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NHL made right move turning down second Summit Series



NICK
 FROST

Sports
 Commentary

"Who, these days, can't conjure up images of Bobby Clarke's toothless grin, Ken Dryden leaning on his stick in goal, Phil Esposito's lament to the nation after a loss in game four, or, at least, Foster Hewitt's legendary call of Paul Henderson's winning goal? Almost nobody."

I can be quite hard on the National Hockey League sometimes, particularly its commissioner, Gary Bettman. I've come down on the league in the past for many things, including its running joke of an all-star game and its constant expansion and relocation into the Deep South over the past decade. However, last week, when Bettman said nyet to Russian Ice Hockey Federation president Vladislav Tretiak, thus making the decision that his players wouldn't be partaking in a possible revival of the Summit Series between Canada and Russia to mark its 35-year anniversary, I felt compelled to give the NHL some dap where some dap was due—even though our reasons for not wanting to see this revival are likely completely different.

The two most likely reasons that the NHL—commissioner, team governors and owners—doesn't want its players participating in such a game is because Canada and Russia doing battle wouldn't appeal to an American audience—the one audience that still likely enjoys watching the WNBA more than it does hockey. Thus, there's no real capital to be earned. The second reason is that teams who have players involved in the game likely wouldn't want their star players suffering any major injuries at the hands of the *nouveau* Red Army.

However, my rationale for not wanting to see this happen is simple: we shouldn't be harkening back to past

moments of glory to try and force similar ones in the present. Though I was still a good 15 years away from being born in 1972, as a Canadian who appreciates the rich tapestry of hockey history in this country, there are many emotions, images and sounds that aren't only sentimental for people of the time, but have become timeless, continuously reaching new generations of hockey faithful. Who, these days, can't conjure up images of Bobby Clarke's toothless grin, Ken Dryden leaning on his stick in goal, Phil Esposito's lament to the nation after a loss in game four, or, at least, Foster Hewitt's legendary call of Paul Henderson's winning goal? Almost nobody. Lame attempts to recreate something with such nostalgic value usually end up looking like just that—lame attempts—and, in a way, can somewhat devalue the original moment.

It's not even like the current Canadian superstars of the NHL need to be etched in the annals of hockey history for representing their country, anyway; most of them already are. The most likely candidates for a possible Canadian squad—should one have been put together—have probably already been a part of either the 2002 gold-medal winning Olympic team, or the 2004 World Cup of Hockey champions. Even those who weren't, like Sidney Crosby and Eric Staal, can still look forward to the 2010 Olympics to

leave their mark in Canadian hockey history—and what better opportunity could there possibly be to win a gold medal than to do so right here on Canadian ice.

Also, icing a matchup between Canada and Russia these days—outside of the World Junior Hockey Championships, which features enough new players each year to keep it fresh—just doesn't have the same appeal that it once used to. If the Russian squad competing in the updated Summit Series was comprised of players from the NHL, the matchup in question seems very passé. Watching not only one match, but seven between the NHL's best from Canada and Russia—outside of, perhaps, the deciding game—wouldn't really be anything new and exciting, as the matchup could very easily translate into something equivalent to a World Championship or Olympic round-robin matchup—something that makes me say, "It's been done."

The only downside to the NHL's rejection is that it could further the rift that already stems from the Russian Ice Hockey Federation's refusal to sign the NHL's Player Transfer Agreement; they're the only nation offered the agreement to have not done so. However, I'm sure that it won't do as much damage as we think; the relationship between the two sides is already as unstable as Boris Yeltsin during happy hour.

Hearts only have room for one team



PAUL
 OWEN

Sports
 Commentary

a world I had never known before—that of competitive athletics.

But, when I moved to Edmonton, and was greeted by a thriving NHL culture. The Oilers weren't good, but their fans were as passionate as any in Winnipeg had been. These were people who had narrowly avoided what I went through when the Jets left Winnipeg; they would understand my pain. Almost every Oilers game is on local TV—something that was far from true for the Jets in the mid-'90s—and my friends get together and watch Hemsky and company. It was hard to not feel an affinity for the Edmonton bunch.

I didn't truly understand that the Oilers were taking over from the Jets until the Flames made their Stanley Cup run in 2003/04. I refused to jump on the Flames bandwagon and cited a hate for all things Calgary in doing so. That's when I realized I had become an Edmontonian, and officially entered the realm of bigamy. I was thinking like an Oilers fan, and *cogito, ergo sum* I am an Oilers fan.

I'm also a hypocrit. Sports bigamy puts you in an impossible situation. You can't wholly commit to two teams that might meet in the playoffs. You can't cheer for two teams facing each other and use the excuse that "at least one of them will win." I'm a diehard; I suffer through the rough times and skip gaily through the good ones. The mixed feelings resulting from an Edmonton-Phoenix Western Final would probably make my head

explode—thank God that both teams are terrible and won't make it happen anytime soon.

If you're a true fan, you can't pick and choose what you want to pay attention to. You pick a team and you follow it—no matter how often they trade away their best player. You celebrate through the good days and commiserate the bad ones. To devote yourself to two clubs at the same time is to neglect both. If you spend 13 hours per week following hockey, you can't give half of that time to each team nor can you double the time you spend following hockey.

You can't hedge your bets by cheering for two or four or every team in the league. Doing so takes all the joy out of being a fan and all of the attachment. Last year's Oilers playoff run meant considerably less to me because I was doing this. My buddy Dave was screaming "why God, why?" at the TV every time a Marc-André Bergeron slap-shot missed the net by three feet, and I was denying myself those same passionate feelings by splitting my loyalties.

If you're a sports bigamist, do yourself a favour and make the choice. End your misery. If your two teams were pitted in the league championship, who would you want to win? Make that decision and throw yourself into it. Buy memorabilia and apparel and call talk radio shows and bitch about the latest trade. Just nut-up and admit the colour of your blood. If you can't, it's probably yellow.