

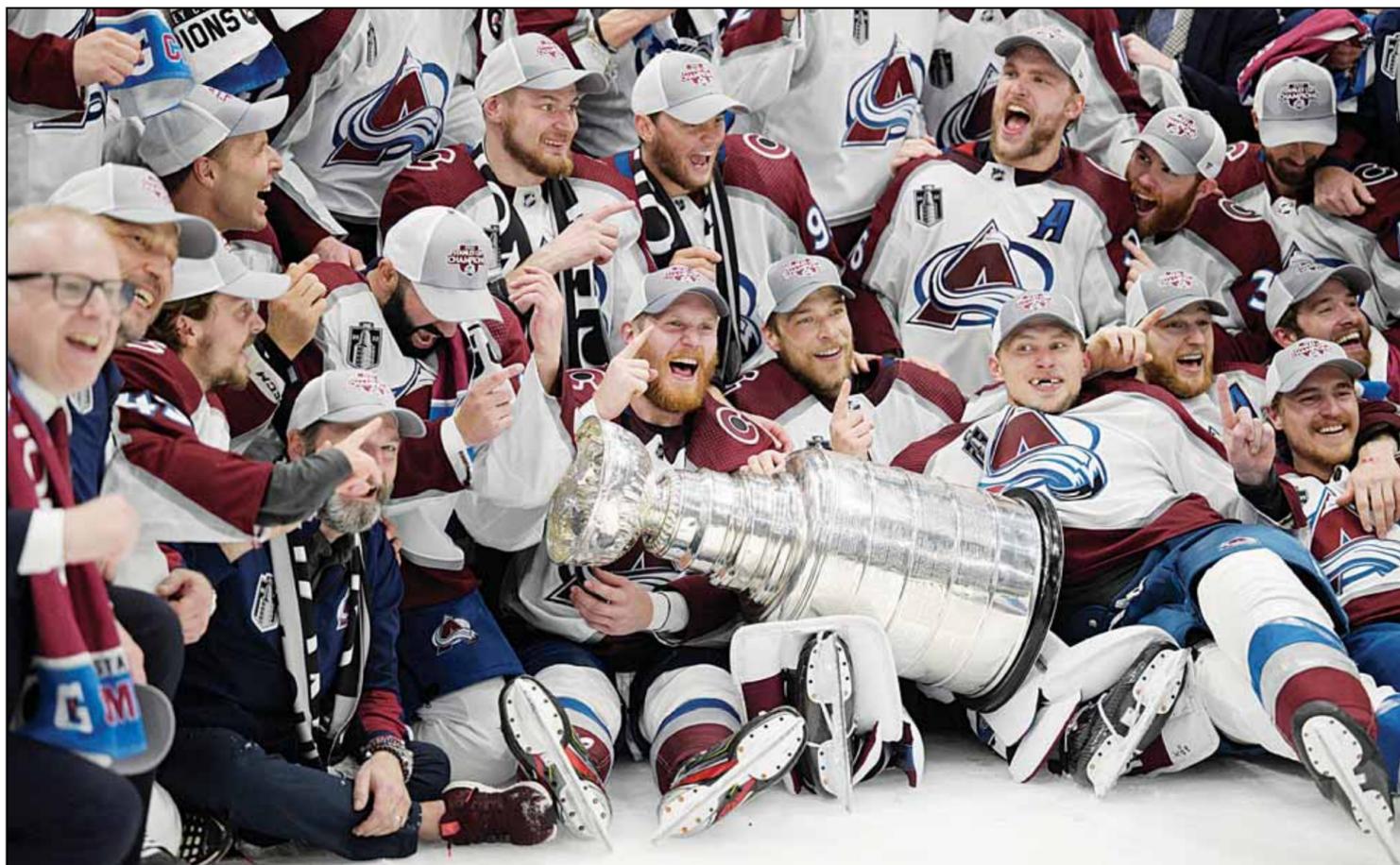


Colorado Avalanche right wing Valeri Nichushkin (13) and Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman (77) reach for the puck during the second period of Game 6 of the NHL hockey Stanley Cup Finals in Tampa, Fla. (AP)

Sports

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Avalanche win third Stanley Cup



Lightning dethroned

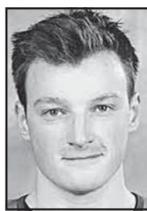
TAMPA, Fla., June 27, (AP): Nathan MacKinnon could not find the words. Gabriel Landeskog cracked a smile and a joke.

After years of playoff disappointments, the Colorado Avalanche are back atop hockey's mountain after dethroning the two-time defending champions.

Behind a goal and an assist from MacKinnon, the Avalanche won the Stanley Cup for the third time in franchise history and first in more than two decades by beating the Tampa Bay Lightning 2-1 in Game 6 of the final Sunday night.

"It's just been building over time," playoff MVP-winning defenseman Cale Makar said about the Avalanche's journey. "I've been here only three years. A couple of tough exits in the playoffs. It was just all leading up to this."

It's the first title for the Avs' core group led by MacKinnon, captain Gabriel Landeskog, Mikko Rantanen and Makar, and it follows several early postseason exits - in the second round each of the past three seasons and the first round in 2018. The 2016-17 team was the worst in hockey, finishing with just 48 points.



Makar

ICE HOCKEY

"It's hard to describe," said MacKinnon, who led the way in the clincher by blocking shots and taking big hits in addition to his offensive production. "Some tough years mixed in there, but it's all over now. We never stopped believing."

With a mix of speed, high-end talent and the experience gained from those defeats, Colorado broke through this time - earning every bit of the championship by knocking off a deep and gritty team that hoisted the Cup the past two years.

"To beat them is probably a little more satisfying, to be honest, because they are champions," said veteran forward Andrew Cogliano, who hoisted the Cup for the first time at age 35. "They know how to win. And, ultimately, when you can beat the champions, you know you really earned it."

Like the Avalanche fully expected, it wasn't easy.

An early turnover by Makar led to an easy goal by Steven Stamkos, putting Colorado in a hole and several more bumps and bruises followed. The Avalanche tied it when MacKinnon beat 2021 playoff MVP Andrei Vasilevskiy with a near-perfect shot and went ahead on another big goal by trade deadline acquisition Artturi Lehkonen. They locked things down by holding on to the puck and held Tampa Bay without a shot on Darcy Kuemper until midway through the third period.

When the Lightning finally did, he was there. Brought in from Arizona in a trade last summer to shore up the sport's most important position, Kuemper was solid again and made his most important save with under seven minutes left when he slid over to deny star Nikita Kucherov.

His teammates finished the job and Colorado improved to 9-1 on the road this postseason.

Much like the Lightning went all in multiple times by trading high draft picks and prospects to load up for the best chance to win the Cup, Avalanche general manager Joe Sakic was not afraid to ante up in March to acquire Lehkonen, defenseman Josh Manson and Cogliano. They became the perfect complement to Colorado's core that had showed plenty of playoff promise but until now hadn't produced a championship.

Sakic, who captained Colorado's first two title-winning teams in 1996 and 2001, used a familiar recipe to get his team over the hump. Much like Pierre Larocq, the architect of those Avalanche teams that had so much success after the organization moved to Denver, Sakic prioritized skill, speed and versatility.

That speed overwhelmed every opponent on the way to the final, from an opening sweep of Nashville through a hard-fought, six-game series against St. Louis and another sweep of Edmonton. It was a different challenge against Tampa Bay, when the Avalanche needed to absorb counter-punches from the back-to-back champions to close it out.

Tampa Bay ended up two victories short of becoming the NHL's first three-peat champion since the early 1980s New York Islanders dynasty.

Alejandro stuns Hurkacz

Djokovic makes more history at Wimbledon

WIMBLEDON, England, June 27, (AP): These days, Novak Djokovic makes history just about every time he wins another match. On Monday, the top-ranked Serb did just that at Wimbledon.

Djokovic, a six-time champion at the All England Club, beat Kwon Soon-woo 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 on Centre Court, his 80th victory at the grass-court major. With it, he became the first man or woman to win that many matches at each of the four Grand Slam tennis tournaments.

"It's always very unique match to play as the defending champion, first on the grass," said Djokovic, who won his 22nd straight match at the tournament. "Other than this year that Wimbledon made a change so you could practice before the tournament starts, it was always coming out on the untouched grass. It's really a unique and special feeling in our sport."

Djokovic was playing for the first time since losing to Rafael Nadal last month in the French Open quarterfinals. "It didn't all go his way on Monday, however."

With the roof closed because of sporadic rain, Kwon was able to pick his spots with his booming forehand. It all came together in the second set, and even continued into the third, but Djokovic stepped it up and played like he usually plays in southwest London - unbeatable.

Djokovic has won the last three Wimbledon titles and is going for his seventh overall. That would put him in a tie for the second most with Pete Sampras and William Renshaw. Only Roger Federer, with eight, has more.

Another major title would give him 21 for his career. Nadal has 22, and Federer has 20.

TENNIS

Most of Djokovic's Grand Slam singles championships have come at the Australian Open, where he is a nine-time champion. But he was unable to defend his title in Melbourne this year after being deported because of Australia's COVID-19 vaccination protocols.

Despite that issue, the crowd on Centre Court was happy to see him back at Wimbledon.

"I guess that motivates me more to try to make the most out of this tournament," he said.

After Djokovic finished, Emma Raducanu took to Centre Court for the first time. The 19-year-old British



Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina returns the ball to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz during their men's singles tennis match on day one of the Wimbledon tennis championships in London. (AP)

player, who won the U.S. Open last year, was playing at the All England Club for the first time since retiring from her fourth-round match a year ago.

The first player to reach the second round was Alison Riske. The 28th-seeded American defeated Ylena In-Albon of Switzerland 6-2, 6-4.

Other seeded women who advanced were No. 2 Anett Kontaveit of Estonia, No. 3 Ons Jabeur of Tunisia, No. 24 Elise Mertens of Belgium and No. 29 Anhelina Kalinina of Ukraine. Kalinina will face another Ukrainian, Lesia Tsurenko, in the second round.

Tsurenko's match was halted for about 10 minutes when her opponent, British wild-card entry Jodie Burrage, stopped to help a ballboy who was feeling faint.

Burrage gave the boy a sports drink and nutritional gel before someone in the crowd passed her some chewy candy. The boy was soon helped off court.

French Open finalist Casper Ruud won his opening match on Court 12. The third-seeded Norwegian defeated Albert Ramos-Vinolas 7-6 (1), 7-6 (9), 6-2.

No. 23 Frances Tiafoe of the United States and No. 30 Tommy Paul of the United States advanced.

The highest seeded player to lose was No. 7 Hubert Hurkacz of Poland. He was beaten by Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain 7-6 (4), 6-4, 5-7, 2-6, 7-6 (10-8).

Ole Miss sweeps Oklahoma

Mississippi clinches first CWS title

OMAHA, Neb., June 27, (AP): The last team to get into the NCAA baseball tournament was the last team standing.

Mississippi scored twice on wild pitches in a three-run eighth inning and the Rebels won their first national baseball title, sweeping Oklahoma in the College World Series finals with a 4-2 victory Sunday.

The Rebels (42-23) became the eighth national champion since 2009 to come out of the Southeastern Conference and third straight, and the trophy will stay in the Magnolia State for another year. Mississippi State won last year.

"There is so much to be said for how much we overcame this year, how much we had to fight through, how much we had to pick each other up and never let ourselves get down," team captain Tim Elko said. "The story of our season is going to be told for year and years to come."

Ole Miss benefited from a runner-interference call that took a run away from Oklahoma (45-24) in the sixth inning. The Rebels also overcame a spectacular pitching performance by Cade Horton, who set a CWS finals record with 13 strikeouts.

Brandon Johnson struck out the side in a 1-2-3 ninth inning to set off a celebration on the field and in the stands where the majority of the 25,972 were Rebels fans dressed in Ole Miss powder blue. Catcher Hayden Dunhurst ran to the mound to embrace and then

BASEBALL

tackle Johnson after Sebastian Orduno swung and missed on the final pitch.

It was an improbable journey for the Rebels and 22nd-year coach Mike Bianco, who was under fire when his team sat at 22-17 overall and 7-14 in SEC play on May 1.

"I think they've showed a lot of people that you can fall down, you can stumble and you can fail, but that doesn't mean you're a failure," Bianco said. "If you continue to work hard, you continue to push and you continue to believe, you can accomplish anything. That's not some poster or some tweet to motivate you. We've all heard that. These guys have lived that season."

Ole Miss beat out North Carolina State for the final at-large bid and had to go on the road for regionals and super regionals. The Rebels finished the season on a 20-6 run, including 10-1 in the national tournament.

Their only loss at the CWS was 3-2 to Arkansas on Wednesday. The next day, Dylan DeLucia pitched a four-hit shutout to beat the Razorbacks and send the Rebels to the finals. DeLucia was named CWS Most Outstanding Player after allowing one earned run,



Mississippi pitcher John Gaddis (27) throws a pitch against Oklahoma in the seventh inning of Game 2 of the NCAA College World Series baseball finals in Omaha, Neb. (AP)

Al-Kuwait defeat Iranian team

NEW DELHI, June 27, (KUNA): Kuwait's Al-Kuwait SC defeated Iran's Mes Kerman (30-17) in the third match of Group B in the 24th Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship held in Indian city of Hyderabad.

In another match today, Al-Najma club of Bahrain drew against al-Wakrah club of Qatar (24-24) to remain in top position of the group with five points and seven-goal difference. Al-Najma had defeated earlier Iran's Mes Kerman 31-25 and Al-Kuwait 30-29.

Al-Kuwait are occupying the second position in the group with four points and 22 goal difference.

striking out 17 and walking none in 16 2/3 innings.

Ole Miss, which won the CWS finals opener 10-3, was down 2-1 going

into the eighth inning Sunday. Trevin Michael relieved Horton with one out, and Jacob Gonzalez singled through the right side to drive in the tying run.



Mississippi players dogpile following their victory over Oklahoma to win Game 2 of the NCAA College World Series baseball finals in Omaha, Neb. (AP)