

Opinion

A Sport Almost Worth Watching

by Dan Cronin

The goal of the sport of hockey is to score more points than the other team, or so the NHL would like me to believe. But if I didn't know better, I would think the goal is to prove to the world who is the toughest player, who can beat the snot out of the other players—with a few goals scored on the side.

Okay, well that might be a little bit harsh, but what's not harsh is the NHL's policy on fighting altercations during games. While the NHL stops short of actually encouraging such behavior on the ice, they do little to stop it. Maybe this is all part of the entertainment for some people, but if I wanted to watch two people punch each other, I would watch boxing. Being an avid football fan, I'm all for contact sports and hard hits as long as they're within the parameters of the game. The fights in hockey are not within the parameters of the game. On the contrary, the whole game stops for the fights, which makes them a detriment to the game as a whole.

Certainly emotions rise high in all sports, especially in playoff games, and one of the most prevalent emotions tends to be anger. However, athletes must find a better means of venting their anger during games than punching each other. We know this is possible because no other sport has so many outbreaks of blatant violence.

Sure, fights happen in other sports: benches clear in baseball, elbows are thrown in basketball, and late or unnecessary hits happen in football. The difference is that the other sports take serious action to punish all players involved in an effort to discourage such behavior. An elbow to the face or neck in basketball results in immediate ejection and a one game suspension. Players involved in starting the brawls in baseball are ejected and often suspended. Late hits in football warrant severe in-game penalties and possible ejections and suspensions. In contrast, punching somebody in the face twice before he has a chance to defend himself in hockey? Well, that might get him a few minutes in the penalty box and a fine, but no suspension.

Now, I'm not saying that hockey shouldn't be a contact sport; I like the physicality of the game. I enjoy watching somebody get checked hard into the boards as much as anybody, but if the player getting checked wants to retaliate, he should do it by checking the other player back. These people are supposed to be professionals, after all. What bothers me most about the fights in hockey is that I feel like it's a sport I could really learn to watch with regularity if the players bothered to stop punching each other long enough for me to become interested.