

# Penn State Women's Hockey Ranked For The First Time In Program History

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Penn State-ment? After the hottest start in program history, Penn State women's hockey is ranked in the USCHO.com Poll for the first time ever.

This past weekend, Penn State swept in-state foe Robert Morris in Moon Township to improve to a record of 6-1-1. Not only was it the first time Penn State had swept the Colonials but it also was the first time that Robert Morris got swept at home by any CHA opponent in over eight years.

To some, this phenomenal start wasn't much of a surprise. Penn State's remarkable freshman class was widely considered to be the best in the nation.

When head coach Jeff Kampersal took over in 2017, his recruits were committing as young as 13 or 14 years old. Those recruits are now the team's stars, including the team's best player, Kiara Zanon.

Zanon leads the team with 11 points in just eight games and was recently named the WCHA's National Rookie of the Month for December. Her 1.375 points per game is currently second in the nation.

Before her time at Penn State, Zanon led the PWHL, the women's top junior league, in points by a wide margin. Her 64 points in 35 games was 20 more than anyone else in the league. She was also one of only three Americans in the Top 100.

To put in perspective how good Penn State's recruiting class was, the PWHL's third highest scorer was Olivia Wallin. Nobody has scored more PWHL goals in a two-year span than her. Her 52 goals in 76 career games was the most of any player over that span. Now a Nittany Lion, Wallin has four points in six games and has been an impressive first-line right winger.

Penn State started its season with an easy sweep over Lindenwood but would be put to a test with a four-game series versus Syracuse. Coming into the series, Penn State had beaten Syracuse just twice in program history. By series end, they had doubled their win total, going 2-1-1 against the Orange, tallying two incredible third-period comebacks. The Nittany Lions' "never quit" mentality earned them the mantra "Whatever It Takes."

Eight games into the season, Penn State is averaging three goals per game, an entire 1.1 goals per game more than last season. With 41.1 shots per game, the Nittany Lions are averaging 13 more than a year ago. On defense, freshman goalie Josie Bothun might be just 5 feet 6 inches, but she

is standing quite tall in net. Her .944 save percentage has held opponents to under two goals per game.

Now No. 10 in the rankings, Penn State will take on Rochester Institute of Technology in a four-game home and home series. Penn State is heavily favored, but RIT is known for pulling off upsets in the CHA. Just last weekend, the Tigers defeated Mercyhurst to earn a CHA split.

If Penn State can take care of business, it should have quite the stronghold on the CHA standings and could climb even higher in the national ranks.

If the Nittany Lions keep up this pace, who knows how far this team can get. It appears the sky's the limit for this team, perhaps even to the point that Pegula Ice Arena could host the national championship in 2022. But there's still a lot of hockey to be played, and coach Kampersal's Nittany Lions will surely focus on winning now and dreaming later. Whatever it takes.

*Kyle Cannillo is a broadcast journalism major at Penn State University. To contact him, please email [kcannillo1@gmail.com](mailto:kcannillo1@gmail.com).*