

After nearly five-month timeout, NHL fans hot and bothered for midsummer hockey

Seven-in-ten fans say they're excited for modified playoffs to get underway, but many say they'll tune out

July 30, 2020 – The 2020 August long weekend will feature something never seen before: NHL playoff hockey.

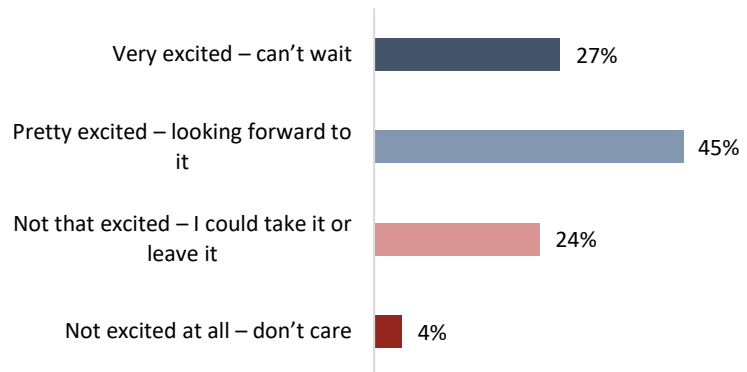
After nearly five months off the ice, 24 teams are lacing up their skates to compete in one of the stranger Stanley Cup playoffs in league history. The good news for hockey fans in this country is that because of the expanded playoff field, six of the seven Canadian teams will be playing for the championship.

Perhaps boosted by the participation of Canadian teams from five provinces, or simply wishing to finish the season that started last October, a new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds seven-in-ten hockey fans (72%) ready to embrace August hockey.

One-quarter (27%) of those who follow the NHL playoffs in a normal year say they are very excited for puck drop, while another 45 per cent of these fans are looking forward to it with slightly less excitement. On the other end of the enthusiasm spectrum, 28 per cent of fans who would normally watch the playoffs say they have little interest in the strange midsummer night's dream of chasing Lord Stanley's mug.

The league is scheduled to return to play on August 1 with modified playoffs. How excited would you say you are to watch this?

(Among those who regularly watch NHL playoffs closely, n=518)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 23 – 24, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,519 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.

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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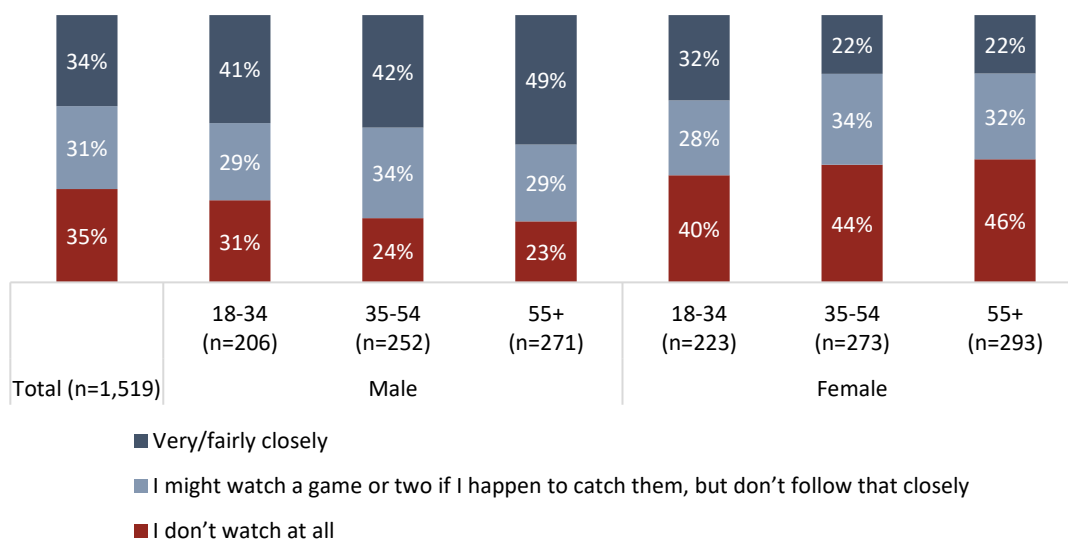
Hockey is back, but will Canadians care?

On March 12 of this year, the NHL [announced](#) that it would suspend play due to the outbreak of the coronavirus in North America. At the time, no one knew how long the break would last. Now, nearly five months after play was halted, hockey is set to resume on [August 1st](#).

The league will return with a modified playoff format. Eight additional teams were added to the standard top 16 that would normally qualify, due to the lack of resolution of the regular season. Twelve teams will be playing in Edmonton to see who will represent the Western Conference in the Stanley Cup final, while twelve more will play in Toronto to determine who will represent the East.

As a baseline, in traditional circumstances, one-in-three Canadians (34%) would normally tune into the playoffs consistently, while three-in-ten (31%) would check in from time to time. Men are much more likely to be close followers:

Thinking about the last 3 or 4 hockey seasons, on average, how closely would you say you follow the NHL playoffs?



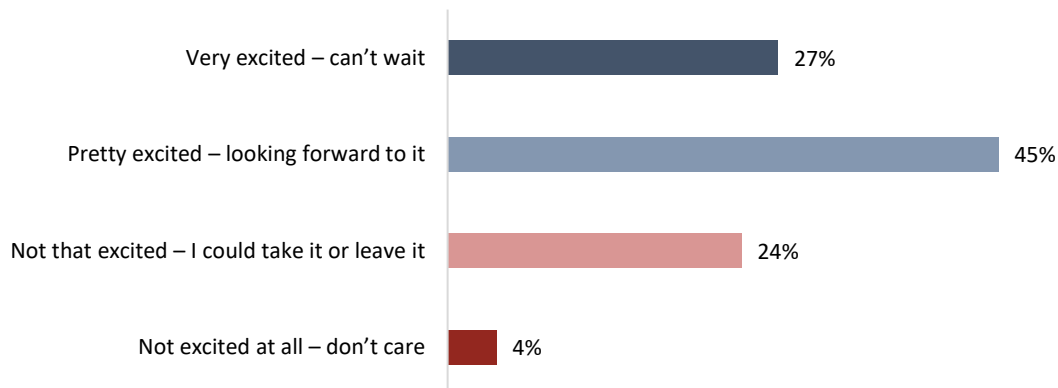
What will viewership look like this year under extraordinary circumstances? Time will tell just how many fans become hooked along the way, and high-profile matchups further down the line may lead to a boost in interest, but as players prepare for puck drop, about seven-in-ten hockey fans appear committed to this year's version of the playoffs. Among those who normally follow the NHL playoffs closely, one-quarter

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(27%) say they are very excited, while 45 per cent are not quite as excited but are looking forward to it. Three-in-ten (28%) say they have little interest, if any, in watching:

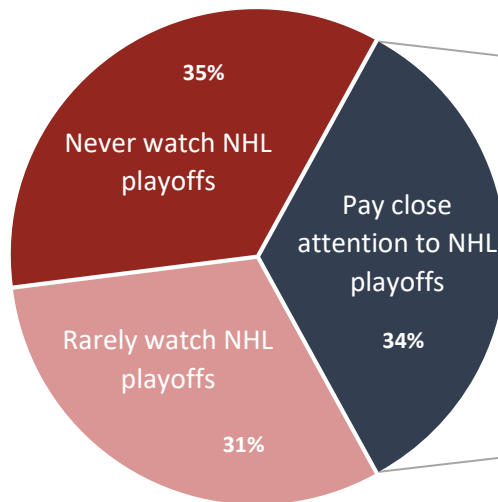
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(Among those who regularly watch NHL playoffs closely, n=518)**



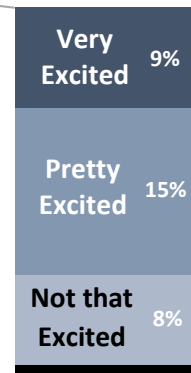
Looking at these responses in proportion to the general population, about one-in-ten Canadians (9%) are very excited for the August start, while 15 per cent are pretty excited.

Significant portions of potential fans are on the fence as playoffs begin but could join in if something intrigues them. With six Canadian teams – Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Montreal – qualifying for the tournament, one team may capture the nation's interest with a playoff run well into September and October:

**How closely do you follow NHL playoffs in a regular year?
(All respondents, n =1,519)**



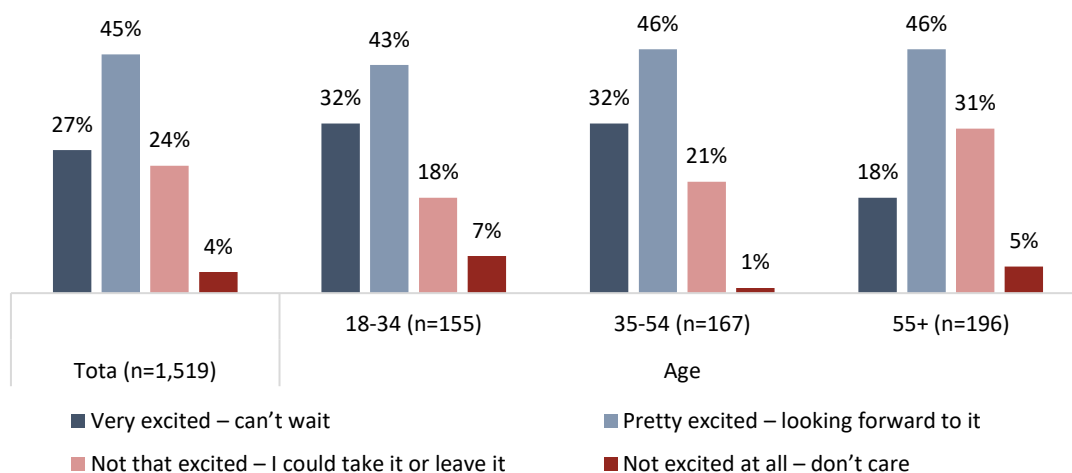
How excited are you for this NHL playoffs starting August 1?



Percentages re-based to all respondents, n=1,519

It is evidently older fans who have lost the most enthusiasm for these summer playoffs. Among hockey fans 55 years of age and older, 36 per cent say they have little interest, if any, in this non-traditional tournament. At least 75 per cent of fans in the two younger age groups are excited for playoff hockey, even if it kicks off in during an expected heatwave:

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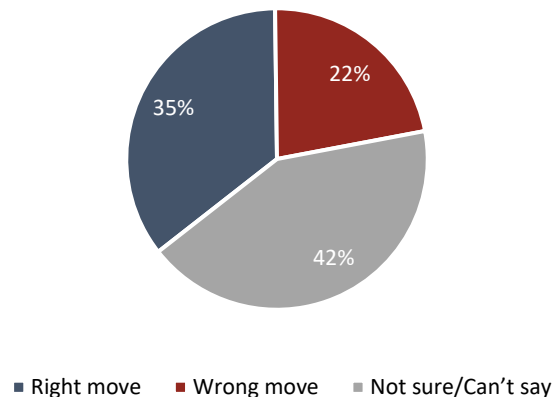
Good call to have Edmonton and Toronto host?

Major sports leagues have taken a wide variety of approaches to get their sports back in action. The NBA has established a ‘bubble’ at Walt Disney World in Orlando, with protocols, testing, and isolation procedures. The MLB is playing games in cities around America without fans. Baseball’s strategy may prove problematic, as games have already been cancelled due to an outbreak among the Miami Marlins’ players.

The NHL’s strategy has been to set up their return-to-play in two cities: Edmonton and Toronto. Several American cities were considered but ultimately rejected as COVID-19 cases continued to climb in that country. Players will have access to restaurants and training facilities in a sequestered space surrounding their hotels and the main arenas – Scotiabank Arena in Toronto and Rogers Place in Edmonton.

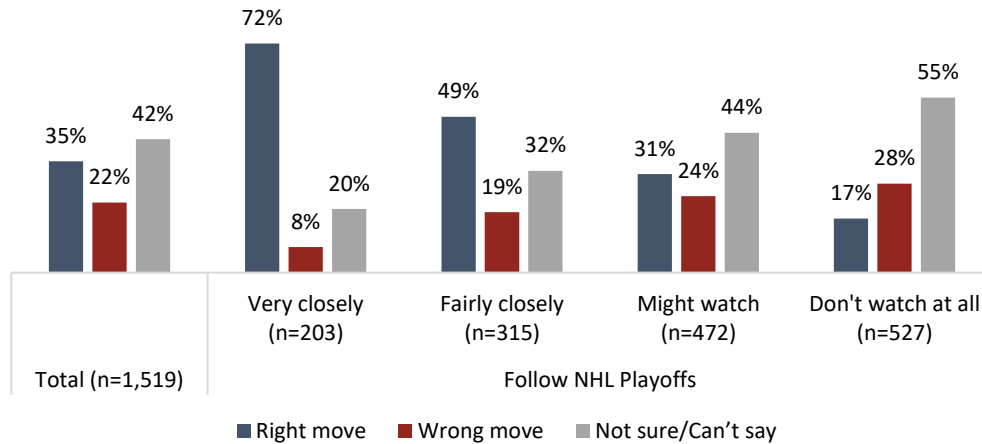
Overall, Canadians are more supportive than opposed to the decision to allow the NHL to set up shop in these cities. 35 per cent say it was the right choice, while 22 per cent say it was the wrong choice and could prove too much of a risk. The largest portion, two-in-five (42%) say they don’t know:

**Do you think it was ultimately the right move or wrong move to allow the NHL to host the playoffs in Edmonton and Toronto?
(All respondents, n=1,519)**



Notably, those who normally follow the NHL playoffs closely are much more supportive of the decision to bring NHL games to Edmonton and Toronto than the rest of the general public. Those who do not follow the league are more uncertain than they are opposed:

Do you think it was ultimately the right move or wrong move to allow the NHL to host the playoffs in Edmonton and Toronto?



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

For detailed results by regular playoffs engagement, [click here](#).