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**Vancouver Canucks, New York Rangers on Top,
Winnipeg Jets, Tampa Bay Lightning at Bottom
of
2013 Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index**

NEW YORK, NY May 6, 2013 – Last week the National Hockey League began its 2103 Stanley Cup quarterfinal rounds. Just before the conclusion of hockey’s greatest competition, Brand Keys, Inc. (www.brandkeys.com), the New York-based brand and customer loyalty research consultancy, has released the results of the 2013 *Sports Fan Loyalty Index* for the NHL.

“This year, the National Hockey League hasn’t treated fans all that well, at least not when it comes to managing to get teams out on the ice as regularly as fans might have desired,” said Robert Passikoff, Brand Keys founder and president. “Pity the poor hockey fan. If, as Woody Allen suggested, 80% of life is just showing up, there hasn’t been much life in the NHL this season, and we’re sure it has had it’s effect on loyalty levels.”

In spite of the significantly shortened season (or perhaps because of it), there are more loyalty ties in 2013 than in preceding years. According to fans in the teams’ own DMAs, the current 2013 NHL top-5 and bottom-5 brand loyalty rankings are as follows with last season’s ranking appearing in parentheses:

Top-5

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Vancouver Canucks and New York Rangers | (#2 and #11) |
| 2. Boston Bruins and Chicago Blackhawks | (#2 and #6) |
| 3. San Jose Sharks | (#3) |
| 4. Pittsburgh Penguins and St. Louis Blues | (#6 and #21) |
| 5. Detroit Red Wings and Philadelphia Flyers | (#1 and #4) |

Bottom-5

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 30. New York Islanders | (#26) |
| 29. Columbus Blue Jackets | (#24) |
| 28. Phoenix Coyotes | (#18) |
| 27. Winnipeg Jets | (#19) |
| 26. Tampa Bay Lightning | (#20) |

Win-loss ratios may be the only thing when it comes to a playoff championship, but when it comes to loyalty it’s not the only thing.

“The rule-of-thumb is that win-loss ratios can contribute up to a 20% bump in a team’s loyalty. But to be fair to NHL Fans, professional hockey is a little different from other Major League Sports,” said Passikoff. “Its contribution to loyalty is about 10 % higher for the NH for a number of reasons: first, the sport moves faster than others, so there’s a bit more attention necessarily paid to the ‘Pure Entertainment ‘driver, wherein wins and losses reside. Second, the protective equipment makes it hard to instantaneously identify individual players, with the possible exception of the goalie.”

So while the final scores tend to contribute more to loyalty for professional hockey, three other emotionally-based, predictive factors must be taken into account. The four emotional drivers of fan loyalty are:

Pure Entertainment:

How well a team does. Also contributing, how exciting is their play? Or in the case of the NHL, do they play at all?

Authenticity:

How well they play as a team. Again, in the case of the NHL, if they actually play. A really abbreviated season doesn’t contribute to authenticity.

Fan Bonding:

Are there players that are particularly respected and admired? In the case of the NHL, someone you can recognize behind the protective equipment and, this year in particular, who didn’t disappear to play in European leagues during the lockout?

History and Tradition:

Are the game and the team part of fans’ and community rituals, institutions and beliefs?

“Assuming regular lockouts and strikes aren’t part of a fan’s ethos,” noted Passikoff. “Brand Keys hypothesizes that because two of the four loyalty drivers involve a team showing up and playing, a smaller degree of loyalty differentiation showed up on this year’s list.”

Of the four Major League Sports that Brand Keys tracks in its *Sports Fan Loyalty Index*, perhaps not surprisingly, the National Hockey League is 4th. The National Football League is currently 1st followed by Major League Baseball, with the National Basketball Association in 3rd place.

Overall team rankings – no matter which league – because they *are* based on predictive engagement metrics, correlate with game viewership and licensed merchandise sales. And, since rankings can be influenced depending upon how loyalty drivers are managed, it’s critical that NHL team marketers act as strategically off the ice as the players do on it.

“It was Wayne Gretzky who noted that a good hockey player plays where the puck is, and a great player plays to where the puck is going to be. Great sports marketers follow the same maxim that is true of fan loyalty too,” said Passikoff.

Contact: VISIBILITY
Len Stein
cell 914 527 3708
Lens@VisibilityPR.com
www.VisibilityPR.com