

# Sports

## Why Fans Always Need to Be No. 1

By Christopher J. Ryan

The 2012-13 NHL lockout put hockey fans through the wringer [again]. That's how we see it, and as egocentric as it sounds, it's [mostly] what matters. Fans pack the house, buy merchandise and furnish their team with sustained value. The investment isn't just money either. Hockey fans have an obstinate fever for the sport and we're willing to sacrifice our own personal welfare in the process. Not even for big returns, like a Stanley Cup Championship, but small things like a free T-shirt that's eight sizes too big. We are the backbone of the sport and culture. The proof is in the success stories of high-revenue hockey clubs and impasses of low-revenue hockey clubs.

For 113 days, the National Hockey League (NHL) and National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) struggled to put their shirt-and-tie differences aside in the boardroom to negotiate the new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Here are the major talking points of the 2012-13 CBA negotiations:

- Player's Share: Ensures the players receive an agreed percentage of NHL revenues by establishing a salary cap and "floor," which is the baseline of a salary cap.

- Salary Cap "Floor:" Keeps team spending in check and protects every individual player's earning potential.
- The Guaranteed Contract: Shields players from owners who might dump player contracts, established by player contract variance.
- Escrow Payment: Evaluates correct revenue splits between players and teams by tying up some cash to distribute at the end of the season.
- Revenue Sharing: Strategically distributes money between high-revenue and low-revenue teams to create league balance.

Some said hockey wasn't going to come back from this one, that we couldn't handle another season ending lockout like the 2004-05 NHL season. Maybe it's an eye-opener for fans and sports in American culture. You hope hockey (not money) comes first and that our loyalty and passion has a higher purpose than to prime business objectives.

Hockey enthusiasts know this much: You're either a die hard fan or you're someone who can't identify the slot. There is nothing in between and that's why hockey is so great. Hit or be hit. On or offside. Skate with everything you've got or sit on the bench. Win or lose. Champion or placeholder.

We fight for everything, in the stands and on the ice, in the name of hockey. Something that we don't fight is insane beer prices — we concede this ground to you. So, we need an NHL that isn't about fighting. Let us fight. You guys keep the peace and make sure the jerseys stay on when the gloves come off.

