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PLAYERS BLAMED FOR LOCKOUT OF CANADA'S GAME: SURVEY

NHL May Lose Some Casual Fans Should the Lockout Continue

TORONTO, October 14, 2004 – Three in five hockey fans expect that there will not be a season at all this year and the NHL lockout could cost the league some casual fans in Canada, suggests a new poll conducted by TNS Canadian Facts.

“There is remarkable pessimism across the country about the lockout. There has not been a cancelled season ever in the NHL, but most people think this will happen this year,” said Richard Jenkins, corporate director of public opinion research at TNS Canadian Facts.

The survey asked online Canadians to assess the current situation. Three in ten (31%) say they blame the players, while just one in ten (11%) blame the owners, despite the fact that the labour dispute is a lockout rather than a strike. A majority of Canadians (58%) assign blame to both sides equally, but, interestingly, casual fans are much more likely than die-hard fans are to blame the players. Casual fans are defined as those who watched less often than once a week or who only watched the NHL playoffs last season. Die-hard fans, conversely, watched hockey at least once a week last season.

“If they are hearing the arguments put forward by the players’ union, casual fans are not buying them, and may be caught up in seeing the players as overpaid and undeserving of sympathy,” said Jenkins.

Indeed, the poll suggests that casual fans who spend their occasional hockey viewing time on other activities during the lockout may be in no rush to sit down to watch *Hockey Night in Canada* when the game resumes.

When asked how frequently they are likely to watch NHL games if and when they resume this season, almost three in ten claim they will watch less often than last year or will watch no games at all. For their part, just 14% of die-hard fans make this claim.

Expectations are for a long dispute with fully three in five believing there will not a hockey season this year. When the lockout ends, most (57%) expect the settlement to be the result of a compromise rather than one side winning outright. Two in ten expect the owners to prevail. Nearly as many (18%), conversely, expect the players to triumph. Die-hard fans, who are more likely than casual fans to blame the owners, are also more likely to expect the owners to prevail (25%).

The survey was conducted using TNS Canadian Facts' national weekly Internet omnibus service, TNS Express Online. Email invitations were sent to 3,200 members of the firm's Internet panel comprising more than 70,000 Canadian Internet users who have agreed to participate in survey research from time to time. In total, 1,051 online interviews were completed between September 24 and 28, a 33% response rate. The survey results are nationally representative of the online Canadian adult population and are considered accurate to within three percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

TNS Canadian Facts (www.tns-cf.com) is one of Canada's most prestigious full-service marketing, opinion and social research organizations.

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TNS is a leading global provider of market information. The company collects, analyzes and interprets information to help its clients better understand the needs and wants of their customers. TNS provides research, advice and insight on market segmentation, advertising and communications, new product development, brand performance and stakeholder management. The company is also one of the leading providers of social and political polling.

From its global network, which spans 70 countries, TNS provides local expertise and knowledge, together with internationally consistent information and analysis to multi-national organizations.

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