

# Bettman appears on final 'Hockey Night in Canada in Cree' show of season

NHL Commissioner talks making game inclusive for Indigenous people, playoffs, Lafleur

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Gary Bettman stops by to chat with Earl Wood and the panel during the 1st intermission of the Panthers, Maple Leafs game on HNIC in Cree

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman celebrated the final edition of "Hockey Night in Canada in Cree" this season Saturday by making an appearance on the groundbreaking broadcast that brings the NHL to Indigenous fans in the Cree language.

Commissioner Bettman spoke with studio host Earl Wood and panelists Clarence Iron, John Chabot and Jason Chamakese during the first and second intermissions of the game between the Florida Panthers and Toronto Maple Leafs on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).

"It's an honor to be with you," Commissioner Bettman said. "We're at perhaps the beginning of the most important and exciting part of the season as we finalize playoff positions. But most importantly the fact that we can have a broadcast like this, it represents our game being inclusive and welcoming, so thank you for all that you are doing."

Bettman discussed the NHL's attempts to make the game more inclusive for Indigenous people.

"We understand there are barriers for entry into the game. It's expensive. One of the things that we do try to bring to communities is street hockey. You don't need as much equipment ... that's something we're working on and we're exploring ways to deploy NHL Street hockey in the indigenous communities as the program we're rolling out rolls out throughout North America. It is a priority to make sure we're hitting all communities, particularly the Indigenous communities."

Commissioner Bettman also touched on the death of Montreal Canadiens icon Guy Lafleur on Friday; his memories of spending time with Fred Sasakamoose, one of the first Indigenous players in the NHL, and how important it is to have a show like "Hockey Night in Canada in Cree."



"This type of program demonstrates that we want to reach out to all fans, no matter what your background is, no matter who you are," he said. "We want you to know that you are welcome in our game and we want to do whatever we can to make you feel comfortable being a part of our game."

Indigenous players have a rich legacy in the NHL that includes Canadiens goalie Carey Price, Washington Capitals forward T.J. Oshie, Vegas Golden Knights defenseman Zach Whitecloud, Florida Panthers defenseman Brandon Montour, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Ethan Bear and St. Louis Blues coach Craig Berube.

They stand on the shoulders of Indigenous former players that include forwards Bryan Trottier, Reggie Leach, Henry Bocuha, Gino Odjick, Jordin Tootoo and defenseman Jim Neilson.

The players, past and present, include Stanley Cup champions, Hockey Hall of Famers and history-makers. Berube coached the Blues to the Stanley Cup in 2019; Trottier, who was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1997, helped the New York Islanders win

four consecutive Stanley Cup championships; Leach won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the Stanley Cup Playoffs most valuable player in 1976, despite the Philadelphia Flyers losing to the Canadiens 4-0 in the Final; Price won the Vezina Trophy as the best goalie in the NHL and Hart Memorial Trophy, given annually to the player adjudged to be the most valuable to his team as selected in a vote by the Professional Hockey Writers Association, in 2014-15.

Bear made hockey history in July 2020 when he wore his last name in Cree syllabics when he played for the Edmonton Oilers.

*NHL.com staff writers Bill Douglas and Adam Kimelman contributed to this report*