**Speech Proposal - Brendan McWilliam**

**Attention Getter:** There is no way that we would allow one of our friends to be bullied at school, we would either stand by them or stick up for them. No one is going to let anyone be mentally or physically abused, so just because it is a competitive sport, does not change the rules of a bullying mentality, especially in a game where high speeds and physical contact is involved.

**Preparatory Background:** There are a few things that need to be discussed before moving into this topic. One, when I say fighting, I mean one on one mutually agreed fights. I do not mean full line brawls, which happen anyway but there are usually consequences. Any more than one against one becomes an issue of safety. Two, no leagues lower than semi-pro should have fighting within them because there is no need for minors to be fighting with other players because they simply don’t understand the rules of a fight. Three, this topic relates to modern-day hockey, not hockey before the 2000s, which was littered with fights practically every game and was often much more violent than what we see in hockey today. There is a lot of clash between whether or not fighting should be allowed in hockey. Many people think it adds to the game, while others believe that it is unnecessary for the sport. It is difficult for a decision to be made because there are two different perspectives: athletes who don’t mind it being a part of the game, and people who are not athletes, who believe they know what’s best for athletes. It is important to consider the culture of the sport before making any judgement on the matter. It is easier for athletes to understand the mentality behind it than non-athletes simply because they have experienced the game at the most realistic level.

**Polished Thesis:** Fighting in professional and semi-professional hockey leagues should continue to be allowed because it regulates player behaviour and makes the game safer, as well as strengthens team play and adds to the overall intensity of the game.

**Blueprint Statement:** I will cover how fighting in professional hockey leagues regulates player behaviour and keeps the game safer, and how fighting is slowly being eliminated from the game with more skill-based players being introduced in the league. I will then offer an opposing view of safety issues and argue that fighting is something that is taken seriously by all players, who understand the rules and ethics of a hockey fight. I will then conclude with a point relating to an athletes point of view relating to protecting teammates and intimidating opponents.

**Main Point One:** It regulates player behaviour.

**Evidence**: By including fighting in hockey, there is a standard of behaviour that players are more likely to abide by unless they want a target on their back. For example, if you go after a team’s star player multiple times, you can be sure that the team is going to make sure that you know what you’re doing is unacceptable. You cannot let opponents go after your teammates consistently or they will think they can do whatever they want without any consequences. With fighting, lots of players will be less likely to target a player which keeps the game fast-paced and interesting with star players able to perform to their full standard.

**Main Point Two:** Fighting is not occurring as often anymore and is slowly being eliminated altogether with new generations being more skill-based.

**Evidence:** ESPN stats from the 2018-2019 season revealed that in 1,271 regular-season games, there were 224 fights where at least one player got a major penalty, which continued the decline in fighting since the 2008-2009 season, where there were 734 fights. The number of fights has continued to decrease over the past ten years with the introduction of greatly skilled players who are simply better than previous generations, which has caused teams to realize that high IQ hockey is more necessary than ever in order to compete at the highest level.

**Offer Opposing View:** Fighting in hockey should be banned because it jeopardizes player safety and puts them at risk for injuries that could ultimately be avoided altogether.

**Critique Opposing View:** It needs to be understood that hockey players are not savages and recognize the dangers of fighting, which is why they regard safety to the highest degree. Often, players will not engage in a full fight unless both parties are willing to drop the gloves. Furthermore, there is an unwritten code when it comes to fighting that all players generally follow when a fight does occur, including not striking a player on the ground, not getting involved when two other players are fighting, and understanding when a player cannot continue to fight. Players know what they are getting into when they start or are challenged to a fight and understand the risks of fighting, but are willing to in order to support their team.

**Argue Strongest Point:** In a competitive sport involving high speed and aggressive play, fighting is necessary in order to protect players from certain injuries and to make sure that opponents don’t think they are able to do whatever they want.

**Evidence:** There are players on every team who make sure that the star players on other teams understand their presence, both as an obstacle and as a nuisance. They work to either scare these players or throw them off their game, which ultimately affects the entire team’s performance. It needs to be understood that these players are not to be messed with, so other players will often give them warnings or engage in a push and shove match. If a star player is hurt or targeted, it is not enough for a two-minute penalty. Players have to look out for each other, which means that making sure that player is not targeted again usually involves a physical altercation. Very few players actually enjoy fights, and will often get the message that certain players are not to be targeted.

**Closer:** Fighting needs to continue to be allowed in hockey, otherwise we will see a decline in natural talent due to star players being injured and opponents thinking they can get away with whatever they want.

Annotated Bibliography

**Lewinson, R. T., & Palma, O. E. (2012). The Morality of Fighting in Ice Hockey: Should It Be Banned? Journal of Sport and Social Issues, 36(1), 106–112.** [**https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723511434330**](https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723511434330)

This article relates fighting in hockey to old principles offered by philosophers such as Emmanuel Kant and suggests that applying these concepts would cause hockey to become similar to a wrestling ring with the number of fights that would occur. The article then tries to explain that the officials should be the ones responsible for controlling the game in order to mediate happiness, however, it becomes more than just giving a player a penalty for players to feel that someone has been adequately punished. This article stands on the side of fighting should be banned from hockey, and relates anthropologic concepts to a competitive sport, which seems to be a bit of a stretch. The article continues to use outdated concepts and relate them to a competitive sport, and I will use this source as my primary opposition for my speech.

**Zakhem, A. (2015). The Virtues of a Good Fight: Assessing the Ethics of Fighting in the National Hockey League. Sport, Ethics and Philosophy, 9(1), 32–46. doi: 10.1080/17511321.2015.1017522**

This paper argues that fighting in hockey, specifically the NHL, can be virtuous and add to the overall intensity of the game. It also defines fighting how I define it in my outline: voluntary and initiated by a challenge that can be denied, and how players embrace a code of honour if they are involved in a fight. The article further explains that there is a lot that goes into fighting and that players develop a sense of the elements of a fair fight and that they are not directly looking to fight to injure. Later on, it talks about the history of fighting in the NHL and how it has evolved over time to a very strict set of rules including only using hands and game suspensions if other fights occur while a fight has already started. The article concludes with suggestions that fighting has always had a role in the game, with a quote from current NHL commissioner Gary Bettman agreeing that fighting is important to hockey. I will use this source in order to stress the ethics of fighting and illustrate how players are mature enough to know what they are getting into when they are involved in a fight.

**Goldschmied, N., & Espindola, S. (2013). “I Went to a Fight the Other Night and a Hockey Game Broke Out.” Sports Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach, 5(5), 458–462. doi: 10.1177/1941738113491711**

The study used in this piece focused on fighting at specific points during games, and over the course of one season. The article hypothesized that players know when to fight and when not to fight which is part of the strategy of playing hockey. The primary results found that players were less likely to engage in fights during the late stages of games, as well as in the playoffs. Players understand the importance of the last period of a game, and players who consistently play in the postseason are aware that the further they go, more skill and technique are required rather than brute physicality, which is also why even body checking also takes a drop closer to the end. I hope to use this source in order to stress the mentality behind fighting in hockey, and suggest that it is not used for the purpose of winning when in fact players will often not engage in fights when games are on the line.

**Kerr, J. H. (2006). Examining the Bertuzzi–Moore NHL ice hockey incident: Crossing the line between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence in sport. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 11(4), 313–322. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2005.07.010**

This article examines a particular incident where Todd Bertuzzi sucker-punched Steve Moore from behind, resulting in Bertuzzi receiving fines, a suspension, and criminal sentence and even possible jail time, and Moore suffering fractured vertebrae and a concussion. It talks about how Bertuzzi did what he did because of what happened in a previous game, in which Moore targeted one of their star players and hit him in the head, resulting in that player being out for the rest of the playoff series. Bertuzzi had challenged Moore but Moore did not want to fight, so Bertuzzi went after him. This type of altercation was not looked upon lightly by the NHL, who quickly suspended and fined Bertuzzi. The point is that there is a fine line between sanctioned and unsanctioned violence, and often times players know the difference. I hope to use this source to help others comprehend the fact that players and the NHL know the difference between a mutually agreed hockey fight and an act of unnecessary violence.