

Hat-trick origins

Contributed by asap
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JOHN MARSHALL looks into the origin of a hockey term and figures out where all those lids go.

It's one of the great traditions in sports, the raining of hats onto the ice after someone from the home team scores his third goal in a game.

If you know anything about hockey, you're aware the scoring feat is called a hat trick. But do you know the origins of the term? And what about the hats? What happens to all the lids once they're scooped from the ice?

We weren't sure on either count, so we decided to do some digging.

THE HABERDASHER

By most accounts, the hockey term "hat trick" dates to the 1940s, when a Toronto haberdasher named Sammy Taft gave Maple Leaf players free hats anytime they scored three goals in a game.

The idea of tossing hats to the ice is generally credited to the Biltmore Hat Company, which sponsored the Guelph Biltmore Mad Hatters of the Ontario Hockey League in the 1950s. The Guelph, Ontario-based company encouraged fans to flip their lids whenever someone from the home team scored three goals, a move that obviously was meant to drum up more business.

But as we dug deeper, we found that the term actually has its origins in cricket.

The phrase "hat trick" first appeared in print in 1858 after English cricketer HH Stephenson took three wickets on consecutive balls. There's some debate whether the hat meant the person who hit three wickets was awarded a "cap," or regular spot on the team, or if a hat was passed around and filled with cash after the feat.

It's unclear if Taft knew about the cricket term when he coined the phrase in hockey.

CHARITABLE HATS

As for the hats, the result of our research wasn't all that surprising: most teams donate the lids to charity.

In Dallas, the Stars community relations department goes through the hats and gives the clean ones to local charities, while the Washington Capitals pass their lids onto homeless shelters. The San Jose Sharks present the hats to the player who scored the hat trick, then send the clean ones to a local kids cancer group.

The Nashville Predators allow fans a chance to retrieve their hats before sending the leftovers to charity, and the Buffalo Sabres sent a big batch to Goodwill during last year's playoffs after a pair of players had hat tricks in the same game.

In Colorado, the hats are saved and later auctioned off by the Avs Better Halves (players' wives) with the proceeds — often hundreds of dollars per batch — going to charity.

But not every team does the donation thing.

The Columbus Blue Jackets, St. Louis Blues and Tampa Bay Lightning commemorate hat tricks by putting the hats in display cases on the concourse of their arenas. The Anaheim Ducks give the hats to the players as a memento, while the Toronto Maple Leafs hand them out to kids near the Zamboni entrance.

And here's something else we didn't know: most teams don't allow fans to get their caps back. So unless you're headed to a home game of the Predators or the Minnesota Wild, which has a lost and found for lid lobbbers, don't bring a hat you're hoping to wear again — it's probably going to end up on someone else's head.

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