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Canadians losing interest ... and money ... as lockout drags on

By [RANDY SPORTAK](#) -- Calgary Sun

Out of sight is becoming out of mind.

The [NHL](#) lockout's impact on Canadians appears to be taking a toll both players and owners should worry about.

A SES poll of 1,000 Canadians conducted between Oct. 26 and Nov. 1 found interest in Canada's game is waning.

A whopping 80% said they're either part-time hockey fans or would rather be doing something else. The poll found 42% said they only watch the [NHL playoffs](#) while 38% said they'd rather read a book than watch professional hockey.

Only 16% identified themselves as diehard NHL fans who were addicted to it like a drug. Four percent were undecided.

"I think people are just upset with the fact that this whole (lockout) has really boiled down to money and two different sets of millionaires are fighting over who gets a bigger piece of the pie," pollster Nik Nanos said.

However, those who care, care deeply. Especially since the lockout that's nearing its seventh week has hit them hard in the pocketbook.

In dollars and cents, the players have lost three paycheques totalling nearly \$350 million US.



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However, nearly all of them have been blessed to squirrel away some cash. As well, the NHLPA is set to dole out around \$5,000 per month to its players.

Shonda Read, a server at Bottoms Up Sports Pub on 17th Ave. S.W., could only dream of having that kind of a slush fund.

"This is my livelihood they're messing around with," she says, scanning the nearly empty establishment last night. "I just have to budget more, I guess. I certainly don't eat out much and there's no more clothes shopping."

Then there's the army of part-time workers at the Saddledome making their way without the benefit of a job ushering, selling food or working in the parking lot. There's also all the full-time staff who are down to working three days a week with a 40% cut in pay.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg in the Stampede City. The ripples are more like tidal waves.

"A month ago, I thought I'd be down \$3,000 or \$4,000 a week. I wish I was right. It's more like \$5,000 to \$7,500," said Spencer Tapley, owner of Bottoms Up. "It's really bad. I'm still OK because Sundays and Monday Night [Football](#) are still a draw but it's costing me huge. I don't know what I'm going to do if there's no season."

Frank Folan, owner of Collector's Paradise, said his memorabilia sales are down 30% from a year ago simply because he has no new [hockey](#) paraphernalia to sell.

"With no licences issued to the card companies like Upper Deck, Topps and O-Pee-Chee, we're starving for product," he said. "We're hurting, absolutely. There's no question."

Folan is hoping a soon-to-be released collection of cards featuring junior players such as phenom Sydney Crosby and Flames prospect Dion Phaneuf will ease the pain.

"We were coming off a fabulous season with the Flames and the momentum should have carried on," Folan said. "We'd like to be riding the wave of excitement but there's no wave."

And the impact will last.

The Flames Foundation alone generates roughly \$1 million annually for city charities. That's on top of many donations from players.

The Calgary minor hockey association sees more than \$100,000 from the Foundation, putting it towards helping some 250 children afford to play.

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"It's going to have a big effect," said MHAC president Ken Moore. "If they're out a full year, we'll have some tough decisions here. Whether it's this year or next year."

GOING TO THE POLLS

The results of an exclusive SES Sun Media poll show pro hockey is losing its grip on the Canadian population. The survey of 1,000 Canadians was conducted between Oct. 26 and Nov. 1.

9% SUPPORT THE PLAYERS IN LOCKOUT

35% SUPPORT THE OWNERS IN LOCKOUT

51% DON'T SUPPORT EITHER SIDE

80% ARE JUST PART-TIME HOCKEY FANS

42% ONLY WATCH DURING THE PLAYOFFS

38% WOULD READ RATHER THAN WATCH NHL

16% ARE DIEHARD FANS OF HOCKEY



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POLL

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- ☐ 50-plus
- ☐ 40-50
- ☐ 30-40
- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ Less than 20
- ☐ Don't care

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