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How The Strike Changed National Hockey League Rules

Back in 2004 many people rang the bell of doom on the National Hockey League, as it missed a season due to player and management differences. Many people said that a sport that misses a whole season and that emphasized brute strength over skill would never recover. However, in the past few years hockey fans have found much to be pleased with, and teams that are both skillful and entertaining.

When the National Hockey League started up again in 2005 it made several rule changes in order to restructure parts of the game, and to regain hockey fans that loved the skill and finesse of Olympic style hockey games.

The first area they addressed was stricter enforcement of longstanding rules. Any player who uses their stick hand or free hand to slow any opposing player will be penalized. This includes hooking, holding, tripping, cross checking and interference. For several years prior to 2005 there were a number of bear hugs and wrestling matches that were not quickly stopped by a referee, and this slowed down the speed of the game.

The new rules include also added two ways to break a tie that ends a regular game. Five additional minutes are played 4-on-4, and if the game remains tied at the end of those five minutes, a shootout determines the winner. This does make the end of the hockey game much more exciting, except that now the final scores of the game are not as useful a tool to rank different hockey teams. Some fans and NHL officials view this as pandering to the crowd, just to get them excited about their team winning the game.

US professional hockey players once could not pass from their own defensive zone, across the red line at center, and all the way to the opposing blue line. Now that these long passes are allowed, the speed and tactics of the games have changed: there are more quick attacks and less use of the forecheck.

The goalie has less goalie padding, which makes goalies look more like their hockey ancestors of the fifties. Also, goalies before 2005 were able to have a good deal of puck control while in their zone. They could hand it off to a teammate, shoot it out when they got it and make a forward pass. Since there are goaltender interference rules, a goalie could do any of these things without any interference from the other team. Goalies now have very limited puck handling, except in the zone directly behind the net.

Several other changes include moving the blue lines closer together, to be only 50 feet apart, and the ability for players to "tag up" and go back to the blue line so they will not be considered being offside, and eliminating a offside whistle.

These changes have made higher scoring hockey games, and have emphasized the skill and the ice skating speed of the players, rather than their muscles and defensive ability. These changes in the rules have made an even larger fan base that is not put off by the brawling image of earlier NHL hockey games.

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