

Most Controversial Refereeing Decisions in NHL Playoff History



Author: Liam Setterlund

While you can't always blame referees for the bad decisions they make, sometimes you can't help but hold them responsible. No player ever wants to have the results of their game solely affected by the referee, although it's very common to see this in sports like pro hockey.

In the NHL, we've seen countless times where fans and players don't agree with the referee's decision, some of which are completely game-changing calls. In this article, we'll highlight the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history, including when the game was, what teams were playing and what the controversial call on the ice was.

Most controversial playoff calls in NHL history

John Leclair scores through the net - 2000 Stanley Cup Playoffs

While the Sabres held a 1-0 series lead against Philadelphia, the Flyers' John Leclair ripped a shot that went through the side of the net, outside the official goal to put the Flyers ahead in Game 2. This call is as controversial as the title says, as back in 2000 this goal wasn't reviewed in-depth as it should've been, especially during the playoffs. Still, the goal counted, although never crossed the line through normal rules, making everyone wonder what the refs were thinking.

Duane Sutter scores an offside goal - 1980 Stanley Cup Finals

Another one of the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history was the Islanders' Duane Sutter scoring an offside goal that wasn't called back. During overtime in Game 6 of the 1980 Stanley Cup Final, Clark Gillies made an offside pass to Butch Goring, who left the zone too early, leading to an elongated play where Sutter scored to win the game 5-4 in overtime. With a failed call such as this affecting the game, it's no wonder this goes down as one of the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history.

Wayne Gretzky high stick not called - 1993 Stanley Cup Playoffs

The famed Wayne Gretzky arguably commits one of the biggest 'uncalled' fouls in the 1993 Stanley Cup Conference Finals Game 6. In this game, Gretzky would high-stick the Maple Leafs' Doug Gilmour, leaving him bloodied on the ice, although the altercation was not recognized nor called. Crazy enough, Wayne Gretzky, who should've been penalty box bound, scored to keep his team in the game forcing it to go to a Game 7. This, however, was an obvious missed call by the referee and would've changed the outcome of the game entirely, making it one of the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history.

Martin Gelina scores a 'no-goal' - 2004 Stanley Cup Playoffs

Back in 2004 during Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Finals between Tampa Bay Lightning and Calgary Flames, Martin Gelinas would 'score' one of the most controversial goals in the history of the NHL. With Calgary ahead in the series 3-2, a pass would bounce off Martin Gelina's skate and just cross the goalline as Lightning Goalie Nikolai Khabibulin's pads stopped the puck dead in place. The goal wasn't called in the end, although you could've argued it should've been, but regardless, Tampa Bay would win the game, forcing a Game 7 and winning the

entire series due to one of the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history.

Brett Hull scores with foot in the crease - 1999 Stanley Cup Finals

Hands down, one of the worst calls made in an NHL playoff game was Game 6 of the 1999 Stanley Cup Finals. With the game already in triple overtime, the Dallas Stars were seeking their first Stanley Cup ever, and Brett Hull would be the hero to score the game-winner, although a very controversial one at that. As the final pass came to Hull, he'd tuck the puck away with his foot barely over the crease. Originally, there was a rule in place stating that any attacking player who scores with their foot in the crease would have the goal called back (a rule most people hated). While this was expected to be the call on the ice, there was an unexpected private memo before the game that as long as a player controlled the puck in the crease, the goal would stand. This contrasting view of the rule and the result of the decision made by the referees makes this one of the most controversial refereeing decisions in NHL playoff history.