

Loose lips sell new shirts for lucky NHL marketers

It was an accident, but Reebok and EA Sports did the league a favour by leaking the new jersey designs and got people talking



NICK FROST

Sports Commentary

Spoiler alert: it's damn near impossible to keep anything secret from the public these days.

But, hey, you already knew that—you probably found it out on an online message board dedicated to the art of keeping secrets long before I had it printed at the beginning of this article.

Such is the nature of the beast in the age of the Interwebs, where the most-anticipated new albums are peer-to-peer-distributed months before their release; shocking endings to television programs are revealed long before the shock can even apply itself, let alone set in; and, as several NHL clubs found out this past Thursday, new jersey designs are leaked to the public due to the slightest fuck-up by the company manufacturing them, Reebok.

However, unlike the other examples—which result in torrent after torrent of free albums and a drop-off in viewership, respectively, in turn leading to some form of profit loss—the NHL can only stand to benefit from this little uproar.

Over the past several months, close to two thirds of the NHL's franchises have successfully revealed their new jerseys in accordance with the release dates they had each set for themselves. While there were rumors and crude—nay, God-awful—mock-ups circulating around as to what each jersey would look like, those that came out prior to last Thursday seemed to do so without incident, and even got the appropriate press conferences to finally show them to fans longing for all that overpriced, form-fitted goodness.

However, the jerseys that had yet to be seen by anyone other than their makers were preceded last Tuesday by the release of EA Sports' *NHL 08*. In order to keep the game current and not disappoint the legions of hockey fans needing their yearly virtual-reality fix, EA implemented a code system solely into the PS3, XBOX 360, and Wii versions of the game—a smart

move, considering someone would've likely hacked the files of a PC version within an hour of release—that would unlock each RBK Edge jersey for all 30 teams.

This code was supposed to be released at the beginning of the NHL season, after all of the new outfits had been seen. Instead, two days after the release of the game—with many of the uniforms still days away from being introduced—RBK accidentally put the code on their website for a brief moment—which, as we all know, is just long enough for the thousands sitting at their computers all day waiting for the Internet to act up to spot the code and go posting it everywhere.

While I'm certain that a few team presidents and a number of guys in RBK's research and development are probably a little irked right now at the fact that their surprise party was gatecrashed by a gang of internet delinquents, it's best to look at this from a positive standpoint.

With the number of people clamouring over the summer to find out whether the Original Six teams would go against the grain and adopt vertical stripes, whether the Canucks sweater would actually have a wordmark on it that stuck out like a sore thumb, or whatever else they desired to know, the new RBK Edge jerseys—regardless of whether they were exposed a little bit early or not—are fresh in the minds of the hockey fan and are being heavily discussed in hockey circles. I may not be much with marketing, but I can only imagine that this is what the NHL wanted exactly.

They took a product idea that a lot of people were, and still are, skeptical about, and through smoke, mirrors, and a hell of a lot of teaser pictures, made the topic of the new jerseys the hot-button conversation of the moment—even giving the usual summer discussion-fest that is the unrestricted free-agency period a run for its money. And while it will probably take a few years for traditionalists like myself to get used to the close fits, half-stripes, vertical piping, and sheer ugliness of some of the designs—like the New York Islanders' new shirts, for instance—I can still give the NHL and Reebok marketing departments the rare thumbs-up for getting people enthusiastic over the prospects of a new jersey.

Now if only they could make them a little more affordable.



GEOFF MACINTOSH, THE GAUNTLET

POP AND LOCK IT Pandas midfielder Lyndsay Stewart fights for the ball with one of the University of Calgary Dinos during Sunday's away game. The Pandas lost the closely-fought game 1-0.

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