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Igloo no longer fitting home for NHL's Penguins



GATEWAY SPORTS
STAFF

Phoenix: a place known for retirees and sweltering heat, not ice hockey. When the Whale got beached in Hartford they packed up and moved to Carolina: a region known for its rabid college basketball fans, not its hockey prowess. Now, as the Penguins drown in Steeltown, Mario Lemieux and crew look to move the team, and I implore them not to stick the Pens in some city devoid of hockey fans like Las Vegas or Kansas City.

Thanks to some bizarre circumstances and some obstruction-holding from Gary Bettman, billionaire Blackberry mogul Jim Balsillie is no longer in line to buy the beleaguered franchise. Because the group that would have built the Penguins a new arena for free failed to receive a casino license, keeping the Pens in Pennsylvania is no longer a viable option and Mario Lemieux is actively looking for a new place to call home. With this last point in mind, the Gateway took it upon themselves to decide where the best potential locations for a new NHL team would be.

Trevor Phillips

It appears as though the writing is on the wall for these endangered animals of professional hockey, and it looks as though it's only a matter of time until the non-flyers from Steeltown are shipped off to a new habitat. Therefore, I would like to humbly suggest that the Pens be moved to the City of Sin, in order to finally bring a professional team—and a little respect—to the land of poker tables and \$10 steak buffets.

That's right, Las Vegas is where the family-friendly NHL should move the Penguins. Not because showgirls and Wayne Newton are going to make the NHL a little edgier—or the Feds could employ the skills of lead CSI Grissom the Great to solve Operation Slapshot—but because Vegas is no longer a haven for bachelors and poker bums; it's a legitimate family town. Vegas has an economy and market stronger than, dare I say, Winnipeg. Besides the fact that their four top players can't even legally drink, if this whole move happens to fall apart, Bettman can always say, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas," and that might be the best thing for this fumbling franchise.

Nick Frost

The NHL seems to have been progressively going south for a number of years—demonstrated, of course, by the amount of teams currently situated in the southern United States. In an effort to appease all hockey markets, the NHL, in the last 20 years, has moved teams from Winnipeg and Minnesota, to hockey hotspots like Phoenix and Dallas—and the results have spoken for themselves. Just look at the amount of people that attend Phoenix Coyotes' games; not to mention, hockey has moved ahead of bass-fishing in American TV ratings. Take that, Michael Iaconelli.

But, NHL, look at this like a limbo contest: you know—and I know—you can go lower. That's why my suggestion is for the league to move the Pittsburgh Penguins to Tijuana, Mexico.

Think about how perfect this is: what better way to start up a new, fresh hockey market, than giving it a team with the kind of star power that the Penguins have. The señoritas will go loco over Sidney Crosby, and every chico in the village will want to be the next Evgeni Malkin.

Not to mention, this move would maintain the ease of being a southern-NHL team by lightening the amount of travel. Sure, a Stanley Cup finals between Tijuana and Toronto would be an absolute bitch for both teams; but, then again, I don't think the Leafs are planning on being in the Stanley Cup Final any time soon.

Finally, it will divert attention from other, more dangerous Mexican sports like bullfighting, tequila shot-for-shot and cockfighting—both kinds.

Andrew Renfree

I'm sick and tired of the NHL expanding or moving teams into US cities where no one gives a damn about hockey. When the beloved Jets crashed in Winnipeg where did they end up?

Here's a thought: why not move the team to Stockholm, Sweden? Some players would complain about the travel, but about five per cent of NHL players hail from Sweden anyway. The NHL's elite Swedes include big names like Daniel Alfredsson, Peter Forsberg, Markus Naslund, Mats Sundin, Mattias Norstrom and Nicklas Lidstrom, all of whom captain their respective teams and would have pull in getting a team in Sweden. Furthermore, what's a little jet lag if it means a team will actually be appreciated by the fans in hockey-crazed Scandinavia? During the Swedish games at the recent World Junior Hockey Championship, the fans were singing, chanting, waving flags, and banging drums and cowbells throughout. And if a solid fan base isn't enough to convince the NHL, doesn't "Stockholm Penguins" just have a nice ring to it?

Ross Prusakowski

While it's a shame that the NHL is failing in one of its original twelve markets because of an antiquated building and not because of the quality of team on the ice, there's really only one place for the Pittsburgh Penguins to move: Antarctica. Sure, at first it might seem like a terrible location to place the team, given the travel and housing constraints Antarctica would place on every team, but once you look past those minor inconveniences, the natural opportunities quickly become apparent.

Placing the Penguins in Antarctica would finally ensure that the Ross Ice Shelf Research station—the 1385th American TV market—is finally being served, and home attendance figures comprised of 30 scientists and 200 000 actual penguins would push the team from dead last to tops in the league. Add in the fact that the team's penny-pinching ownership wouldn't need to fork out for a new arena since the team could just play on the ice shelf, and the location is a natural fit. Plus, it's just stupid that the Penguins would play north of the equator—if *March of the Penguins* taught us anything, it's that people love dumb, flightless animals in their natural habitats.

Paul Owen

So seriously, where should the Penguins move? Many of you probably think I'm going to say that they should be shipped off to Winnipeg and renamed the Jets, but Winterpeg fucked itself when it built a new arena specifically to entice the NHL back to the city and failed to make the rink big enough to be profitable in the NHL—the MTS Centre doesn't even sit 16 000, for fuck's sake.

Of the other areas interested in an NHL franchise, none of them are truly viable solutions. Neither Seattle nor Portland has the hockey fan-base to support a losing team, and Kansas City can't even support the teams they have now, like the Royals. Vegas, as much as they want a team in any sport, won't get one while they allow gambling on that sport—the stigma of Pete Rose is too strong.

In the end, it would seem best to move the Pens to a Canadian city, though doing so would require a new, 19 000–20 000 seat arena to be built there. Larger urban areas like Hamilton or the Kitchener area where Basillie wanted to move them would be plausible, but perhaps the best option would be putting the Pens in a smaller Canadian city whose residents have high household incomes and regularly sell out CHL games. So, despite claims to be the best fans in the WHL, Prince George, you don't fit this bill. Kelowna, however, does. As do Red Deer and even Halifax. Just keep them out of Antarctica. Prusakowski gets really smug when he's right.



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