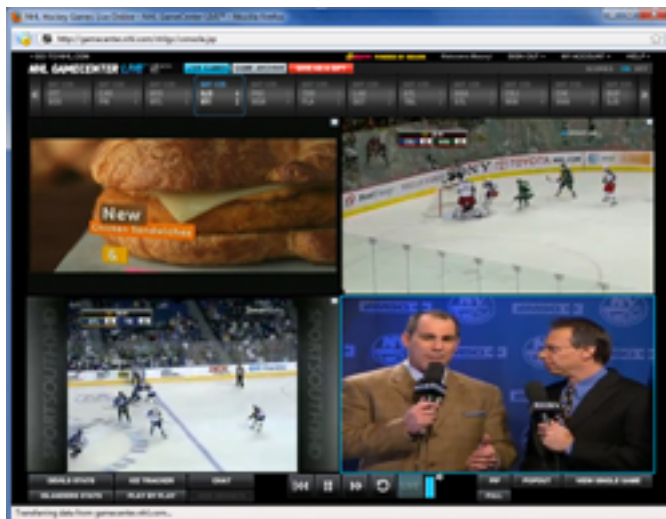


REVIEW: NHL GameCenter Live Best in Class for Streaming Sports Online

Written by Maury Brown

Sunday, 24 January 2010 17:20



4 on the Floor: NHL's GameCenter Live allows you to watch up to 4 games at once, plus much, much more ([select image to see in larger view](#))

It's a great time to be a sports fan these days. Between HD, mobile, and the internet, fans of every stripe can get their fix.

Of course, there can be option overload. Between league-owned networks, and out-of-market television packages, the problem could be, "Where to choose?"

For anyone looking to augment their NHL viewing options, or get started, the league's GameCenter Live package should be worth considering. The online streaming package for out-of-market games has just about everything a fan could want if they find watching video online as an option over television, or a service that can get them watching games when a television set isn't available, with one major exception we will get to in a bit.

Seeing Is Believing

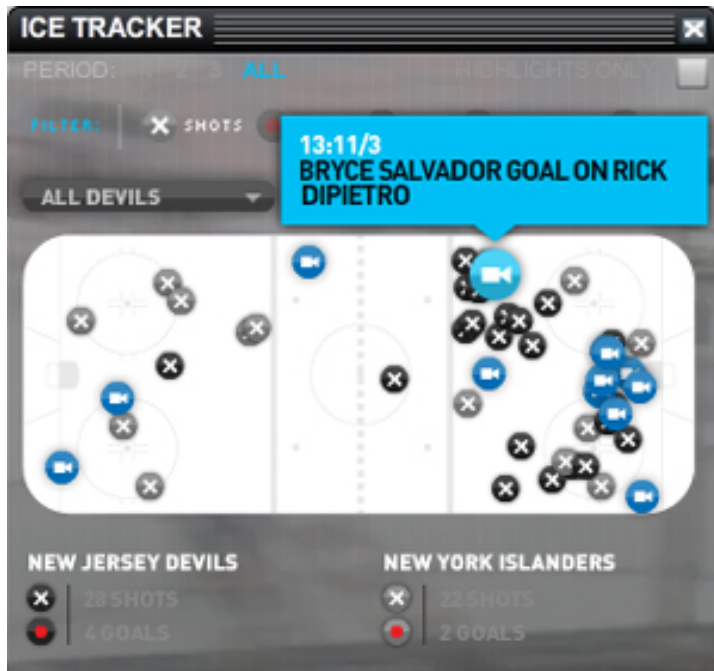
Our review of GCL was done on a Dell Inspiron 1750 2.10GHz Dual Core system laptop running Windows 7 with 4 Gigs of RAM, a 17" monitor running at 1600x900, running WiFi over DSL. We used Mozilla's Firefox as the browser. By default, video streaming runs at 1600Kbps, with the user being able to select lower bit rates (400Kbps, 800Kbps). We installed the NeuLion Plug-In that is an option for GCL that allows for adaptive bit rates – the system automatically detects and adjusts the bit rate depending on the connection speed.

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With the ability to stream up to four games simultaneously, we were pleasantly surprised to find no buffering issues. Clicking between each pane switched audio for that given game seamlessly. For those that want to keep track of multiple games, the ability to watch four games is a key selling point of the package. **(Select image in the upper right to see example)**

DVR-Like



"Ice Tracker" in GameCenter Live is one of several widgets that make the streaming video package a winner

New for this year in GameCenter Live is the ability to use the system's "DVR-like" functions. Becoming standard fare for streaming packages, users can pause, rewind, go back to "Live", or use the handy "Go Back 10 Seconds" button.

Widgets 'R Us

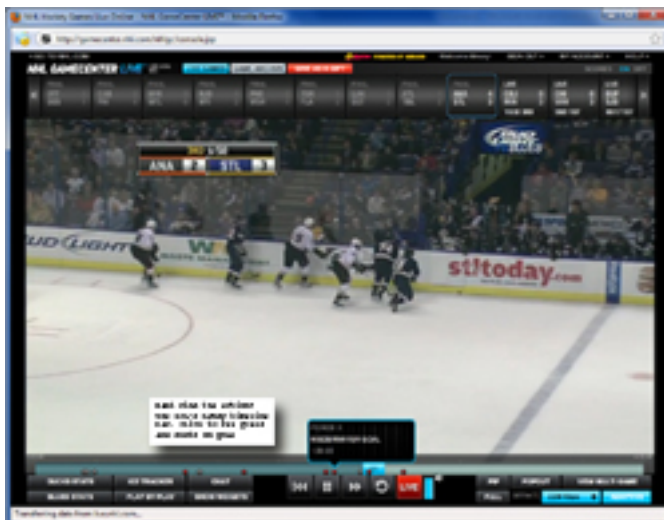
GameCenter Live's biggest strength is the use of widgets. Once launched, the user has the ability to watch up to four games at once, by clicking from the schedule bar above the viewing field, or by clicking on a game, and dragging and dropping it into place. This is also handy for stats for a particular game you happen to be viewing. Caps playing the Bruins? Click on the stats tab for which team you want to view, and drag the transparent menu anywhere on the viewing screen, including over the action. Want to watch a game in full view, but want to check another game using Picture in Picture, there's a small widget for that in which you can place it where ever you like.

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Other great widget features include Play-By-Play, a chat window, and our favorite, the Ice Tracker which allows you to see where shots, goals, hits, penalties, occurred for the entire game, by period, for both, or each team. Mousing over a marker on Ice Tracker gives you details (*see image*)

Give Me The Time(line)

There's nothing worse than watching a game, forgetting to put it on pause, walking away and coming back only to find that you missed a shot on or goal. One of GCL's best features is a timeline with markers showing when the period ended, shots on goal, and goals. Clicking on the markers gives you several seconds leading up to the action in question. When getting into archived games, this function can act as your "highlight reel".



Got the time? GameCenter Live's timeline bar allows you to click right to where the action happens (click to see in detail)

(select the image to see in detail)

Popout Fizzles

The only glitch we found in GameCenter Live revolved around its ability to have a "popout" window. Clicking on the "popout" button opens a mini-window that can be set in the corner of your screen to allow you to check a single game, but not have it consume a sizeable part of your screen's real estate. We tried using this function several times, only to have it lock the browser up. This was distracting, but not a deal killer – the functionality seems a nice to have,

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rather than a core piece – after a couple of crashes, we simply left the “popout” testing alone, and soon forgot about it.

Time Machine (Archives)

Fall asleep on the couch, and only have a few minutes before you have to dash off to work? If you're a NHL GameCenter Live subscriber, you can watch a 10 to 12 minute version of the game the next morning at 8am ET. And, you can watch archived games 48 hours after the games are broadcast with no blackouts. For those that live on the East Coast and are looking to see what they might have missed for Left Coast games, a great way to keep up with the action.

One of the coolest content related pieces for this year's GCL is the ability to see a collection of select games from 1970 thru 2009 that have been selected by the NHL's Editorial Staff.

Conclusion: Get It, But Let the Buyer Beware (Blackouts)

As online streaming sports applications go, GameCenter Live is the best one out there. It pulled out all the stops in terms of functionality, and with the exception of one hiccup, was robust enough to give a great viewing experience.

But, before you plunk down \$119 (US), GCL's biggest issue may have nothing to do with the application, at all, but rather the NHL's television blackout policy. Depending on your location, and national broadcasts, getting “up to 40 games a week” may fall more on the side of well under, rather than reaching that nice sounding “40 games” plateau.

Since GCL looks for where your computer's IP address is located, your blackouts become tied to that location. But, the NHL doesn't provide a zip code locator where you could enter in your location to see where you are currently blacked out, and to-date, no enterprising individuals have created a blackout map, such as is the case for Major League Baseball (see [MLB's blackout map](#)). This is the biggest issue surrounding GCL, and it's most glaring weakness.

There's nothing worse than purchasing something great, which GameCenter Live is, only to find that the games you want to see are caught up in the Blackout Blues. If you live in a location where blackouts are not an issue, such as we are, then purchasing GCL should be a no brainer.

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For the rest of those considering, since the NHL doesn't have the information, we suggest scouring the web thoroughly for information that will help you make the proper decision on your purchase. Below are the NHL's blackout restrictions pulled from their [GameCenter Live FAQ](#). Consider reading closely before purchasing:

1. ***When am I blacked out on NHL GAMECENTER LIVE?***

Generally, you are blacked out of games on NHL GAMECENTER Live based on a number of factors, including:

1.
 1. *Your local team is televising on a local over-the-air station and you are located within that station's signal.*
 2. *Your local team is televising on a local regional sports network and your cable or satellite system falls within the distribution for that local regional sports network (regardless of whether your cable or satellite system actually carries that regional sports network.)*
 3. *There is no local television coverage of your local team.*
 4. *The game is being televised nationally – In the U.S. this includes NBC, Versus, and the NHL Network. In Canada this includes CBC, TSN, and the NHL Network.*

1. ***What if all the games I'm trying view are blacked out?***

This means our system cannot identify your IP address as a valid IP address. Hotels, Universities or Colleges, using a company VPN could be connecting to proxy servers that make it difficult to locate what TV territory you are located in.

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Maury Brown is the Founder and President of the [Business of Sports Network](#) , which includes The Biz of Baseball, The Biz of Football, The Biz of Basketball and The Biz of Hockey. He is available for hire or freelance

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