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Sports Business

PWHL San Jose's identity revealed internally as branding decision looms



The Professional Women's Hockey League held a media event at the SAP Center to announce San Jose as the league's latest expansion city in May 2026.
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By Kristen Gonzalez – Reporter, Silicon Valley Business Journal
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Story Highlights

- PWHL San Jose's team name was circulated to all four expansion franchises earlier this month.
- San Jose State University expert Shaun Fletcher said successful team names resonate locally and remain marketable.
- Jonathan Becher said Sharks Sports & Entertainment will reconfigure SAP Center's schedule for PWHL San Jose games.

PWHL San Jose's identity has been revealed internally.

Team names were circulated to all four expansion PWHL franchises earlier this month, according to an Oct. 5 report by The Hockey News, but the decision on the organization's branding could be one of the key factors in the sustained success of the South Bay's newest professional women's sports team, according to a local expert.

Shaun Fletcher, an associate professor of public relations and sport communications at San Jose State University, said team names must do two things: resonate with local fans and be marketable.

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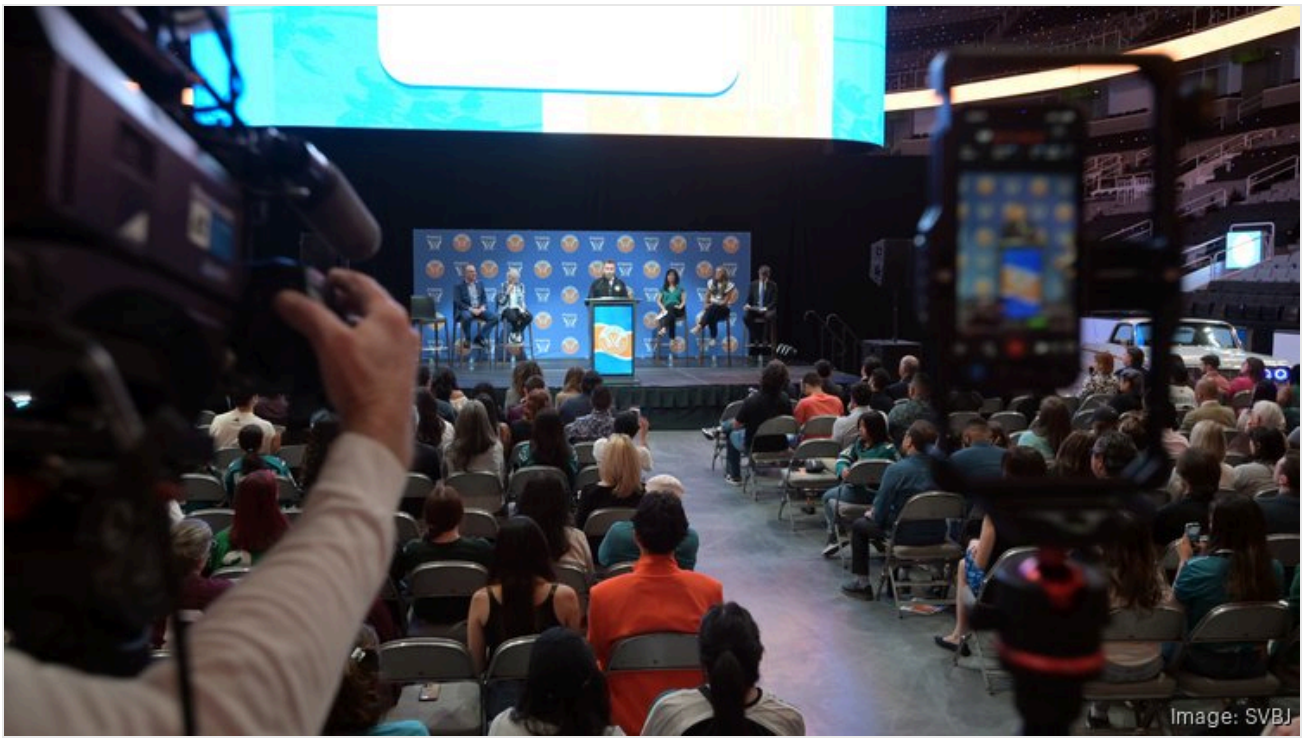
"The most successful team names have depth to it, [they're] not just haphazardly selected," Fletcher told the Silicon Valley Business Journal.

Other expansion markets include Las Vegas, Detroit and Hamilton.

At PWHL San Jose's franchise unveiling, Mayor Matt Mahan suggested "Hammerheads," while San Jose Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce CEO Leah Toeniskoetter proposed "Stingrays." When asked, Fletcher said his guess was "Tsunami."

"It would be a miss if they were to go outside of something aquatic," he said.

Representatives of PWHL San Jose were not available for comment.



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Fletcher pointed to the Golden State Valkyries as an example, noting the team's "combat warrior-type" branding plays off its Chase Center co-tenants, the Golden

State Warriors.

The team also turned its name into a play on its home court, which is referred to as "Ballhalla" during Valkyries games.

"At every single point of contact that you had with the organization, you felt as though you were part of this coalition who was going into battle every time an opposing team came into our arena," Fletcher said.

The Golden State Valkyries are also the first women's professional sports team to exceed $100 million in annual revenue, according to sister publication San Francisco Business Times.

Bay FC, a San Jose-based National Women's Soccer League franchise founded in 2023, has also received a positive reception in the Bay Area.

The club's match against the Washington Spirit drew 40,091 fans to Oracle Park in San Francisco, becoming the highest-attended game in U.S. women's professional sports history at the time.

Fletcher said the region's response to women's sports suggests the market has not been saturated.

The South Bay has gained three professional women's sports franchises in three years, most recently with the addition of the NorCal Rumble, a women's volleyball team set to play its inaugural season at Tech CU Arena in San Jose.

Fletcher said it would benefit PWHL San Jose if the organization aligned its identity with its SAP Center co-tenant, the San Jose Sharks.

"The PWHL San Jose franchise should not be trying to go after a market that's not already, for the most part, aligned with the San Jose Sharks," he said. "You should

not put your branding outside of the beaten path because they've already tapped into a market the Sharks have been wildly successful with."

Coordination between PWHL San Jose and the Sharks already appears to be underway.

Jonathan Becher, president of Sharks Sports & Entertainment, said his organization has reconfigured SAP Center's schedule so that nearly all games can be played at the venue amid its $425 million renovation. Once the Sharks' season is over, the league will shift the San Jose franchise's games to Tech CU Arena, according to previous Business Journal reporting.

"The Sharks and PWHL San Jose are committed to working together to grow the game and build a strong fan base for professional women's hockey in the Bay Area," Becher said. "Even before local operations were established, Sharks Sports & Entertainment supported season membership deposits and helped connect the organization with potential community stakeholders."

Sharks President Jonathan Becher welcomed the new team to the Shark Tank, which will serve as the as yet unnamed team’s home ice.

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PWHL San Jose will also receive a dedicated locker room and team facility at Sharks Ice, training alongside the Sharks and their AHL affiliate, the San Jose Barracuda, according to Becher.

Fletcher said PWHL San Jose's position as a new franchise in an established league could help attract corporate sponsorships.

"When you start seeing success, when you see ticket sales, when you see revenue sharing, when you see these leagues negotiating media rights deals ... it becomes a bit more enticing for an organization to say we got in on the ground floor," he said.

Fletcher added that planting roots in the community will be crucial, particularly through youth hockey organizations across the Bay Area that already have relationships with the audience PWHL San Jose hopes to reach, including the Junior Sharks.

Becher said the Sharks' philosophy has been to operate "as a good neighbor in the community."

"San Jose is also an incredibly diverse community, and it's important that everyone feels welcome and included under the Sharks umbrella," he told the Business Journal.

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3	3	The Tech Interactive

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