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## The Stanley Cup Final Has It All and Thensome

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It was one of the best events of the early summer. The finals of the NHL Playoffs, the Battle for Lord Stanley's Cup, hit high gear and produced two of the best games in any sport over recent months. Indeed the last two games were among the best ever.

After a slow start to the Cup finals with the teams splitting the first two games in New Jersey, the heavily favored Dallas Stars headed home where it was assumed they would win with some ease. They lost Game Three 2-1, and then after leading 1-0 heading into the final period saw their lead turn into a two goal deficit as New Jersey scored three times in six minutes leaving the Stars in shock.

With the Devils heading home with a 3-1 lead in games the Dallas Stars were given up for dead. The fun was about to begin. In the longest scoreless game in Stanley Cup History the goalies, Martin Brodeaur of the Devils and Ed Balfour of the Stars, made save after spectacular save as each team had excellent scoring chances. Finally six minutes into the third overtime period Mike Modano redirected a less than picturesque shot by Brett Hull. It was one of the most excruciating games anyone who is a fan of either team could be asked to watch. That either goalie should lose this one was criminal.

So the teams headed back to Dallas for Game Six. Once again the game went to multiple overtimes. Once again the two goalies were spectacular. Each team scored once in regulation about 90 seconds apart. The rest of the game it was tied. By the time the game finally ended slightly over eight minutes into the second overtime this Stanley Cup Final had left its mark among the best ever.

Jason Arnott scored the winning goal on a pass from Patrik Elias and for the fifth time in six games the home team lost. The two teams had played the equivalent of over three games in just over fifty-one hours. Amazingly at the end of both games many players, especially Modano, Nieuwendyk, Hull, Arnott, Elias, and Stevens seemed to still be playing with high energy.

Unfortunately it was a series marred by ugly physical play especially by Jason Arnott and Derian Hatcher although not confined to these two.

Jason Arnott was both victim and perpetrator. In the latter role in the final game Arnott used a stick to leverage Joe Nieuwendyk on a face-off and slam him to the ice knocking him silly. No penalty was called, as apparently referees don't watch face-offs.

Late in the first overtime Arnott had Blake Sloan down on the ice and while on top of him delivered a cross check in the neck slamming his head into the ice. Sloan was wearing a special mask because he was playing with iron plates in his surgically repaired jaw. A penalty was called.

Arnott perhaps thought he could deliver whatever blows to the head he wanted because the referees had clearly given Derian Hatcher license to do so. Late in Game Four Arnott skated into the slot, let a shot go, and after the play had moved on Hatcher cross checked Arnott to the mouth literally removing his bridgework. A replay showed the bridgework flying from his mouth onto the ice. The referee retrieved it and took it in to the New Jersey bench. No penalty was called, no fines later levied.

Then early in Game Six Hatcher put an elbow into the head of Petr Sykora as he came across the blue-line with his head down, having just taken a stick to the midsection. Again no penalty. Sykora lay motionless on the ice and was taken off on a stretcher with his head immobilized. He spent the night in the hospital but an MRI showed no concussion. The referee who was "wired" told Hatcher that he respected the concern Hatcher was showing for Sykora's condition as they stood side-by-side over the motionless body being attended to by the medical staff.

This sort of headhunting has become way too common in the NHL and has led to numerous concussions and the early retirement of some of its victims. It is such a problem that even the hard-nosed Don Cherry finds it excessive. Cross checks to the back of the head are commonplace and go largely unpunished.

The NHL needs to make a simple decision. Does it want to risk permanent head injury to its players? Does it want to create a high attrition rate for its players? Does it want

to shorten the careers of its stars and in effect help to destroy its own product?

There are those that insist that all of this is just part of the code of Hockey. The fact is that assault with a weapon by any other name is still assault. Players are not expendable commodities even in the cold world of high-capitalist modern sport. Encouraging the destruction of the product is simply bad marketing, not to mention a form of savagery unworthy of the term "sport."

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't need to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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