

# Mr. Hockey hat trick

*Dan McCaffery - May 2021*

One of my pet peeves is hockey broadcasters who use the term ‘Gordie Howe hat trick.’

I know it’s not important, but it drives me crazy every time some moron says a player is closing in on a ‘Gordie Howe hat trick.’

It is, without a doubt, the most nonsensical term ever coined in the history of any sport.

For those who don’t know, a Gordie Howe hat trick refers to a player who scores a goal, picks up an assist and gets into a fight in the same game. Naturally, many people think that ‘Mr. Hockey,’ as Howe was affectionately dubbed during his playing days, did these three things on a regular basis.

But the fact is Gordie Howe almost never played a game in which he scored a goal and an assist and also engaged in fisticuffs. Consider the evidence. Howe played in 1,767 National Hockey League games and 419 World Hockey Association matches. That adds up to 2,186 big league contests. So how many ‘Gordie Howe hat tricks’ did he pick up? Exactly two more than Dan McCaffery.

That’s right, in a career that spanned five decades, Mr. Hockey had just two ‘Gordie Howe hat tricks’ to his credit.

Nor was he anywhere near the lead in this department. Rick Tocchet, for instance, played 18 games in which he got a goal and an assist while also dropping the gloves. Brendan Shanahan had 17. Another player had 16 and two others 15.

It is an insult to Howe, one of Canada’s true heroes, to suggest he was a goon who fought all the time.

The truth, as any broadcaster should know, is that Gordie Howe almost never fought anyone. Especially not in the last quarter century of his career.

There was a reason for this. Other players were scared to death of the Saskatchewan native. And with good reason.

When Gordie was a rising young star, back in the 1950s, the league tough guy was a New York Ranger named Lou Fontinato. Fontinato led the league in penalties during just his second season. A year after that, he became the first player to be assessed 200 minutes in the sin bin during a single campaign.

But when Fontinato challenged Howe to a fight in 1959, he received a vicious beating. Howe, observers said, was throwing so many punches that it looked as if his arm was a piston. The blows to Fontinato’s face sounded, one writer said, like Howe was chopping wood.

When the scrap was over Fontinato’s nose was smashed and his jaw dislocated. After that, players stayed away from Gordie.

I watched Howe play many games (on TV of course) in the 1960s and ‘70s and never saw him fight even once. His opponents weren’t afraid of getting a five-minute major for fighting, they worried that they would need facial reconstruction surgery if they tangled with Gordie Howe.

So when Gordie retired in 1980 it had been 26 years since his last ‘Gordie Howe hat trick’ (which came in 1954).

Idiotic broadcasters keep using this ridiculous term because most of them don’t know a thing about the history of Gordie Howe or the sport. It’s high time someone set them straight.



