

# **The Toronto Maple Leafs on Television: A Research Paper by Keely Brown<sup>1</sup>**

## **Canadian Television Networks**

Three Canadian networks vie to broadcast the Toronto Maple Leaf hockey games (Leafs). Canadian Broadcast Corporation (CBC), The Sports Network (TSN) and CTV Sportsnet, as well as CFTO Ontario combine to cover all 82 Leaf games of the 1999-2000 season.

## **How Is a Television Network Permitted to Broadcast a Hockey Game?**

Television networks must go through the National Hockey League (NHL). In the past, the NHL had a contract with Molson where the NHL sold Canadian NHL hockey rights to Molson. In order for a television network to have the right to broadcast an NHL game, the network had to negotiate with Molson.

The NHL decided this arrangement was not working to their satisfaction. It would be more beneficial to the league to sell the broadcast rights directly, so two years ago, the NHL took back their rights to NHL hockey in Canada. Molson still holds the Leaf regional rights. TSN and CFTO buy their games from Molstar, which bought them from the Leafs.

Other than the regional games Molson holds the rights to, the NHL in New York negotiates a national package with CBC and Sportsnet in order to broadcast NHL games. CBC, for example, deals directly with the NHL and is even allowed scheduling input. CBC has top priority input for the NHL season schedule and negotiates to get the Leafs to play every Saturday night so they can be featured on *Hockey Night in Canada* on CBC, which is a prime draw card for Canadian audiences nation wide. The NHL also sold the title sponsorship for *Hockey Night in Canada* rights on CBC to Labatt.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author, Keely Brown, is a student at Osgoode Law School. This paper was in conjunction with Pro Bono Students Canada at Osgoode Hall for Friends of Canadian Broadcasting. All opinions in this paper are of the author.

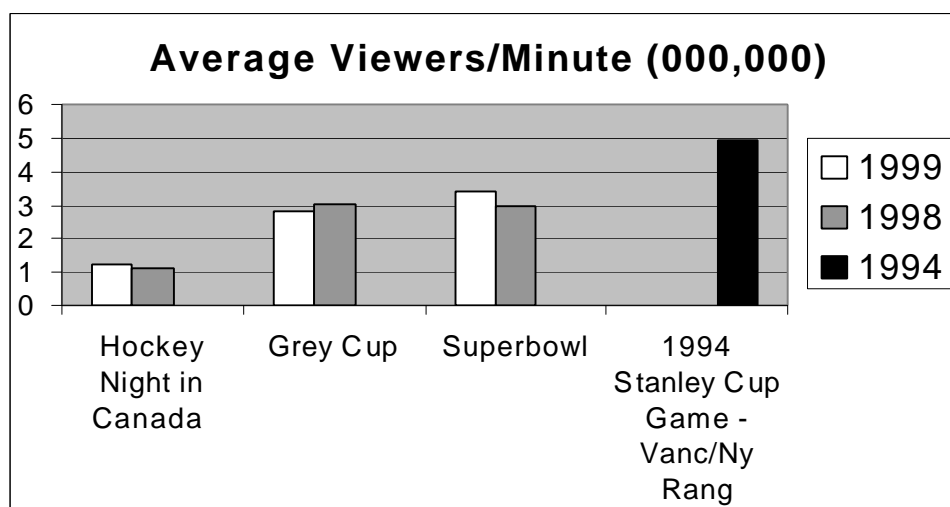
### Which Regions Does Each Network Cover?

**CBC** - CBC has been running *Hockey Night in Canada* for five decades. This event is the #1 weekly sporting attraction in the country. Its viewer average over the season sits as the #3 sports property with only the *Grey Cup* and the *Superbowl* getting better audience ratings, although individual playoff hockey games get a much higher audience.

(See graph)

### Comparison Between Sporting Events on Television

	1999	1998	1994
Hockey Night in Canada	1.217	1.106	
Grey Cup	2.8	3.01	
Superbowl	3.4	3	
1994 Stanley Cup Game - Vanc/Ny Rang			4.957

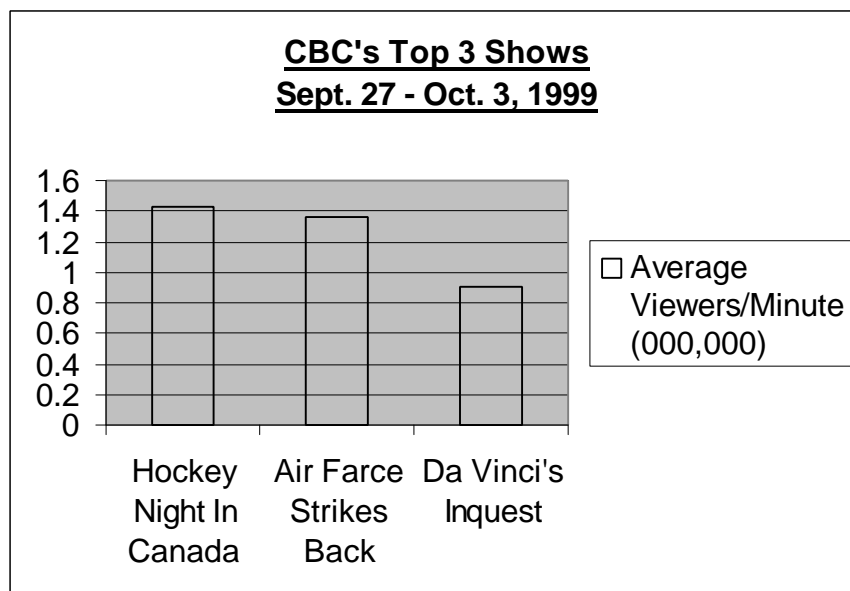


*Hockey Night in Canada* is also the #1 draw on CBC, which is a network that broadcasts almost 90% Canadian content (6 out of 49 hours from five p.m. until midnight a week, or 12%, is not Canadian). CBC has 34 television stations; 17 are owned and operated by CBC and 17 are affiliates. These markets are divided into four regions, which cover 98% of Canada. (See graph)

---

### CBC's Top 3 Shows - September 27 - October 3, 1999

	Average Viewers/Minute
Hockey Night In Canada	1.433
Air Farce Strikes Back	1.358
Da Vinci's Inquest	0.9



**TSN** - TSN started in 1984 and has been broadcasting Leaf games since the 1998-99 season. They are a cable network and \$1.07/month from each house that pays for cable goes to them. TSN's broadcast of Leaf games is on a regional basis and covers most of Ontario west of Belleville. TSN does the same regionally for the Montreal Canadians in Quebec and New Brunswick.

TSN is allowed to air up to 10% of their programs on a regional basis. Leaf games comprise most of this allotted percentage.

**CTV**- CTV national does not carry Leaf games, however regional coverage is provided by CFTO Ontario and CTV Sportsnet. Sportsnet and CFTO broadcast in the same area as TSN.

Sportsnet started broadcasting Leaf games this season. Like TSN, Sportsnet is also a cable network and \$0.78/month per house with cable goes to them. There are four regions. 33% of their programming must be specific to that region and there is other licensing commitments like airing amateur sports.

### How do the Television Networks Audience Ratings Compare?

**Nielsen Ratings** – This is the only set of figures that is relied upon to record who watches what on TV. In September of 1989 A.C. Nielsen changed the way they measured audience ratings. Prior to that time, selected households had diaries where each family member was supposed to write down the TV shows they watched. This was recorded into quarter-hour audience averages.

Nielsen now computes their numbers into the average number of viewers per minute. Along with the diaries, there are boxes on televisions in 1000 Canadian household that require each person in the house to press a button when they sit down to watch TV. The box then records and averages out the number of viewers per minute across Canada according to age. This method does have its faults. For example, it would miss recording the people that go out to bars to watch the game on TV as a group. Also, the sample number is small and the Nielsen Ratings method is not contrasted with any other measures.

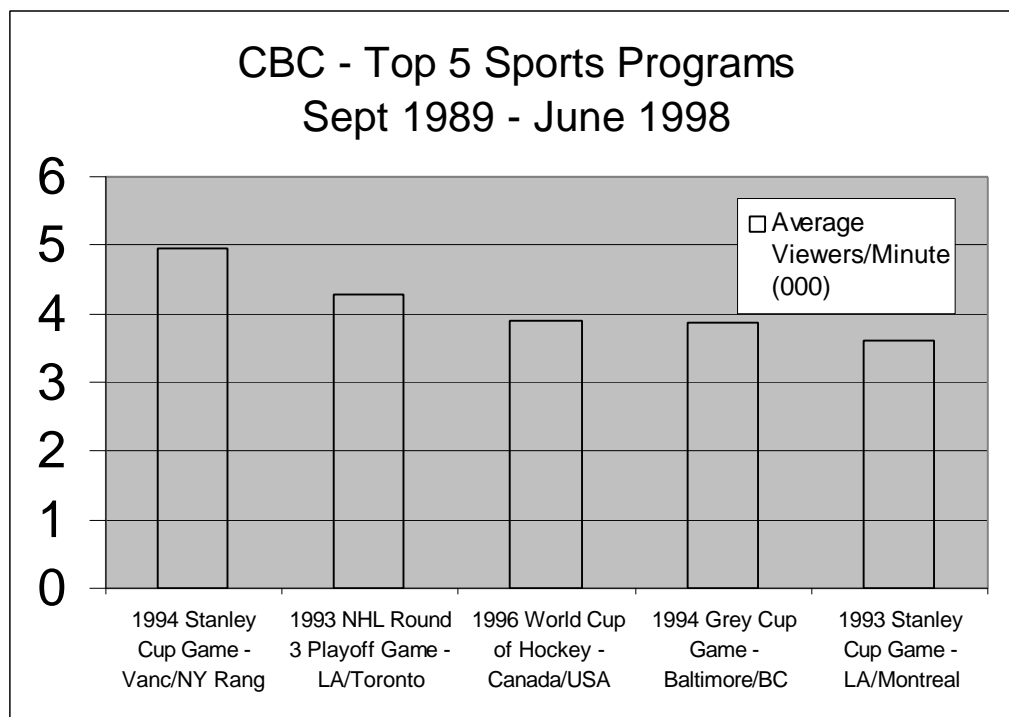
The ratings we will be using in this report involve what is called the 2+ category. This includes everyone from age 2 and up. Due to the change in recording methods, it is difficult to directly compare current ratings with those prior to 1989. It is also important to note that these numbers are averaged out over the whole game. The audience can fluctuate depending on many variables. For example, the 1999 *Grey Cup* game averaged 2.8 million viewers per minute, but it peaked at seven million at one point in the game.

Overall, the ratings are down for sports in general because there are now more sporting options aired on TV for viewers to choose between. In 1994, a *Stanley Cup* game between the Vancouver Canucks and the New York Rangers averaged 4.96 million viewers per minute. Last season, a couple of playoff games hit two million. There was hope for a top of three million if the Leafs made the Final round, however they did not make it that far. **(See graph)**

### CBC's Top 5 Sports Shows - 1989-1998

	Average Viewers/Minute (000)
1994 Stanley Cup Game - Vanc/NY Rang	4.957
1993 NHL Round 3 Playoff Game - LA/Toronto	4.269

1996 World Cup of Hockey – Canada/USA	3.907
1994 Grey Cup Game – Baltimore/BC	3.876

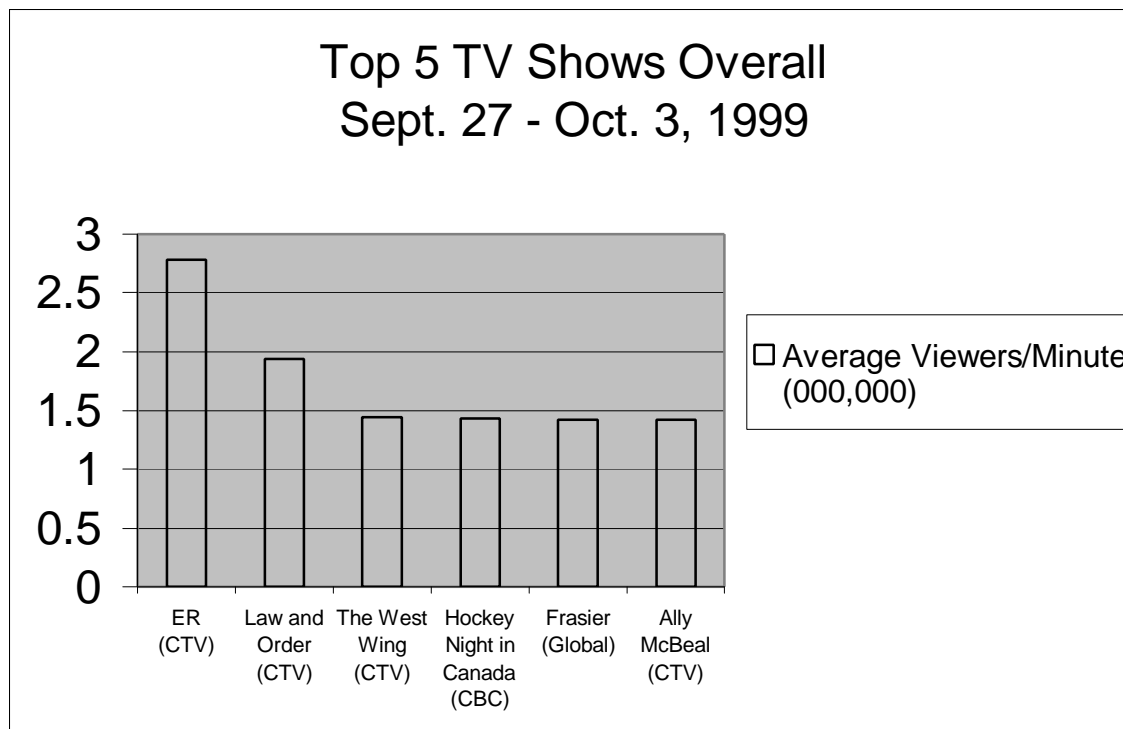


1993 Stanley Cup Game - LA/Montreal	3.614
--	-------

See the attached graph below of the top 10 shows overall on TV for the week of September 27 – October 3 to show where *Hockey Night in Canada* fits when compared with the ratings of all televisions shows. (See graph)

### **Top 5 TV Shows Overall - September 27- October 3, 1999**

	Average Viewers/Minute (000,000)
ER (CTV)	2.777
Law and Order (CTV)	1.941
The West Wing (CTV)	1.446
Hockey Night in Canada (CBC)	1.433
Frasier (Global)	1.423
Ally McBeal (CTV)	1.423



**CBC** – This season, Leaf games average 1 million, 217 thousand viewers per minute on CBC. The number tends to fluctuate with variables such as score, opponent etc. This number is up 10% from last season, which was up 25% from the season before.

CBC airs 26 Leaf games of the 82 game 1999-2000 schedule. This amounts to 32% of the Leaf games.

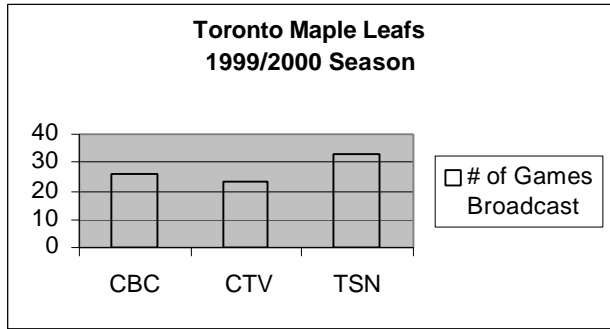
**TSN** – Since TSN broadcasts to a smaller area, they average 332 thousand viewers per minute this season. This is a 25% increase from last season.

TSN airs 33 games of the 1999-2000 Leaf schedule, which accounts for 40% of the Leaf games.

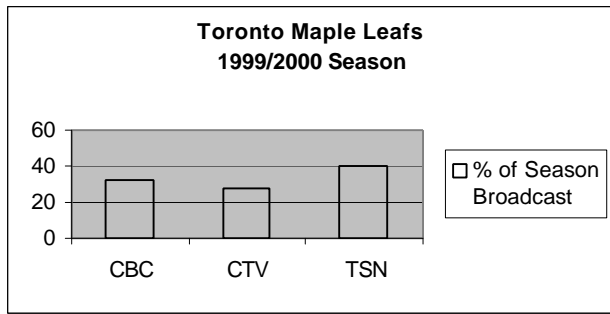
**CTV** – CTV includes both CFTO which is local and airs 10 Leaf games this season, as well as CTV Sportsnet which airs 13 Leaf games. CFTO and Sportsnet combined audience ratings for Leaf games amounts to 314 thousand viewers per minute average. CTV's 23 games amounts to 28% of the Leaf schedule for the 1999-2000 season. **(See graph)**

## The Toronto Maple Leafs on Television

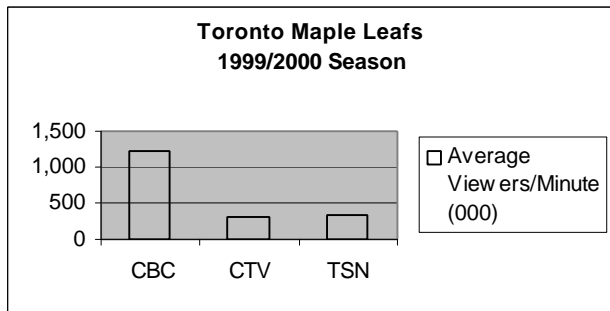
	# of Games Broadcast
CBC	26
CTV	23
TSN	33



	% of Season Broadcast
CBC	31.7
CTV	28
TSN	40.2



	Average Viewers/Minute (000)
CBC	1,217
CTV	314
TSN	332



### **How do Networks Benefit from Broadcasting the Leaf Games?**

The networks benefit from high audience ratings in two ways. First, it helps them get more sponsors and command a higher price per sponsor option for the particular show. For example, CBC sells commercial sponsorship in the broadcast of *Hockey Night in Canada*. The sponsors' contracts are for the whole season. Prior to an upcoming season, CBC will approach the sponsor with the relevant Nielsen audience numbers for *Hockey Night in Canada*. Since the numbers have gone up in recent years, they are able to command more sponsorship money for the spots offered.

The second way a network benefits from broadcasting popular Leaf games is through the spill over effect to their other shows. Chances are better that a viewer will stay on the same channel after or before the game, and will check out the channel during non-game times to see what else is on. This raises the stock in the network as a whole. They can advertise Leaf games during other shows, and also get more sponsor money for their other shows based on the premise that more viewers will glance at their channel.

### **How do the Leafs Benefit from Having their Games Broadcast?**

The Leafs gain in the amount they can command for their rights to have their games broadcast if the audience numbers are high. This is best illustrated with an example from the Toronto Blue Jays since the applicable Leaf information was not available.

The Blue Jays have had a large drop in audience numbers since the 1993 World Series average of 1.1 million viewers per minute on CBC. Last year CBC averaged 507 thousand viewers per game and TSN averaged 381 thousand viewers per game. Due to this drop, the Blue Jays' rights fees have dropped as well. Last year their rights were worth \$25 million for the season. This was cut in half from 1993. Their drop in ratings have essentially cost them a difference of \$25 million.

Basically, the more television audience the Leafs draw, the more their rights are worth when the television networks are bidding for their games.

As an aside, it remains to be seen if the current situation with the CTV's takeover bid of TSN will affect the competition for Leaf games that keep the Leafs' rights at their current draw.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> This report was written prior to the release of CRTC's decision on CTV's takeover bid of TSN

### **How do Networks get Sponsors for the Games?**

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) mandates that there cannot be more than 12 minutes of advertising per hour of TV. The NHL has their own sponsorship contracts including Master Card, Canadian Airlines and Nike. Also, anything to do with the individual players, for example, must go through the NHLPA.

Broadcast sponsors are separate. The networks have their own set of sponsors for the games and make their money this way. They can go through the NHL to get the NHL sponsors to add in to the broadcast time, for example CBC gets Labatts through the NHL to get *Hockey Night in Canada* presented by Labatt. However, networks do not have to go through the NHL to get sponsors.

CBC sells sponsors for the entire season unit. The standard package entails full game or period sponsorships that CBC airs throughout the season. *Hockey Night in Canada* is a double header of hockey aired every Saturday night at prime time. CBC also broadcasts the NHL All-Star Game and the NHL Skills Competition.

Each network has their own set of sponsors for different contracts. There are sponsors of the period, sponsors of between periods, highlights of the games, stars of the games, summaries of the games, and more. Overall TSN has more sponsors per moment than CBC.

Since each part of a Leaf game has its own sponsor i.e. the NHL, the network, and even the arena the game is played in, interesting things can happen. For example, Molson still has a contract with the Air Canada Centre (ACC) and the Leafs and displays signs all over the Air Canada Centre because the ACC sells its own signage. CBC has a contract with Labatts which is a major competitor of Molson. Because of this, *Hockey Night in Canada* presented by Labatt shows a game with Molson's signs on the boards of the rink.

### **Conclusion**

The Toronto Maple Leafs are a very successful hockey club with respect to the amount of television coverage they get and also with their high audience ratings on television. All of the games in their season schedule are broadcast at least within their region, if not all over Canada. To gauge the prosperity of the Leafs on television, one only needs to look at the popularity of *Hockey Night in Canada* and the role the Leafs play within their schedule. Broadcasting Leaf games benefits all involved.

**Acknowledgements:**

- Chris Zelkovich, Sports Media Columnist, The Toronto Star
- Walter Coburn, Senior Labour Relations Officer, University of Toronto

**Source:**

A.C Nielsen