

## NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off Increases Hockey's Popularity in North America

The NHL's 4 Nations Face-Off boosted hockey's popularity in North America, with the highly anticipated matchup between the United States and Canada on Saturday, February 15, 2025, drawing an average of 10.1 million viewers. 4.4 million viewers were in the U.S., while 5.7 million tuned in from Canada. The game marked one of the most-watched non-Stanley Cup hockey broadcasts in recent years and developed a growing interest in the sport, particularly in the United States, where hockey traditionally lags behind football, basketball, and baseball in popularity.

The game, held at Montreal's Bell Centre, saw a dominant performance by the United States, who secured a 3-1 victory over Canada. Forward Jake Guentzel led the American offense with two goals, and Dylan Larkin added another. Canada's only point came from Connor McDavid. However, it was not the score that caught viewer's attention. The opening nine seconds saw three fights break out, setting a fiery tone throughout the series. This physicality and the historic rivalry between the two nations contributed to the game's impressive viewership numbers. After fans booed the U.S. national anthem, tensions grew even higher when Matthew Tkachuk and Brandon Hagel "dropped the gloves" off the first duel.

"I think the message we wanted to send is 'It's our time,'" Matthew said. "We're in a hostile environment, and we wanted to show that we're not backing down. They've had so much success over so many years over there. They're some of the best players in the world. We felt in this environment it was a good time to do it. It was a lot of fun."

"The game is in a better place because last night's game existed," said Jon Cooper, Canada's head coach. The 4.4 million U.S. viewers made it the most-watched hockey game outside of the Stanley Cup Final since 2019. To compare, last year's seven-game Stanley Cup Final between the Florida Panthers and Edmonton Oilers averaged 4.2 million viewers per game, with Game 7 peaking at 7.7 million in the United States.

The increase in viewership shows that international competition resonates with audiences in ways that regular NHL games may not. The 4 Nations Face-Off has proven to be a valuable platform for the league to engage with a broader audience, with standout players like McDavid, Sam Bennett, Auston Matthews, and brothers Matthew and Brady Tkachuk bringing power to the event.

According to an NHL release, the rivalry showdown between the teams was a 203 percent increase from viewership numbers seen during the 2016 World Cup of Hockey played by the United States and Canada.

As the NHL and NHLPA explore future international competitions, including the 2028 World Cup of Hockey, the 4 Nations Face-Off's success is a strong case for further investment in these events. The tournament showed that hockey, while not part of the "Big Three" in U.S. sports, can still bring in a large audience under the right circumstances.

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