

Tuning out, turning off: No Canadian teams in NHL Playoffs drives viewers away

54% of regular playoff watchers say they'll watch less, or not at all

April 7, 2016 – When NHL commissioner Gary Bettman [expressed hope](#) Canadians would stick with the Stanley Cup playoffs – even though odds were not looking good for a single qualifying Canadian team – his concerns were indeed well-founded.

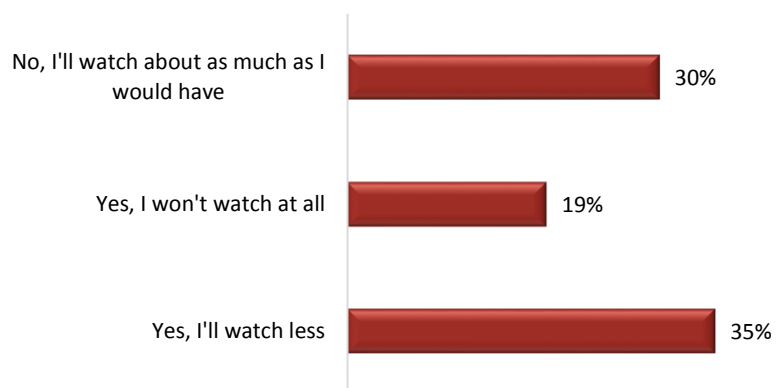
The latest poll from the Angus Reid Institute suggests more than half of regular playoff viewers on this side of the border say they'll either be watching less or tuning out completely.

With all seven Canadian clubs mathematically eliminated from playoff contention, the NHL team Canada's hockey fans are most likely to throw their support behind instead is the defending champion Chicago Blackhawks.

Key Findings

- When asked how important the game of hockey is to them personally, Canadians generally fall into one of three categories: fans (33%), those with many other interests that come before hockey (31%) and those who don't care about the sport at all (36%)
- A majority (54%) of those who normally watch the NHL Playoffs say they plan to watch less this year, if they choose to tune in at all. Among self-described "diehard fans," this figure rises to 59 per cent

**This year, there will be no Canadian teams participating in the NHL playoffs. Will this affect how much playoff hockey you watch?
(Among usual playoff viewers)**



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 28 – 31, 2016, among a representative randomized sample of 1,522 Canadian adults who are members of the [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.

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- With Canada now in a 23-year Stanley Cup drought, one-in-four (26%) of those who pay some attention to hockey believe the Montreal Canadiens have the best chance to break the streak and bring a championship back north of the 49th parallel

No Canadian teams = fewer Canadian viewers

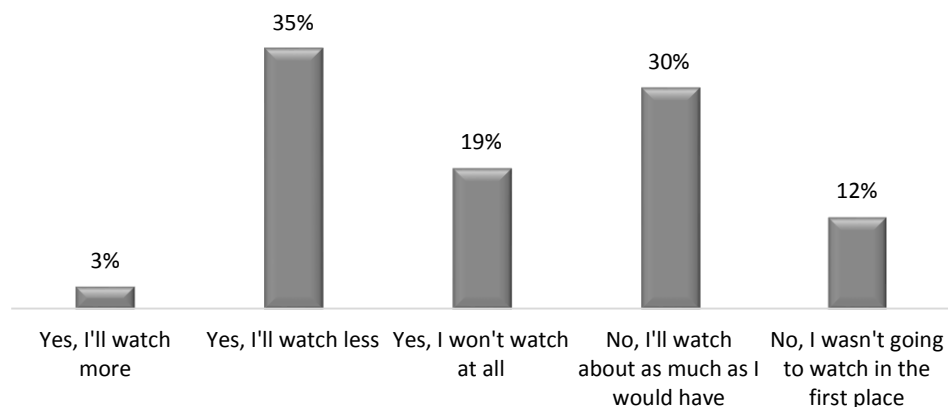
Though many may have been hoping it was merely a cruel April Fools' hoax, the first of this month cemented a depressing reality: Canadian Stanley Cup hopes were gone, dashed prematurely and left to wait another year. This season marks the first time the NHL Playoffs will proceed without a Canadian team since 1969-70, when the only Canadian teams to hold a place in the league were Toronto and Montreal.

In this country, that hurts. As [previously canvassed](#) by the Angus Reid Institute, 88 per cent of Canadians say that hockey is an important part of Canadian culture, a figure that includes 23 per cent who go as far as to say it "defines" our culture.

Now that fans' dreams of winning the cup have transitioned to dreams of winning the draft lottery for [consensus top pick Auston Matthews](#), what sort of effect will the absence of Canadian franchises have on their hockey-viewing habits over the next two months?

A majority (54%) of those who normally watch at least a couple of games during the playoffs say they'll be watching less this year, including 19 per cent who say they won't be watching at all. Considering an average of [1.5 million Canadians watched each game of the playoffs last year](#), this represents a significant exodus:

This year, there will be no Canadian teams participating in the NHL playoffs. Do you expect this to have an effect on how much playoff hockey you watch this year?

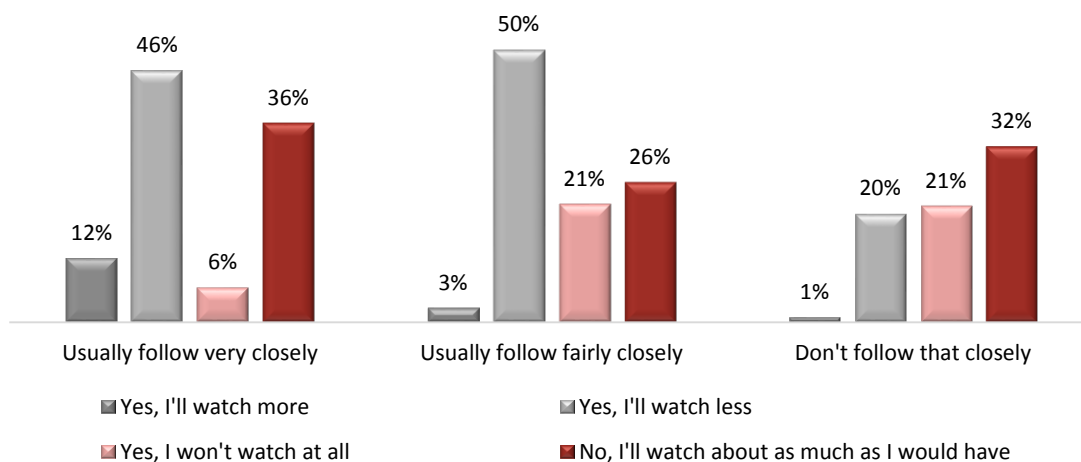


And it's not just casual fans – those often drawn onto the bandwagon around playoff time – who say they'll be changing their viewing habits this spring. Among those who say they follow the playoffs "very

closely” most years, nearly half (46%) report that they’re less inclined to watch this season. The same can be said for viewers who normally follow “fairly closely.” Almost three-quarters (71%) of this group will watch less than usual, including one-in-five (21%) who say they won’t watch at all.

Notably, one-in-ten fans who usually watch the playoffs very closely (12%) say they’ll actually be tuning in *more* this year – perhaps freed of the stresses of cheering for their home team, or perhaps fans of an American team that made the tournament:

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So if not Canada, then who?

Generally speaking, most Canadians are willing to set aside regional rivalries to support other Canadian teams in their pursuit of a championship. When asked if they find themselves cheering for other Canadian teams after their club is eliminated, more than half (57%) say yes, they want Canada’s teams to succeed.

Casual fans are most likely to take this approach, while diehards are more likely to say their support for Canadian franchises other than their own “depends” on the team in question (see summary tables at the end of the release).

But what about this year, when all of the Canadian teams are out of the running? When those who say they plan to watch the playoffs this season were asked to pick as many as two rooting interests from among the playoff-bound U.S. teams in each conference, most opted for a pair of Original Six squads:



Nearly half of respondents (46%) choose the defending champion Blackwawks, led by Canadians Jonathan Toews, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook, as the team they'll support in the Western Conference. In the Eastern Conference, the Boston Bruins narrowly edge out Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins as the most-chosen option.

As noted in the infographic above, playoff-watchers' allegiances in the Eastern Conference are more divided than in the west. They're also more precarious. Two of Canadians' four most-favoured teams in the east (Boston and Detroit) spent the last week of the season on the playoff bubble.

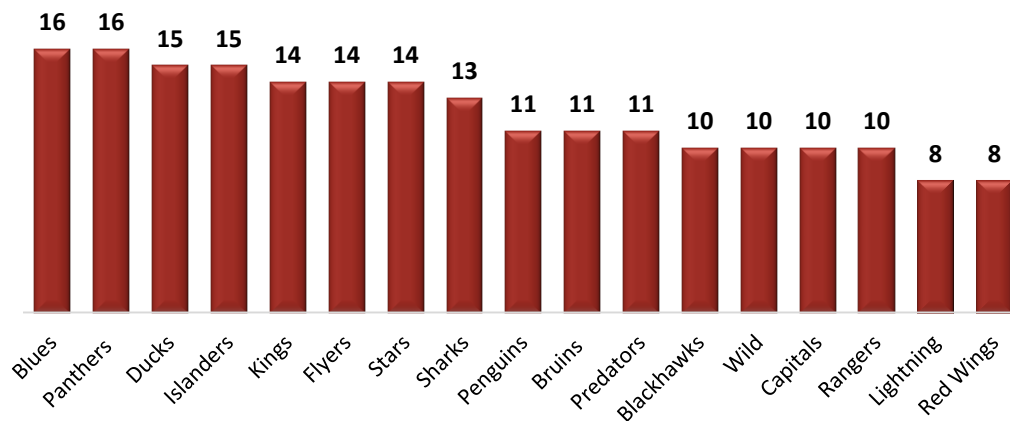
If nothing else, feelings about the Bruins and Blackhawks on this side of the border are polarizing, given that those two teams are also the ones Canadian viewers are most likely to likely cheer *against*. One-quarter (24%) of respondents who plan to watch this year's playoffs say the Bruins are the team they will likely cheer against in the east, and 14 per cent say the same of the Blackhawks in the west.

Plenty of CanCon in the playoffs

If there is any good news for hockey fans, it's that despite the absence of Canadian clubs, this year's playoffs will still offer plenty of opportunities for patriotism. Roughly half (49.7%) of all players currently in the league are from the Great White North, by far the most of any country. The next closest nationality, American, comprises just under one-quarter of the league's population (24.2%).

And if Canadians are looking for a new team to hitch their wagon to, consider this: Of those teams still left standing, the St. Louis Blues and Florida Panthers feature the most Canadians on their rosters, with 16 apiece.

Most Canadian players on team roster (April 1, 2016)
(Source, NHL.com)



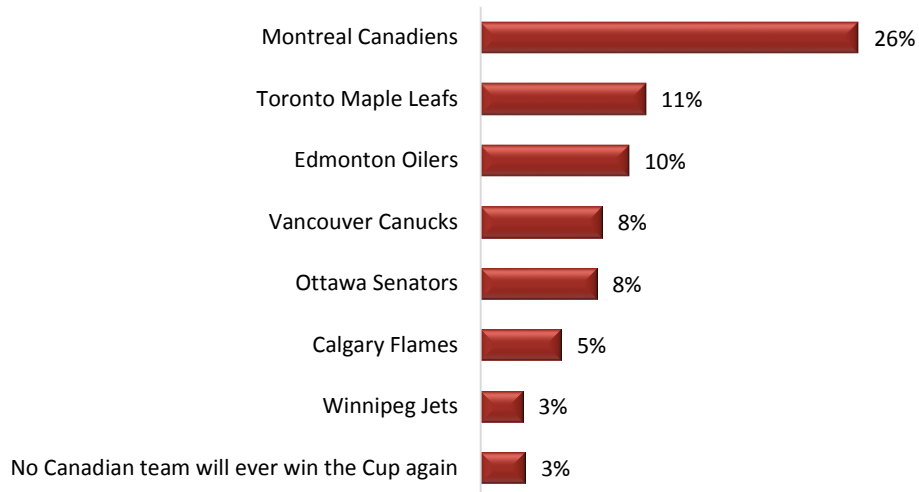
Canada's best hope

Canada's futility in pursuit of hockey's Holy Grail has now reached 23 years. To put that into context, when Hall-of-Fame goaltender Patrick Roy hoisted the Stanley Cup on behalf of his Montreal Canadiens in 1993, Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews was just five years old, the Berlin Wall had been down for less than four, and the Euro was still nearly a decade away from entering circulation.

Since then, Canadian fans have been teased – diehard fans may even say tortured – by failed trips to the finals: the Ottawa Senators lost to the Anaheim Ducks in 5 games in 2007, and devastating losses in the seventh game of the finals have befallen the Vancouver Canucks (1994, 2011), Calgary Flames (2004) and Edmonton Oilers (2006).

So, which team will be the one to break the streak? While there's hardly a majority consensus on this question, the largest number of hockey followers (26%) say it will happen in la belle province. Indeed, more than twice as many say Les Habitants are this country's best chance to end the drought and celebrate a championship once again as any other team:

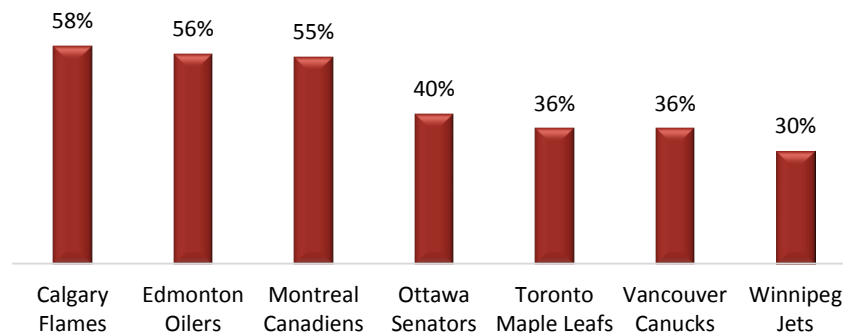
Which of the 7 Canadian teams do you think will be the first one to break this streak and win the Cup?



While the Habs are the clear favourite among all hockey viewers, there’s a little more competition when this question is broken down by which team fans cheer for. Predictably, a much higher number of fans take the “homer” view when they’re asked about their own team.

Calgary fans are the most bullish – 58 per cent say their team has the best chance to win Canada’s next cup – though a similar number of Oilers (56%) and Canadiens (55%) faithful say the same. Things are less rosy in Winnipeg, as just under one-in-three (30%) say they’re Canada’s odds on favourite:

Percentage of team fans who choose 'their own team' as the one to break the streak and bring the Stanley Cup back to Canada



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 organization 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.

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

This year, for the first time since the 1969-70 season, there will be no Canadian teams participating in the NHL playoffs. Do you expect this to have an effect on how much playoff hockey you watch this year?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total who usually watch playoffs (992)	Usual playoff viewership		
		Very closely (139)	Fairly closely (395)	Not that closely (457)
Yes, I'll watch more	3%	12%	3%	1%
Yes, I'll watch less	35%	46%	50%	20%
Yes, I won't watch at all	19%	6%	21%	21%
No, I'll watch about as much as I would have	30%	36%	26%	32%
No, I wasn't going to watch in the first place	12%	0%	1%	26%

This year, for the first time since the 1969-70 season, there will be no Canadian teams participating in the NHL playoffs. Do you expect this to have an effect on how much playoff hockey you watch this year?

	Total who usually watch playoffs (992)	Hockey fandom			
		I'm a diehard fan (131)	I'm a fan (365)	A lot of interests come before hockey (416)	I don't care about hockey at all (80*)
Yes, I'll watch more	3%	8%	3%	2%	4%
Yes, I'll watch less	35%	47%	48%	26%	5%
Yes, I won't watch at all	19%	12%	19%	23%	11%
No, I'll watch about as much as I would have	30%	33%	29%	33%	14%
No, I wasn't going to watch in the first place	12%	0%	1%	16%	66%

*small sample size

It has now been 23 years since a Canadian team (the Montreal Canadiens in 1993) won the Stanley Cup. Which of the 7 Canadian teams do you think will be the first one to break this streak and win the Cup?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total who follow hockey (976)	Team you cheer for							
		Calgary Flames (62*)	Edmonton Oilers (66*)	Montreal Canadiens (286)	Ottawa Senators (62*)	Toronto Maple Leafs (248)	Vancouver Canucks (106)	Winnipeg Jets (46*)	No specific Canadian team (100)
Calgary Flames	5%	58%	8%	1%	1%	2%	1%	4%	3%
Edmonton Oilers	10%	8%	56%	5%	9%	8%	5%	5%	9%
Montreal Canadiens	26%	5%	5%	55%	12%	17%	10%	22%	13%
Ottawa Senators	8%	3%	1%	5%	40%	9%	7%	6%	3%
Toronto Maple Leafs	11%	2%	2%	3%	2%	36%	1%	6%	7%
Vancouver Canucks	8%	6%	6%	3%	4%	4%	36%	8%	8%
Winnipeg Jets	3%	1%	2%	1%	2%	2%	2%	30%	2%
No Canadian team will ever win the Cup again	3%	3%	6%	2%	2%	1%	5%	1%	10%
Really can't say	26%	14%	15%	26%	28%	21%	34%	17%	44%

**small sample size*

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?

(weighted sample sizes)	Total who follow hockey (976)	Hockey fandom		
		I'm a diehard fan (131)	I'm a fan (365)	A lot of interests come before hockey (416)
Yes, I want Canada's teams to succeed	57%	41%	55%	63%
No, I consider them rivals to my favourite team	14%	24%	14%	11%
It depends which team, some I'll cheer for, but some are rivals	30%	35%	31%	27%