



## Press Release

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### **Ex-hockey fans turned off by 2004-05 lockout: Brock researcher**

As the NHL lockout approaches what should be the heart of its regular season, research at Brock University is shedding some light on the long-term impact that work stoppages have on fan loyalty.

While some fans are turned off by the characterization of billionaire owners arguing with millionaire players, researcher Craig Hyatt says the NHL stands to take an even bigger hit because of fans who simply find other sports to watch — and won't come back when the lockout ends.

An associate professor of Sport Management at Brock, Hyatt researches sport fan behaviour. His latest study looks at *former* hockey team fans — people who stopped cheering for a favorite team, and never switched their loyalty to a different team.

The research, which Hyatt started with colleagues from the University of Alberta and University of New Brunswick, is beginning to explain why former hockey fans are no longer supporters of their favourite team.

"I assumed I would hear a lot of team-based reasons and we have," says Hyatt. "However, the number one reason we found was league-based, so they are upset with the National Hockey League and much of that has to do with the 2004-05 lockout."

"Many, many people said it was just appalling that the two sides couldn't agree on how big a billionaire or how big a millionaire they wanted to be," he says. "So that was a philosophical reason for losing interest in their team."

But what is even more interesting, explains Hyatt, is the common response to "what am I going to do with those 10 to 15 hours a week I used to spend watching NHL hockey?"

"There are these sports that overlap with the hockey season that never got their attention because they didn't have time," he says. "So all of a sudden the sports fans turn on the TV and find the Raptors or they find the National Football League and slowly they get into it."

According to his research, when you ask sports fans how they became hockey fans they will talk about exposure and the compelling storylines that keep you following along.

“Once they have the exposure, they start learning the storylines,” says Hyatt. “Then they realize, ok, this team has won three in a row. They have this young star player Chris Bosh. I’m going to tune in next week to watch the Toronto Raptors.”

All of a sudden, fans find themselves caring between games that Bosh is nursing a nagging injury. And by the end of the season they are now Raptors fans. After the season, the lockout continues and continues, and by the time the lockout ends, NBA training camp has already started and the fans find that they care more about Bosh and the Raptors than they do about whatever hockey team they used to cheer for.

“That is what happened so often with the fans I’m talking to,” says Hyatt. “That has been about the biggest reason why former hockey fans stop cheering for their team.”

“It’s a combination of these two things,” he says. “But for every one hockey fan who is turned off by the philosophical frustration of rich people fighting, there are three fans who tell us they have just found something else.”

“There are tens of thousands of people out there right now who are saying they will never come back to hockey because of the current strike, but history has shown many of them, if not most of them, do,” says Hyatt. “But of the people who don’t return we’re getting a much better understanding of why they don’t come back.”

Other motives behind hockey fans losing interest in their favourite team highlighted by the research include: player-based reasons; society’s emphasis on big-time spectator sport; concerns for the levels of violence at every level of hockey; the media’s manufactured narratives and storylines; and general changes in life that have nothing to do with the sport.

Hyatt and his colleagues’ research project is ongoing and they are still looking for former hockey fans to interview.

For more info on taking part in this study: [craig.hyatt@brocku.ca](mailto:craig.hyatt@brocku.ca)

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