



FRANCISCO KJOLSETH The Salt Lake Tribune

Utah's new NHL hockey team is welcomed by fans as players and coaches arrive in Salt Lake City on April 2.

## Here's how you can help pick Utah NHL franchise's name

Franchise has presented 20 possible options for the team's name.

By KEVIN REYNOLDS

The first faceoff of Utah's NHL era is here.

Starting this week, fans can weigh in on the franchise's name.

The team on Wednesday opened the first of multiple surveys it intends to conduct over the coming weeks, giving fans 20 options to vote for.

Those options are:

- Utah Ice
- Utah HC
- Utah Outlaws
- Utah Blizzard
- Utah Blast
- Utah Freeze
- Utah Yeti

- Utah Frost
- Utah Caribou
- Utah Mountaineers
- Utah Swarm
- Utah Powder
- Utah Hive
- Utah Mammoth
- Utah Venom
- Utah Glaciers
- Utah Canyons
- Utah Squall
- Utah Black Diamonds
- Utah Fury

"Utah's NHL team is a community asset, and we want to make sure that the community has a say in what the name is," Utah NHL owner Ryan Smith said in a news release. "Utah has shown up for this team from the moment the NHL awarded us the franchise less than three weeks ago, and it is only fitting that our fans get the rare opportunity to help name the team

they'll be cheering for."

Voting is open until May 22. Smith Entertainment Group said the survey will use a number of strategies, including "geo-location identification" in "the prevention of ballot box stuffing."

The chosen team name is expected to be announced sometime during the team's inaugural season. But the pick drops at the start of the upcoming season, however, the team will only be wearing "Utah" on its jerseys — there will be no logo, branding, mascot or official colors on the ice until the 2025 campaign.

In the interim, the creative agency Doubleday and Cartwright — which has designed branding for multiple sports teams, including Inter Miami and the Milwaukee Bucks — will craft the look of Utah's hockey team.

### EYE ON THE Y »

## Hill's position switch might help Cougars solve offensive puzzle

By KEVIN REYNOLDS

The Salt Lake Tribune

**Provo** » When Keanu Hill regrouped after last year's 5-7 season, he told his parents he might need to change positions.

He'd been a receiver most of his career. His father, Lloyd Hill, was a Hall of Fame receiver at Texas Tech. He'd spent much of the last four years trying to crack into BYU's rotation of featured pass catchers.

But 2023 was a struggle. He started some games, but played injured throughout much of the season. He finished with just 12 catches.

So he figured tight end would be easier.

"Just talking to [offensive coordinator] A-Rod [Aaron Roderick], all the things he could do with me at that position. I can be a good blocker and run routes," Hill said.

In three months, Hill bulked up from 210 pounds to upward of 235. At 6-foot-4, he was an easy pass-catching option at a tight end. The move was complete.

And it might be exactly what Roderick needed to make the offensive jigsaw puzzle a little easier to solve.

Last year, BYU had more than 11 talented playmakers on offense. But it was sometimes difficult to get them on the field at the same time together.

Hill was chief among them. He could make contested catches, a valuable skill, and block well. He could help the running game and make plays.

But he never fit neatly into the wide receiver room and it was difficult to find him a spot.

He wasn't fast enough to break away from cornerbacks and safeties. BYU often opted to put more speed at receiver with Keelan Marion, Parker Kingston, Darius Lassiter and Chase Roberts logging most of the snaps. Even Kody Epps got



RICK EGAN The Salt Lake Tribune

Keanu Hill is making the switch from wide receiver to tight end this season for Brigham Young.

into the mix after he was healthy.

It meant Hill was left out at times — one of BYU's better players not involved. He never had a season with more than 36 catches.

But moving him to tight end allows BYU to get Hill on the field without sacrificing speed and length at the wide receiver position (something position coach Fesi Sitake values, especially in the Big 12). More of BYU's top 11 players can be on the field at the same time. Hill's position change also makes BYU less predictable. At tight end last year, whenever the Cougars brought in Mata'a Tafaese, opposing teams knew what would come next. With Hill being able to catch and block, it makes the offense more dynamic.

Roderick is "able to use me way more at that position," Hill said. It solves the jigsaw puzzle, too.

### NBA » ANALYSIS

## Underachieving Suns had no choice but to fire coach Frank Vogel, but don't let owner Mat Ishbia off the hook

By DOUG HALLER

**Phoenix** » Last week, Mat Ishbia talked for nearly 30 minutes about how well positioned the Phoenix Suns are. How close they are to championship. He mocked national commentary that suggested the organization's house is on fire. The Suns, he said, are in great shape.

A week later, Ishbia and general manager James Jones fired the head coach, dismissing Frank Vogel after one disappointing season. Expected to contend for a title, Phoenix was a first-round flame-out, eliminated and mostly uncompetitive in four games against the Minnesota Timberwolves. Someone had to take the fall. On Thursday, Vogel was that person.

A grinder who began his NBA career in the video room, Vogel did not have much of a chance in the desert. He was a defensive-minded coach with a defensive-challenged roster. He expected a scrappiness the Suns, built around the star power of Devin Booker, Kevin Durant and Bradley Beal, could not deliver. In addition, the Suns lacked a true point guard. They did not have a strong bench. These were the least of Vogel's problems.

As the season unfolded and frustration mounted, players lost trust in the head coach. A lot of this happened behind closed doors, but it also could be seen during games. How players reacted to Vogel during timeouts or when coming off the court revealed a fatal disconnect. What the Suns didn't say publicly was reflected in their body language.

With Phoenix's "Big 3" locked in for \$150 million next season, Ishbia made the only major move he could make. A head coach and a lost locker room cannot coexist, especially if that locker room lacks the leadership to sort through such things. Vogel might have deserved



ROSS D. FRANKLIN Associated Press

Phoenix Suns coach Frank Vogel speaks during his introductory news conference on June 6, 2023. After just one disappointing season on the job, Vogel was fired on Thursday.

better, but he had to go, a scapegoat for all that went wrong. This is how it usually works.

Give Ishbia credit for making a difficult decision — Vogel was his hire, after all, signed to a five-year deal last June — but don't let him off the hook. Since he assumed ownership of the organization, he has made the Suns impossible to ignore, attracting the WNBA and NBA All-Star Games to the desert, putting games on free television and upgrading facilities. But despite the upbeat message delivered last week, the basketball product has suffered mostly because of moves he pursued or approved.

Two years removed from the NBA Finals, Phoenix last season lost in the Western Conference semifinals to eventual champ Denver. This season they didn't win a single postseason game. That Minnesota has gone on to take a 2-0 series lead against reigning champ Denver in the semifinals should not change anyone's view. Regardless of first-round matchup, the Suns weren't advancing far.

After their Game 4 elimination loss, the "Big 3" and others discussed the importance of continuity and the benefits of building off experience. Durant pointed out that Minnesota, Denver, Boston and Oklahoma City, among others, had played together for two or

three seasons and that he looked forward to similar team building. Guard Grayson Allen agreed. The Suns, he said, learned what works and what does not.

The problem is Phoenix has been stuck, wheels spinning, in this mode since acquiring Durant at the 2023 trade deadline. "Figuring it out" has become an organization motto, a promise for a day that never comes. Last year the Suns insisted they fell short because they did not have enough time to fully integrate Durant. This year they struggled because they didn't have enough time to fully integrate Beal, who missed 29 games because of injury,

or to develop the chemistry needed to reach a higher level.

Next season they'll have a new coach.

Ishbia has been great for Phoenix mostly because he's proved that he's not afraid to spend, to do whatever it takes to produce the franchise's first championship. That's all fans want, but the moves have to pay off. A team expected to contend cannot narrowly avoid the Play-In Tournament. It cannot get swept in the first round no matter how well the opponent plays. That's what made last week's season-ending news conference with Ishbia so bizarre. He talked as if the Suns were right on track, that everything here was rosy. The conviction was admirable but the message bombed. And for the first time, Ishbia lost some trust with the fan base.

Decades ago, when this franchise was in its infancy, then-GM Jerry Colangelo interviewed three head-coaching candidates. The first was K.C. Jones, a former player and eight-time NBA champion. The second was University of Washington head coach Tex Winter, inventor of the triple-post offense. The third was Kansas State coach Bill Self. Of the three, Fitzsimmons stood out as the best communicator, the type who could adjust to a roster, talented or flawed, and get the best out of it. He got the job, and eventually, through two stints in Phoenix, became one of the best coaches in franchise history.

That's what Phoenix needs. A head coach who can connect. He'll need a strong staff that can help the Suns defensively. He'll need to convince role players to buy in and do the dirty work. But more than anything, the new head coach will need to connect with Booker, Durant and Beal and maximize their offensive potential. It may not get Phoenix a championship, but it's how these Suns are built. And for now, it's their only hope.