



[USA Today is reporting](#) that U.S. viewership of the 2010 NHL playoffs is up a whopping 24 percent, making the number the largest average audience in the past 10 years. In addition, the NHL noted that corporate sponsorship is up 20 percent and that ad spending on NHL media increased by 37 percent over last season.

The first round of the 2010 playoffs have seen some compelling games and apparently the viewers across North American have taken notice. "The first round of the playoffs was dramatic and exciting, and our passionate fans consumed the game on television, online and in arena in a big way," [said NHL Chief Operating Officer John Collins](#). "Fans are enjoying the playoffs and we are now uniquely positioned to engage and serve them in ways we never have before, especially through our digital platforms."

TSN viewership exhibited the greatest gains in comparison to last year, averaging 1.07 million viewers for the first round of the playoffs. This is an 89 percent increase over 2009. The positive news was not limited to television. Over 17 million unique visitors logged onto NHL.com in April, thus becoming the most-trafficked month in the history of NHL.com.

Although these robust ratings and revenues are encouraging, the NHL is hoping that the early departure of the Washington Capitals and the Phoenix Coyotes from the 2010 playoffs will not slow down this year's encouraging ratings.

The loss of the Caps hurts. Washington D.C. is reasserting itself as a major hockey television market due to the exciting play of young players like Alexander Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and Semyon Varlamov.

The Coyotes are the feel-good story of the 2009-2010 season. The franchise, a symbol of the NHL's attempts at growing the game by bringing hockey to non-traditional markets, has seldom been competitive since relocating from Winnipeg to Arizona. The team's turnaround this year was unforeseeable, as almost one year ago the franchise was concluding another subpar season and on the brink of filing for bankruptcy protection. Now the team has a new owner, the NHL, and is poised to challenge the Western Conference elite for supremacy.

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