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Thu, September 16, 2004

Football wins big as TV backup: Poll

 By **Antonella Artuso**, Parliamentary Bureau

TORONTO -- Grieving NHL fans are most likely to turn to the pigskin to ease their pain, according to an SES Research poll exclusive to the Sun. Twenty percent of Ontarians polled over the weekend said they will tune into pro football if they can't get their regular hockey fix.

Another 9% of fans said they will turn their attention to junior hockey, while 8% would slide over to Major League Baseball and 7% of Ontarians would bounce over to the NBA.

Another 10% of hockey fans say they won't watch any other sport.

"This is kind of like McDonalds going on strike," said Nik Nanos, president of SES Research, noting people wouldn't stop eating hamburgers.

"The appetite's still there for sports," he said.

'ZERO SUM GAME'

Although some diehard hockey fans refuse to switch loyalties, polling indicates nine out of 10

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hockey fans are up for grabs.

Professional football -- not the hockey players or owners -- will be the winner of any prolonged lockout, Nanos said.

"Tens of millions of dollars are made on single-point market share in North America when it comes to professional sports," he said.

"I think we have to consider this a zero sum game; it looks like hockey's loss."

Thirty-six percent of people polled said they don't watch sports.

Another 10% said they were unsure where they would turn if NHL games were unavailable.

SES Research quizzed 500 eligible voters on Sept. 11 and 12.

Results are accurate to within 4.5 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

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