

## Canadian Collapse: Exit of NHL teams brings familiar heartache for fans, potential trouble for broadcasters

*Strong first round viewership could dwindle for rest of playoffs with loss of Canadian teams and big stars*

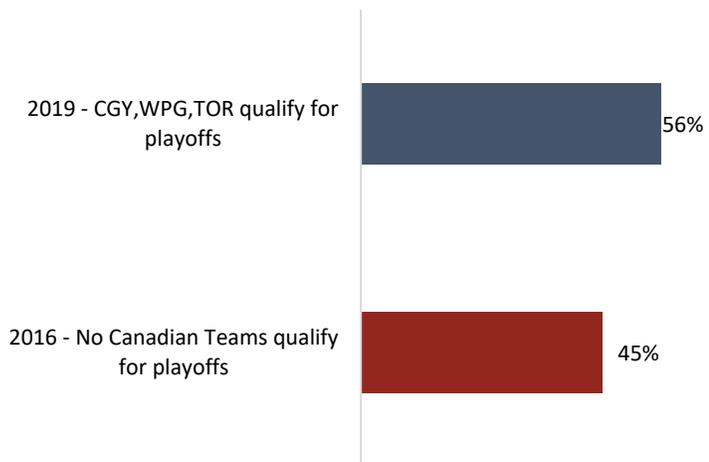
**April 25, 2019** – Canada's Stanley Cup drought was extended again this year, and a lot quicker than most hockey fans hoped. With the Calgary Flames, seeded first in the Western Conference, and the Toronto Maple Leafs and Winnipeg Jets both likely believing they could be playing well into May, parts of this country were buzzing with playoff fever.

But just two weeks into the post-season, all three teams are out, while the streak of futility among this nation's teams adds another year. No Canadian team has lifted Lord Stanley's Cup since the Montreal Canadiens did so in 1993.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that more than half of Canadians (56%) were tuned in to the first round of the playoffs with three of Canada's provinces represented.

While many Canadians are likely disappointed with the poor showing by Canada's teams, executives at Canada's broadcasters – Sportsnet and CBC – probably woke up Wednesday feeling morose as well. In 2016, when no Canadian teams qualified for the playoffs for the first time since 1970, fewer than half of Canadians (45%) said they would be tuning in.

### Percentage of Canadians who were following NHL playoffs



#### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 18 – 23, 2019, among a representative randomized sample of 1,544 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

#### **More Key Findings:**

- There's always next year. Asked which team they believe will be the first to bring the Stanley Cup back to Canada, 31 per cent of Canadian hockey fans choose Toronto, while one-in-five choose Winnipeg (18%). Montreal and Calgary are the two other teams with double digit support on this question, each receiving 10 per cent
- A Stanley Cup would likely mean a lot to Canadians. Among those who follow hockey, 62 per cent say that they are willing to cheer for any Canadian team if their favourite is knocked out.

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- Hockey remains the pinnacle of Canadian professional sports. Four-in-ten Canadians (37%) say they follow the NHL, double the number who say this of Major League Baseball (19%), the National Football League (18%) and the Canadian Football League (18%).

### **About ARI**

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

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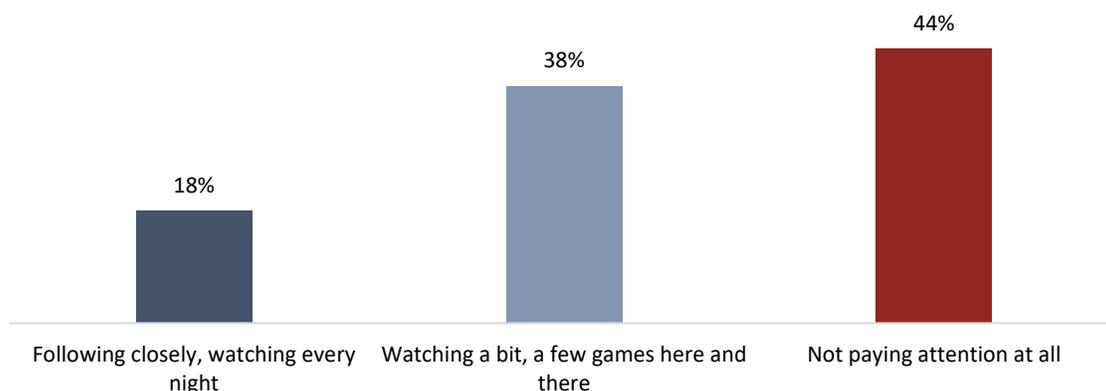
- **Canadians likely to tune out of NHL playoffs?**
- **Which team can break Canada’s Stanley Cup drought?**
- **Whoever does win will have the backing of the country**
- **Hockey remains the pinnacle for Canadian sports fans**

### **Canadians likely to tune out of NHL playoffs?**

The Toronto Maple Leafs were a godsend for Canada’s NHL broadcasters. One quick look at the ratings for this year’s first playoff round spells this out clearly. Game 6 of the series between Toronto and the Boston Bruins was watched simultaneously by nearly 4 million Canadians. For comparison, Monday night’s Game 6 between Washington and Carolina saw approximately 842,000 viewers.

That cannot be good news for Rogers Media, which holds a 12-year contract worth \$5.2 billion for exclusive NHL rights (which it shares with the CBC). The Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians during this first round of the playoffs whether they were watching. One-in-five said they were following closely (18%), while four-in-ten (38%) said they were tuning in here and there, a total of more than half (56%) then, who had been lending at least the occasional eyeball to the first round.

**How closely Canadians are following the NHL playoffs**  
All respondents, n = 1,544

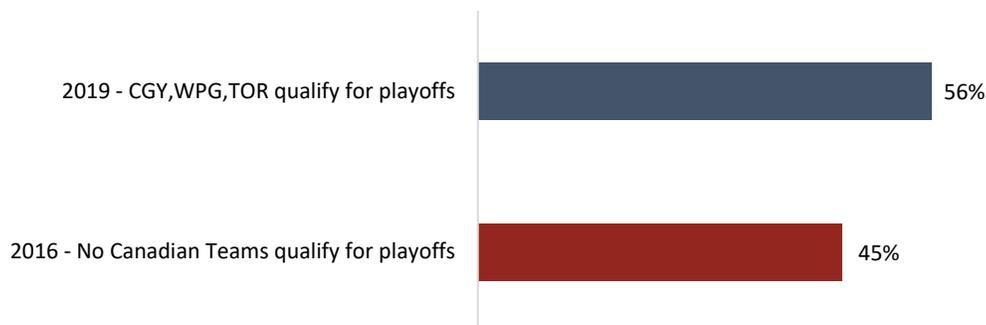


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Will viewership now shrink? Past polling offers a hint: in 2016, fewer than half of Canadians said they were paying attention to the playoffs. That year, no Canadian team made the playoffs – something that hadn't happened in more than 40 years. Adding to the NHL's troubles is the loss of two of the league's key superstars, Sidney Crosby and Alexander Ovechkin, both of whom saw their team's fail to advance past the first round this year.

### Percentage of Canadians who were following NHL playoffs



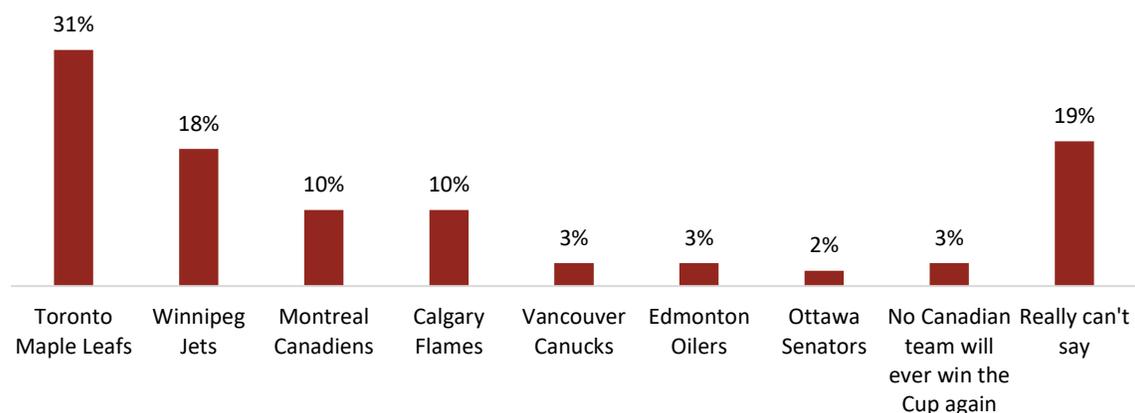
### Which team can break Canada's Stanley Cup drought?

Canadians have been waiting a long time to see one of their country's teams bring home the Stanley Cup. There have been some [close encounters](#). Since Canada's last Cup (Montreal in 1993), the Vancouver Canucks (2011, 1994), Edmonton Oilers (2006) and Calgary Flames (2004) have all made it to a final round, game 7, winner-take-all situation, only to lose in heartbreaking fashion.

Asked who they believe will be the team to break the curse, Canadians are most likely to place their faith in the Toronto Maple Leafs (31%) and Winnipeg Jets (18%). (Note that these responses were collected while all three Canadian teams were still in this year's playoffs.)

### Which of the 7 Canadian teams do you think will be the first one to break this streak and win the Cup?

Responses collected while all three Canadian teams were still active, asked only of those who follow the NHL, n = 728

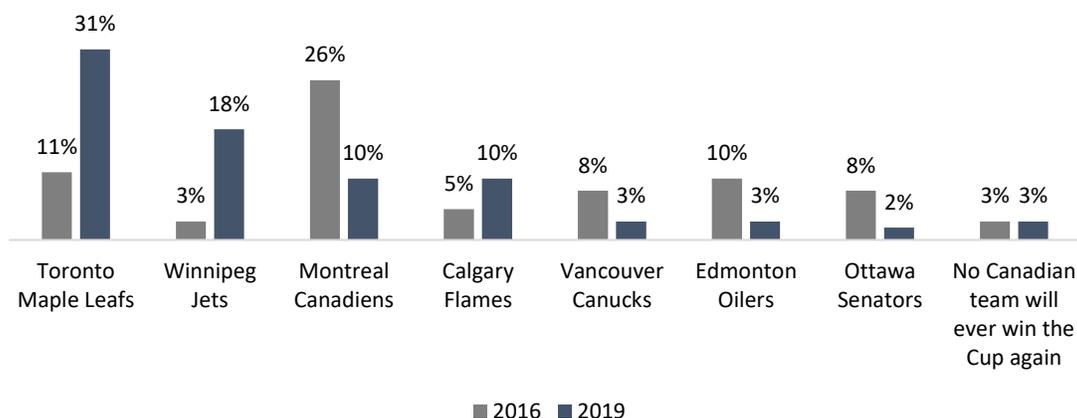


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These responses have changed markedly since 2016. In that year, Montreal was the most popular choice, and the Canucks, Oilers and Senators all received more than double the level of confidence they now generate. In both years, 3 per cent of Canadians said that no Canadian team will ever win the NHL's top prize again:

**Which of the 7 Canadian teams do you think will be the first one to break this streak and win the Cup?**



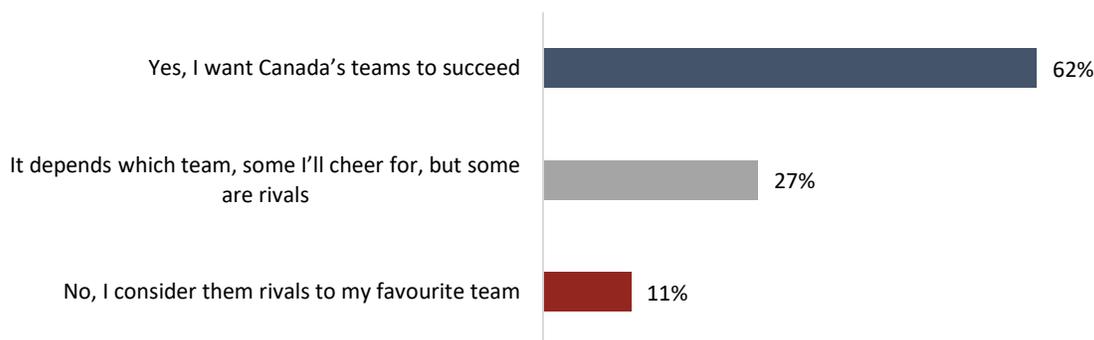
**Whoever does win will have the backing of the country**

There is often a discussion in Canadian sports circles about the territorial nature of hockey fans. There are obvious rivalries that cross generational lines. Leafs fans have a hard time cheering for the Habs and vice-versa. The same goes with the Battle of Alberta. That said, there is some unity across the country available for any team that is able to bring home the Stanley Cup.

Six-in-ten Canadian hockey watchers say they aren't picky, that they're willing to cheer for any Canadian team once their own is out of the picture:

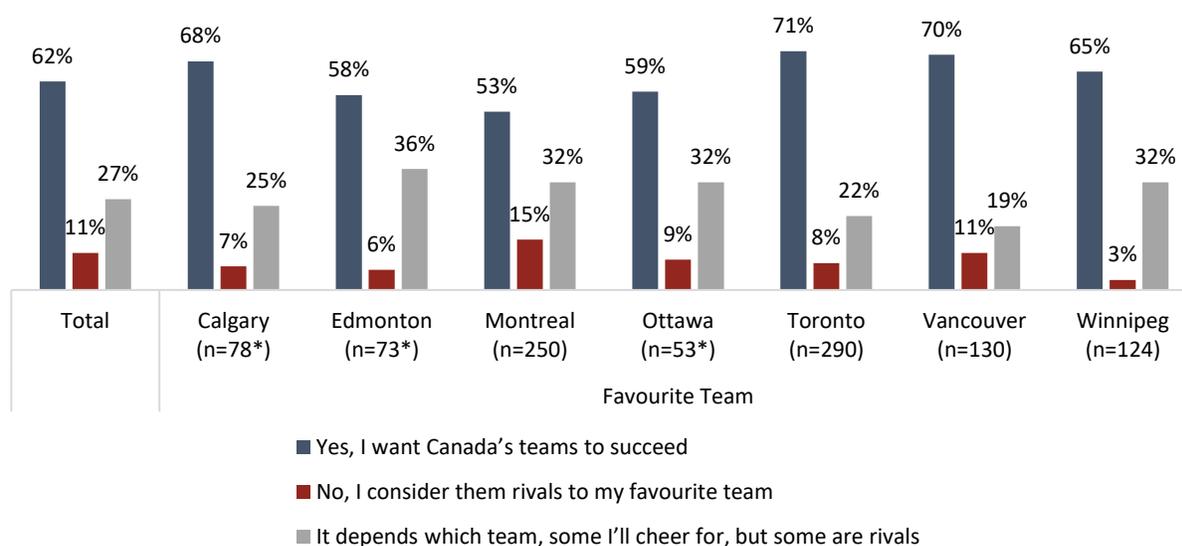
**Generally speaking, when your favourite team gets eliminated from the playoffs, do you find yourself cheering for the other Canadian teams because they're Canadian?**

Among those who follow the NHL, n = 1,080



Fans of the Maple Leafs and Canucks are the most likely to show love to their fellow Canadian squads if theirs is eliminated from contention, while Montreal Canadiens fans are least willing to extend this kind of support:

**Generally speaking, when your favourite team gets eliminated from the playoffs, do you find yourself cheering for the other Canadian teams because they're Canadian?**



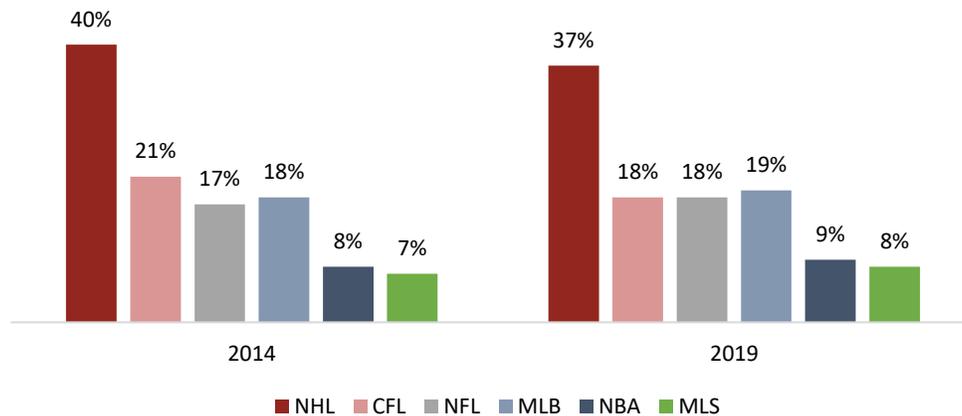
**\*note that these are relatively small sample sizes and should be evaluated with caution**

**Hockey remains the pinnacle for Canadian sports fans**

If there is any more evidence needed as to what a Stanley Cup championship would mean to Canadians it is likely the following: The NHL is twice as popular in this country as any other major professional sports league.

Comparing this data to five years ago, the dominance of the NHL remains. Four-in-ten Canadians say they follow that league, compared to 19 per cent who follow the MLB, and 18 per cent who follow each of the football leagues, the CFL and NFL.

Percentage of Canadians who follow each of these professional sports leagues 'closely'



While the Toronto Raptors appear to be Canada's best bet for a championship in one of the big four North American leagues (the NHL, NFL, MLB, and NBA), having advanced to the second round of the NBA playoffs this week, just one-in-ten Canadians profess to follow the NBA closely.

The Raptors game 4 win over the Orlando Magic in their first-round playoff series reached 977,000 viewers. While this is a far cry from the nearly four million following the Maple Leafs, the early departure of Canada's hockey teams may have viewers looking for another option, and the Raptors are waiting with open arms.

*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*