barker in his interview with The Hollywood Reporter. "It became a word-of-mouth movie. I started going to the theatre to sneak in and watch the film too because I wanted to be part of this thing."

2010s blockbusters have mostly appealed to general audiences, but *Obsession*, *Backrooms*, *Iron Lung* and other indie films have drawn younger audiences.

According to Variety, on Backrooms' opening weekend, over 85 per cent of its audience was under the age of 35. While *Obsession*, *Iron Lung* and *Leviticus* attracted audiences between 18 and 24.

These small movies have managed to stand next to, or even surpass, heavy hitters like Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* or *Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu* in terms of profit and cultural relevance.

Despite a larger marketing campaign and a bigger theatre release, *Star Wars: The Mandalorian and Grogu* fell behind both *Obsession* and *Backrooms* in terms of profit.

When asked what Gen-Z audiences want from their movies, Barker argued they are longing for original ideas and creative execution.

"People are still hungry for movies that are original without some big IP, as long as the story is good," he said.

On the other hand, *Iron Lung* director Mark Fischbach and *Backrooms* director Kane Parsons—both established YouTubers—attributed a lot of their box office success to audience loyalty.

While big-budget movies continue to see major success at the box office, with *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* surpassing two billion worldwide in August, audiences clearly desire alternative media.

No matter what each of these directors owes their success to, audience turnout shows a desire for innovation and sincere experimentation.

Still, it's hard to say what lessons Hollywood will take from this.

According to The Hollywood Reporter, *Obsession's* producer James Harris has been flooded with texts and well-wishes from independent and industry producers hoping to reproduce the film's success.

Buzz around *Obsession* has focused on its intriguing concept, talented director and unknown cast, but Harris says the movie was fundamentally a risk taken on by a first-time director.

"To actually take the chance on the first movie is something that we feel there is a market for. We can work with financial partners to take that risk," he said.

Tea Shop Productions believes in risk-taking and fostering fledgling filmmakers, but not all studios will be willing to take that kind of leap of faith.

A new frontier?

Of 2026's indie darlings, three films were helmed by YouTubers.

Fischbach and Parsons have had long-established careers on YouTube as Markiplier and Kane Pixels, respectively, while *Obsession's* unique brand of horror-comedy was influenced by Barker's 10-year career in YouTube sketch comedy.

Each of these directors is a product of the internet culture of the last two decades. Even their film education has been shaped by YouTube, as none of them has post-secondary training in filmmaking.

But surprisingly, not all of them define themselves so rigidly by the label of YouTuber. Barker sees his filmmaking journey as pretty ordinary.

"I feel my journey isn't that much different from the greats we know and love like Spielberg—not to compare myself to those people, but they started by making short films," he said to The Hollywood Reporter.

"They made films over and over until finally someone gave them a chance."

YouTube may be a new frontier for Hollywood, but Barker and his peers have a lot more in common with established filmmakers than meets the eye.

Like Quentin Tarantino, Stanley Kubrick or even Christopher Nolan at the beginning of his career, Barker, Parsons and Fischbach are not formally educated; they are underexposed and under-connected. They are the antithesis of mainstream norms, but seemingly also able to connect with audiences because of it.

Independent cinema has historically been a force in democratising the film industry by rejecting the mainstream's standards, techniques and monopolies.

It can also easily become absorbed by it. Rocking the boat, only to become the new normal.

Obsession, *Backrooms* and *Iron Lung* might fall into that pattern, depending on what Hollywood learns from their success, but their unconventional directors show that audiences and the film industry are opening up to new talent and new ideas.

We should hope to see many more 'Barkers,' 'Parsons,' and 'Fischbachs' wherever they decide to come from.

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sports

Sports Editor
Julia Finot
sportseditor@thereflector.ca

On your marks, get set...Cougars athletics is back

Four MRU storylines to watch out this 2026-2027 U SPORTS season

Julia Finot, Sports Editor

As October approaches, the 2026-2027 U SPORTS season is quickly coming into full swing for university campuses. This season, Mount Royal University (MRU) Cougars' teams hope to exceed Canada West expectations and contend for nationals.

There are plenty of storylines to follow this season, everything from heated rivalries to award-winning rookies.

Championship aspirations

For the first time in Cougars history, MRU will host the U SPORTS Men's Volleyball Championship in 2027, with the women following suit in 2028. Since joining U SPORTS in 2012, the men's volleyball team has only qualified once.

The Cougars will automatically qualify as tournament hosts, but now the expectations go beyond simply winning Canada West. The challenge will be proving they belong among the nation's best while avoiding an early exit on home court.

The men's hockey team is no stranger to the national stage. In the past two seasons, they punched their ticket to nationals by finishing second at the CanadaWest Championship, but unfortunately, they have been eliminated early twice in the tournament. This season, the team is welcoming 10 new players to the roster, leaving the question of whether the Cougars can return to nationals and will they make a deeper run with a young team?

The men's soccer team came the closest to winning a national title last year. After winning the CanadaWest Championship, the Cougars made it all the way to the final U SPORTS match.

They fell 1-0 after a blizzarding double overtime in Toronto. With the majority of their veteran core returning, they'll be looking to finish the job and claim their place as the nation's top team.

Family affairs

The Cougars continue to prove that athletic talent runs in the family. This season, three sets of siblings will suit up for the same team.

Returning women's hockey defenders Jordynne and Jaselyn Hojnocki are back on the blue line for MRU. Coming into her sophomore season, Jaselyn is expected to take on a larger role and maybe even get paired with her sister to anchor the team's defense.

The men's hockey team welcomes Joey Lies, who joins his older brother Justin after an impressive season in the Saskatchewan Junior Hockey League. In 48 games, he scored 27 goals and assisted an additional 20 times. With 10 newcomers joining the roster, it will be interesting to see if the brothers will reunite on the same line.

At Kenyon Court, twin brothers Elijah and Noah Barlow begin their university careers after dominating high school basketball. The pair led their high school, Holy Trinity Academy, to zone and provincial championships while averaging over 16 points per game each.

Their chemistry is bound to make an immediate impact coming off the bench.

Not just the best in the west

Last season, two Cougars athletes were awarded the U SPORTS Rookie of the Year award: Isa MacPhee for women's hockey and Kale Orr for men's volleyball. Although neither athlete led their team to a championship, both cemented themselves as key cornerstones on their teams.

MacPhee immediately became one of the Cougars' most dependable defenders.

Appearing in 31 games, she tallied three goals and 10 assists, finishing as the highest-scoring rookie in the west. Her poise, decision-making skills and ability to play longer minutes earned her national recognition. This season, the team will look to her more, now also as a leader.

Orr's arrival in Canada West quickly exceeded expectations. He led all rookies with 259 kills, ranking third in all of Canada West. He also recorded 132 digs—more than any of the three MRU liberos. Orr spent August representing Canada in Mexico and Puerto Rico, and now, after returning to MRU, he is expected to step into a larger leadership role, leading the team into nationals.

The battle of Crowchild Trail

Few rivalries in Canada West are as consistent as MRU against the University of Calgary (UCalgary) Dinos. Last season, the teams met 31 times across regular season and playoff matches. The Dinos narrowly held an edge over MRU, winning 16 games to the Cougars' 15.

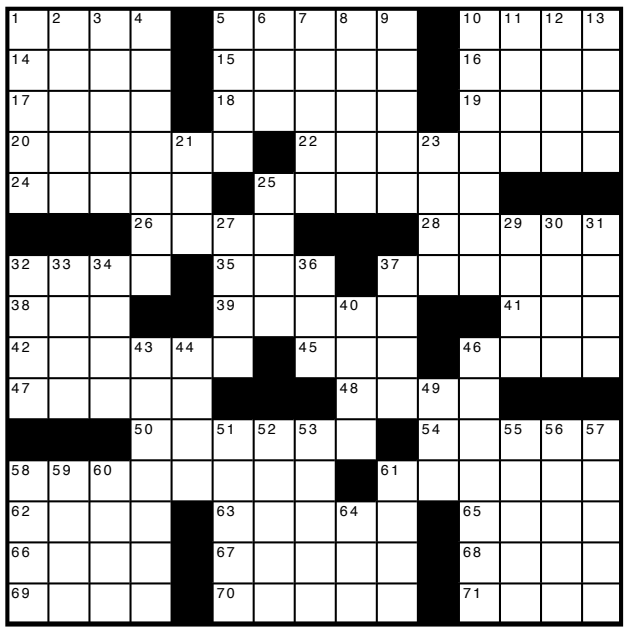
Last season's matchups were among the most memorable for each team. The Dinos eliminated MRU during the men's volleyball play-in series and the women's soccer team defeated the Cougars in the CanadaWest bronze medal match. But it wasn't all Dinos; the Cougars defeated the men's hockey team during the CanadaWest semi-finals.

The crosstown rivalry will continue this season as MRU is set to face UCalgary in 24 regular-season games. The biggest dates to watch out for are the annual Crowchild Classic game in January, the women's soccer rematch on Sept. 26 and Oct. 9, and the men's volleyball rematch on Nov. 13 and 14.



The 2026 Crowchild Classic game had an attendance of 13,324 fans, the most at a U SPORTS regular season hockey game. Photo by Daniel Zappe

REFLECTOR DIVERSIONS



ACROSS
1 Mex. miss
5 Personal histories
10 Foundation
14 Aromatic plant
15 Manuscript sheet
16 Singer Fitzgerald
17 Burden of proof
18 Hard stone
19 Sorry to say...
20 Sharp reply
22 Cause to explode
24 First prime minister of India
25 Fix, as a shoe
26 Highland hillside
28 Clear the board
32 "___ Tu" ('70s hit)
35 Chum
37 Institution for mentally ill
38 Sun. speech
39 Snow conveyances
41 Give guns to
42 Specimen
45 Epoch
46 One hunted
47 D-Day beach
48 Pizarro victim
50 Makes sense
54 Killer whales
58 Jerry Seinfeld, e.g.
61 Soul
62 Work without ___
63 Stop on ___
65 Slender
66 Cuban coin
67 Illuminated
68 ___ facto
69 "The Good Earth" heroine
70 Sows
71 Smart talk

DOWN
1 Trimmed of wool
2 Actress Zellweger
3 Verity
4 Soaks up
5 Fizzling sound
6 Earthlink competitor
7 Slip
8 Sticking points
9 ___ voce (softly)
10 Cheap restaurant
11 ___ breve
12 Blind part
13 Alleviate
21 Capek play
23 Bullfight cheers
25 Actual
27 Church feature
29 Banned apple spray
30 Confident
31 TV award
32 Exxon predecessor
33 500 sheets
34 Columnist Bombeck
36 Bruce ___ was a famous kung-fu movie star
37 Slippery ___ eel
40 Tap trouble
43 Light four-wheeled carriage
44 "Shane" star
46 Partial motor paralysis
49 Against a proposition
51 Clock faces
52 ___ Hawkins Day
53 Band together
55 Mea ___
56 Out of whack
57 Greek island
58 Guitar device
59 Like Nash's lama
60 Arizona city
61 Enlivens, with "up"
64 Kind of pie

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

SUDOKU

EASY

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HARD

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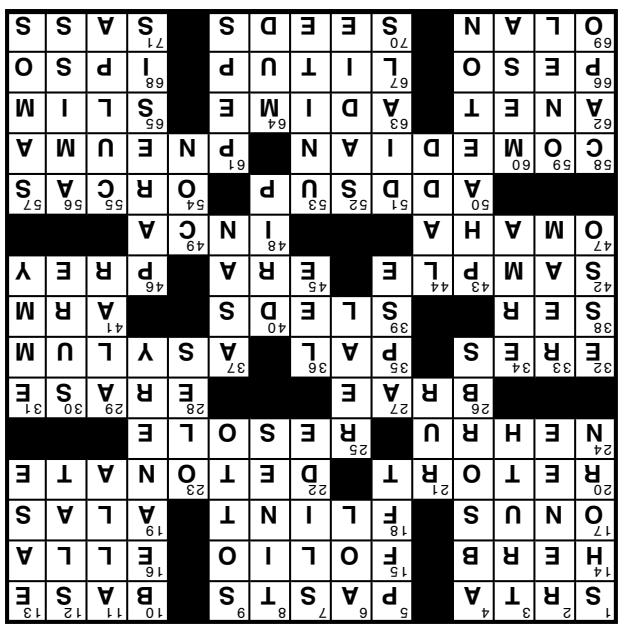
WORD SEARCH

COMPUTERS

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AMINATION
BIOS
BROWSER
BUZZER
CPU
CROPPING
DESKTOP
DOCUMENT
FORMULA
GRAPHIC
TABLET
HARDWARE
ICONS
INPUT
IPAD
IPHONE
KEYBOARD
KEYPAD
MAINFRAME
MODEM
NETWORK
OUTPUT
PALMTOP
PDA
PRINTERS
PROCESSING
PROJECTOR
PROJETORS
SCANNER
SEARCHENGINE
SENSOR
SLIDE
SOFTWARE
TABLE
TEXT
WRAP
UPS
USB
WORDWRAP
WORKBOOK

CROSSWORD PUZZLE SOLUTION



Pom poms to prestige

How cheerleading is solidifying its status as a sport

Karra Smith, News Editor



The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders Netflix series, *America's Sweethearts,* debuted on Netflix at number two in 2024. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @dccheerleaders

Cheerleading's status in the broader sports community has been heavily debated for years, despite the high levels of athleticism and technical skill required to participate. However, with recent cheerleading-centred media—such as the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders (DCC) docuseries *America's Sweethearts*—the narrative around cheerleading is shifting.

When someone says 'think of a sport,' most think of widely known professional sports such as hockey, baseball or basketball, with cheering often represented simply for crowd morale.

In a ProCon piece by Britannica, Daniel Nester, former head coach of Georgia Tech's cheer team, speaks to the physical effort and passion required to be a cheerleader.

"These athletes have trained their whole lives, and they continue to train every day. What's the difference between a track-and-field athlete and a cheerleader? History and pom-poms—and that's what is standing in our way," Nester said.

This sentiment is echoed throughout the world of cheerleading.

'I can't imagine hip surgery at twenty-five'

In an article by People Magazine, DCC cheerleader Parker Kilpatrick says it's hard to describe the intensity of cheerleading for a team as prestigious as the Dallas Cowboys.

She told People Magazine she's always been athletic, but the training camp to join the Cowboys put her endurance and stamina to the test.

"I was like, 'No, really, like, this is genuinely the hardest thing I've ever done,'" Kilpatrick said. "We really earn it every single day."

Some of the DCC's most iconic cheer team—the Outriders—by a friend from high school around the time the *America's Sweethearts* docuseries was gaining popularity.

While Moncrieff had already been a dancer for many years, she says cheering presented its own unique challenges.

"The amount of rain games have been horrendous," she says. "Also, the boots that we wear on the Stamps are super heavy."

Starting her cheer career on the heels of the series success meant Moncrieff constantly had fans questioning if the life of an Outrider was similar to that of a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader.

"As far as intensity, obviously, our schedule and our league isn't as big, but in terms of dancer life and how the industry works and how we're hiring and all of that works, it's quite accurate," she says.

While the Outriders fall more closely into the category of dance cheer as opposed to stunt cheer, the dedication and discipline required to succeed are easily comparable to competitive athletes.

"It's more about endurance you would see on a football field, or that stamina we still have to have. So I'd say, in a physicality way, we're very similar to athletes, but we're not obviously playing a game, like a normal traditional sport," says Moncrieff.

Moncrieff, along with much of the cheer community, says the recognition the sport is finally getting is overdue, and DCC has played a large part in showing the world what it truly means to be a cheerleader.

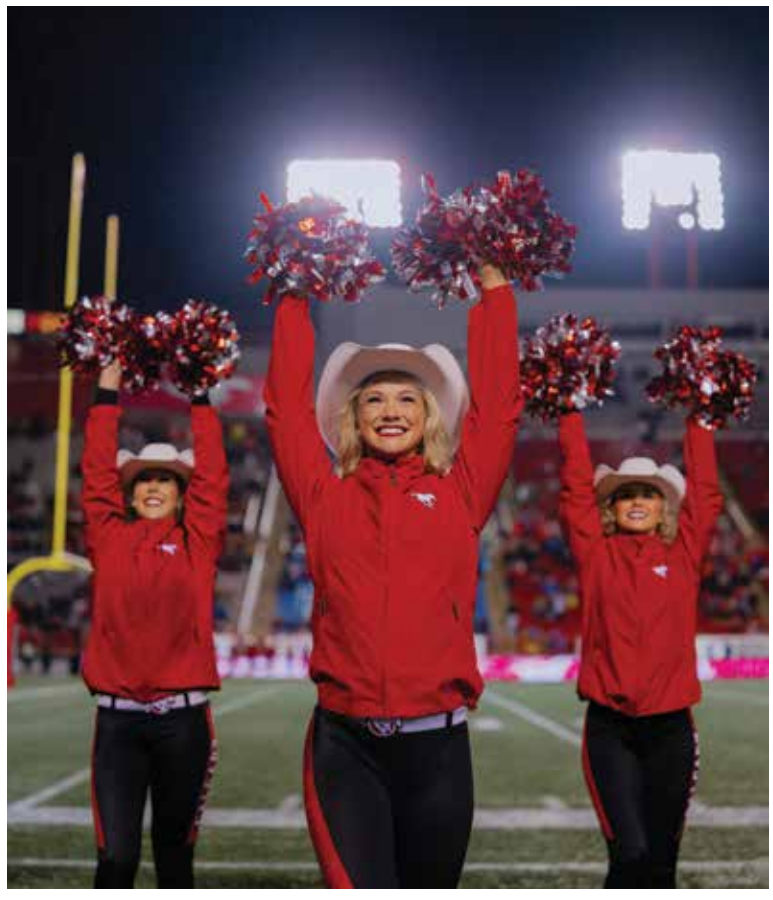
skills are also among the most physically demanding, with one Reddit user explaining that many of the cheerleaders will endure lifelong injuries to continue performing throughout the season.

"I know they are famously known for their kicks and the jump splits; however, season after season we see these ladies wreck their bodies for this one trick," user Annual_Resolution_94 wrote. "When Caroline was getting her hip surgery, the doctor asked her if it was worth it and she was satisfied. I think she is 25? I'm the same age. Can't imagine hip surgery at twenty-five!!!"

The Stampeders Outriders

But it's not just the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders who exemplify athleticism and stamina in the world of cheer.

Sydney Moncrieff was brought to the auditions for the Calgary Stampeders



Cheerleader Sydney Moncrieff dances for both the Stampeders Outriders and the Roughnecks Drill Crew. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @stampoutriders

#S

52 new student athletes joining the Mount Royal University Cougars for the 2026-2027 U SPORTS season

43 points scored by South Africa in the final game to beat New Zealand in Rugby's Greatest Rivalry series

2 teams, the Los Angeles Rams and the San Francisco 49ers made history playing the first ever regular season NFL game in Australia

11 milliseconds, the difference between Landon Norris and Kimi Antonelli for pole position at the Formula 1 Spanish Grand Prix

Women's Professional Baseball League hits it out of the park in inaugural season

The WPBL is quickly growing into a premier league in women's professional sports

Naomi Campbell, Contributor

Professional women's baseball has officially hit the big screens in the United States with the launch of the Women's Pro Baseball League (WPBL). The four franchise teams, the Boston Hunters, Los Angeles Queens, New York Heights and San Francisco Firebells created a huge impact in the first regular season for women's pro ball.

During this first season, each team played out of Robin Roberts Stadium in Springfield, Ill., taking away each club's home advantage. Nevertheless, each team developed their own unique style of play, and players showcased their talent on the diamond, receiving recognition for this historic first in women's sports.

The core four

The Boston Hunters experienced growing pains during this first season. Heading into the playoffs in last place, these women aren't looking to back down. During their debut, the Hunters fell short, losing 11-3 to the San Francisco Firebells.

With powerful and experienced right-handed pitcher Alli Schroder and highly skilled catcher Hyeonah Kim, the Hunters have two intriguing players to watch out for moving forward. Kim has an impressive international résumé, including a batting title for most hits in the 2025 Baseball For All (BFA) Women's Baseball Asian Cup, where she tallied 15 in seven games.

Schroeder played as the first female player to sign as part of the Canadian Collegiate Baseball Conference with the Vancouver Island University Mariners back in 2021, helping spark a new era of play for women's baseball.



The inaugural draft of the WPBL was hosted on Nov. 20 selecting players from 14 different countries. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @ wpbl_hunters

Tied for second was the Los Angeles Queens with a record of 8-7. In the Queens' first game—held in front of a sold-out crowd of over 4,000 fans—they defeated New York 10-8.

There have been two players who have stepped up to lead the Queens to success—third baseman Ashton Lansdell and centre fielder Mo'ne Davis. Lansdell had a wonderful first season in professional baseball.

Through 15 games, she has compiled 21 hits and scored 21 runs, including four home runs. Davis played in 13 games, recording 10 outs and nine additional assists.

Like Los Angeles, the New York Heights also sported an 8-7 record. By the end of the regular season, the Heights achieved many impressive milestones in their first season, including the second-best team batting average and the highest strikeout total among all pitchers.

Along with excellent ball play on either end of the diamond, the Heights saw contributions from several talented players, including infielder Madison Willan and catcher Denae Benites. Willan—the former goaltender for the University of Alberta's women's hockey team—contributed 15 outs and 19 assists. Meanwhile, Benites recorded 90 outs for her team with an impressive 11 home runs and 38 runs batted in (RBIs).

Topping the WPBL standings were the San Francisco Firebells, with a record of 10-5. After their fiery first season, they have many top-tier players to thank for their success.

Leading the way for the Firebells was infielder and two-way player Amanda Gianelloni and Savannah Bananas' talent, Kelsie Whitmore. Gianelloni recorded 16 hits and scored



The first season of the WPBL broke a 72-year drought of women's professional baseball. Photo courtesy of Instagram / @kelsie_whitmore

17 runs, tacking on 12 RBIs. Whitmore had 23 hits, including 11 home runs, but that wasn't all. In her six starts on the mound, she put up a record of 3-1, averaging 9.5 strikeouts a game.

Is the WPBL sustainable?

Building a new sports league requires significant effort to keep the operation running beyond the first year. According to University of San Franciso sports managment professor Nola Agha, in an interview with NPR Illinois, one of the biggest things a league needs is a dedicated fanbase.

Agha called playing exclusively in Springfield a "hotbed of baseball interest," which can later help kickstart a cascade of future fans.

The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) started in 1997, and, like the WPBL, fan attendance was strong at the outset.

According to Wikipedia, in the inaugural 1997 season, the average attendance was 9,661. The average attendance increased by 12 per cent in 1998. It eventually plummeted, and the market for women's baseball slowed down, yet 30 years later, the WNBA is at an all-time high.

After the WPBL's strong start, its viewership is expected to grow. Once the teams debut in their home cities, attendance is expected to surpass this season's records.

As the first season of professional women's baseball comes to a close, all four teams have established a strong basis for future seasons of the WPBL. Players from around the world created historic moments during this first season, delivering fantastic performances for fans to remember.