Hello,

Please enjoy my column. I am interesting in keeping track of which communities they end up in. I would appreciate it if you could take a moment and send me a quick email at rejeangiguere@rejeangiguere.com when you publish the first one.

Thanks, Rejean.

**NHL Teams “Tanking the Season”**

It’s hard to believe it could happen, or has happened, or could even be true.

We have a professional hockey league with owners and players purposely losing, in order to end up in last place in the standings. Losing just to earn a shot at securing the next upcoming wonder-kid in the next entry draft.

The hardest part for a bystander to watch is the differing interests between the ownership and players. I understand that some owners could see a benefit in stepping back today, losing the season in the short term, to create a cornerstone for future wins in years to come.

It is still open for debate whether the fans should, or will, continue supporting a team and pay for tickets when an ownership wants to lose.

The players on the other hand need to excel, they have contracts to play for, a place on the bench to keep. There is a consequence for their future. Some of the team members are not superstars, and have to battle for their positions, whether it’s on this team, or another. For those players their statistics matter.

This year two teams are fighting tooth and nail to come in last place in the standings. The reward is a shot at signing Connor McDavid who is touted as the next big thing in hockey. It should be noted that the last-place team only gets a twenty percent shot at him, not a significant number when you consider the mental effort it must take to want to lose every game in the stretch run to the end of the season.

The Buffalo Sabres are currently in the last place, they traded their number one goalie away earlier in the year, and have just traded their next number one goalie for another team’s backup. That’s not the move you would expect of a team trying to win.

In Arizona they have been trading away players over the last few weeks, dropping skill for future picks. Not a team trying to win either.

Why does this happen? Because of the possibilities that open up when you come in last place.

In 1984, when the Pittsburg Penguins were trying desperately to secure last place, the up and coming superstar they wanted? Mario Lemieux. Down the stretch run to the end of the year they were using a backup goalie, but he started to win a few games. The players were still trying as they should, so the team brought up a goalie from the league below, and he lost four of five games, letting in four to six goals a game.

This is a clear case of tanking the season.

We all know about Lemieux’s career. The Stanley Cups he helped win, the packed capacity crowds, and the revenues he drew in saved that franchise. Getting Lemieux brought them glory.

As long as that possibility still exists, so will tanking in the NHL.

Rejean Giguere is a Northern Ontario author of six novels whose passion spills over into the sports world. Check out his website at www.rejeangiguere.com.

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