

Heinz Field to Host 2011 Winter Classic

Written by Matthew Coller
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[WXPI in Pittsburgh](#) reported Thursday that the 2011 Winter Classic will take place at Heinz Field and feature the Pittsburgh Penguins vs. Washington Capitals. The Montreal Canadiens and Calgary Flames will also face off outdoors at McMahon Stadium in February.

This will be the fourth Winter Classic, the first in 2008 between the Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins at Ralph Wilson Stadium in Buffalo. The NHL clearly took the most obvious route in search of improving TV ratings from last year's Winter Classic. The Boston Bruins vs. Philadelphia Flyers 2010 match-up at Fenway Park on NBC earned a 2.6 overnight Neilson rating which was down from a 2.9 rating for the Detroit Red Wings vs. Chicago Blackhawks 2009 Winter Classic.

Despite the slightly lower TV ratings, the Winter Classic performed well, selling all of its sponsorship and exceeding expectations on merchandise sales and [NHL.com](#) traffic.

COO of the NHL John Collins said after last year's Winter Classic,

"This year's game once again demonstrated that the NHL Winter Classic has transformed the way sports fans think about the NHL experience. □ By providing fans a national event to rally around, we can deliver an impressive national television audience for a regular season game. □ When the final numbers are in, NBC's broadcast will most likely be one of the most watched regular season games in the U.S. in the past 35 years. □ That is impressive considering the stiff competition we faced. Our fans, players, teams and partners all tell us they absolutely love the Winter Classic and for all those fortunate enough to experience the event, it was a special day that produced lasting memories."

One problem that's been mentioned: What's next? The league is using its trump card having Ovechkin vs. Crosby in 2011, but what will it do for 2012? And, is the NHL dead set on using these two players alone to market their league? It seems if the NHL wanted to use momentum from the Olympics and promote American players (say, the Olympic star Ryan Miller) it might have used other teams which featured Olympians. But, it seems the league wanted to play it safe to ensure high ratings.

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