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SENATORS TOP CHOICE TO WIN STANLEY CUP AMONG CANADIAN SPORTS FANS

NHL viewers impressed with rule changes in 2005/2006 season

TORONTO, April 19, 2006 – About one-third (32%) of sports fans across Canada predict the Ottawa Senators will end the more than 10-year hold on the Stanley Cup by U.S.-based teams, suggests a new survey by TNS Canadian Facts. The surging Montreal Canadiens are a surprising second choice (14%), while the Detroit Red Wings—the top team in the regular season standings and a perennial powerhouse—are the third favourite (13%).

"Canadian sports fans feel that this could be the year that a Canadian team finally snaps the 13-year drought for NHL franchises north of the border," said Richard Jenkins, vice-president of TNS Canadian Facts, a Toronto-based marketing research firm.

"Many sports fans expect that Ottawa will finally get over the playoff hump that has seen them defeated relatively early in the past few years," added Jenkins.

Other key findings of the TNS Sports Poll study indicate that the rule changes implemented by the NHL prior to the start of the 2005/2006 regular season have been a hit with Canadian viewers. About half (49%) of NHL viewers in Canada, defined as those who watched at least one game this season, claim that this past season was more exciting than in previous years. Roughly one-third (32%) think that the games were as exciting as previous years, with a small proportion (19%) saying that 2005/2006 was less exciting.

When asked to identify what made the game more exciting, the improved overall flow of the game (46%), the addition of shootouts (44%) and the crackdown on obstruction (24%) were volunteered as having a positive impact on the game.

“Much to its credit, the NHL succeeded in opening up the game in 2005/2006 resulting from its new rules, which Canadian viewers have largely embraced,” said Jenkins.

TNS Sports Poll is a new service by TNS Canadian Facts that tracks, on a quarterly basis, Canadian sports fans’ attitudes about sports, sports personalities, sports sponsorship and other key measures. E-mail invitations were sent to 5,500 members of the TNS Canadian Facts Internet panel comprising more than 95,000 Canadian Internet users who have agreed to participate in survey research from time to time. In total, 2,477 people completed the online survey between April 7 and 16, 2006, a 44% response rate, but not everyone qualified as a sports fan. Sports fans are defined as those who answered five or higher to the following screening question: *“On a scale from 0 to 10 where zero means you are not a sports fan at all, 5 means you are an average sports fan and 10 means you are a super sports fan, where would you place yourself on that scale?”* Out of the 2,477 Canadians interviewed, 1,295 qualified as sports fans (52%). The survey results are nationally representative of online Canadian sports fans, aged 14 and over, and are considered accurate to within 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

TNS Canadian Facts (www.tns-cf.com) is one of Canada's most prestigious full-service marketing, opinion and social research organizations.

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Media Contacts:

Richard W. Jenkins

Vice President, Corporate Director, Public Opinion Research
TNS Canadian Facts
Tel: (613) 230-4799
e-mail: Richard.Jenkins@tns-cf.com

David Stark

Vice President, Public Affairs
TNS Canadian Facts
(416) 924-5751
e-mail: David.Stark@tns-cf.com