



[Arena Digest](#)

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## PORTLAND TO JOIN ECHL FOR 2018-19 SEASON

Professional hockey will return to Portland, ME next year, as Comcast Spectacor announced plans to bring an ECHL franchise to Cross Insurance Arena.

On Thursday, the ECHL confirmed that Comcast Spectacor will run an ECHL team at Cross Insurance Arena, former home of the AHL's Portland Pirates. The league's board of governors has approved the transfer of controlling interest in the defunct Alaska Aces membership to Comcast Spectacor, allowing for Portland to join the league for the 2018-19 season. The Aces announced earlier this year that were dropping out of the league, effective for the 2017-18 season.

As noted, the Portland franchise will play at Cross Insurance Arena, which was the home of the Pirates until they relocated to Springfield, MA after the 2015-16 season. Comcast Spectacor is the parent company of Spectra and the NHL's Philadelphia Flyers. Flyers president Paul Holmgren will serve as the governor of the Portland club, while the franchise's day-to-day operations will be overseen by former Flyer Danny Briere.

While Comcast Spectacor will seek an NHL affiliation for the team, it is not anticipated to include prospects whose NHL rights are currently held by the Flyers. The Flyers have an active ECHL affiliation with the Reading Royals unaffected by this transaction. The new team's roster will mirror that of many other ECHL teams in that most of the players will be under contract to the team itself, and will be recruited and signed by the team's own hockey operations staff. Players will enjoy updated locker room and training facilities thanks to an 18-month, \$33-million renovation of Cross Insurance Arena completed in 2014.

"We are excited to reignite the hockey tradition in Portland," said Holmgren. "The Flyers organization has a strong commitment to winning and developing future stars, and we intend to bring that same culture to this franchise. We're also happy to have an opportunity to assist Spectra in its commitment to the Portland region and the Cross Insurance Arena, a great facility that has recently benefited from a major renovation."

"This is a great day for sports fans here in Portland," said Spectra's Mike Scanlon, divisional senior vice president. "We would like to thank Cumberland County, the Cross Insurance Arena Board of Trustees, the City of Portland, for their support in helping us to bring a hockey team back to the Cross Insurance Arena. We're excited about adding 36 great nights of affordable, family-friendly entertainment to an already vibrant event calendar."

Comcast Spectacor is part of Portland's hockey history. In 1977, the company purchased an AHL expansion franchise to play at the then-brand-new Cumberland County Civic Center. The Maine Mariners was a Flyers affiliate until 1983 and played in Portland through 1992, when they were replaced by the Portland Pirates. The Mariners won the Calder Cup in each of their first two seasons, and added a third in 1983-84.

For the past four seasons, the Flyers have run the business operations for the Hartford Wolf Pack, an American Hockey League franchise owned by and affiliated with the New York Rangers. The Wolf Pack are the primary tenant of Hartford's XL Center, where Spectra also provides venue management, food services and hospitality, and corporate partnerships. From 1996 to 2009, Comcast Spectacor founded and owned the Philadelphia Phantoms AHL franchise, which currently plays at the Spectra-managed PPL Center in Allentown, PA.

Portland's entry into the ECHL rekindles New England rivalries with previous AHL cities competing in the ECHL, including the Manchester (NH) Monarchs, and the Worcester (MA) Railers.