

## Christmas Day Every Day

Written by Chris Nichols

Saturday, 24 December 2011 23:40 - Last Updated Monday, 26 December 2011 14:52

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Every day is like Christmas for a fantasy hockey writer. It just is.

A few weeks ago in a Ramblings I asked you to send in any questions you might have about this field for today's blog, which was to be written in advance of Christmas Day. Cuz it's one of my few days off between October and April.

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Many of the queries overlapped, but here's a sampling of them. Oh... and the Lundqvist pic on the front page cuz he may or may be my favourite player and having him in your fantasy line-up nightly has been a gift for poolies for years and years now.

### THE BEGINNING...

Richard in St. Louis: "Hey Chris, I have loved your addition to the Ramblings each week and have become a regular with your Sportsnet.ca work. Love it! Especially the nightly recaps. I can't even begin to tell you what a huge difference they've made to my team this year. I wish I'd known about them years ago!

Anyway, in terms of the offer to ask you questions about the job – how did you get into this? You obviously have a talent for it, but where did it all begin for you? I read your bio on Sportsnet, but maybe you could go into a little more detail? Thanks and thanks for your dedication."

Chris: Thanks Richard, that's nice of you to say. I basically had a broadcasting background and was working in the news world more than a decade ago when I started to do a freebie thing with ESPN.com where you could be the correspondent for your favourite team and write fantasy notes on them a few times a week. I did that for the Oilers for a season (and went above and beyond by writing a quality segment after each and every game) and made contact with the people running the hockey section there. I used the work to showcase my writing and talked my way into penning their front page content, which actually paid. I think it was a once a week column, but it actually paid pretty well and was a nice supplement to my day job.

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I became really friendly with Eric Karabell, who's evolved into a fantasy superstar with ESPN, and he quickly trusted me with some other paying projects at the site. I owe him a lot and it was then that I realized that I actually might have a chance to do something like that for a living. He's a really, really nice guy that looked out for me and went the extra mile to help me out. Sometimes that's what you need to get your foot in the door and show them what you have.

And now that I look back, ESPN basically financed all of my entertainment centre components at the time. Since I wasn't relying on those payments each month, the money was gravy for me. Mmm. Entertainment gravy.

My memory isn't great when it comes to things like this, but I think I wrote for ESPN for three or four seasons as a paid freelancer doing fantasy hockey and the side projects. It was also at that time that I approached Canoe.ca/ SLAM! Sports about fantasy content for their site, which didn't exist at the time. That's where I met my editor, Jon Cook; another key piece of the puzzle to getting me on the path to doing this full-time. He and Eric were instrumental to getting some traction into this world.

SLAM! is where the Q&A portion of my blog really exploded and Jon let me run with the proverbial ball there. I was doing that five days a week and was answering an insane amount of questions. The core of my following was built at that point and they've stuck around through thick and thin. Ask them about the number of questions. It was nuts. Way more than I needed to, but it was well worth it.

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It was when I was with SLAM! before the lockout that I had the concept for my Live NHL Recaps, but I could never get enough financing to make it worth my while to do that and the Q&A. That's where Sportsnet came in back in 2007. I actually came within a whisker of joining Sportsnet in 2006, but it wasn't quite right for me at the time and I held off a year.

I had actually been making enough money to do only fantasy hockey when I was first with both ESPN and SLAM!, but when you have a mortgage and a wife you tend to be pretty cautious financially. And I was (and still am) a total money whore... so I kept my full-time job and worked both sites on top of that. I basically worked from the time I woke up to the time I went to sleep all the time for several years, but it was worth it to get myself to the point where I felt comfortable enough in the situation that I could do this and only this as a means of support.

I still work seven days a week in-season with a ridiculous amount of hours per week, but it balances out during the playoffs and summers when I don't have to work evenings and weekends on top of just weekdays. Plus, I love doing this job. It's actually fun to get up and know you'll be writing about hockey every day. It's a good feeling and you can't put a price on that.

### HOW CAN I DO THIS?

Jason L. in Edmonton

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“You probably get this alot, but how can I get a job writing about fantasy hockey?”

Chris: Yes Jason, people do tend to ask that one quite often.

Following up to the first question asked for today’s blog, you’ll note that in every single case it was me that approached the employer about creating a job that didn’t exist before I got there. Like with anything in life, initiative and work ethic can go a long way.

Today I’d still suggest the tact of approaching sites for whom you might want to write, keeping in mind you’re more than likely going to need some writing samples off the top and also a willingness to write for free or very little money for awhile. It’s just the way it is.

Given the explosion of the internet since I began, the dynamics have also changed a bit. The site you target will already likely have fantasy hockey content, whereas I was bringing something new to the table in each of my instances.

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You really have to want it and be willing to work hard to get it. A lot of people would love to do this, but not many may have the time on top of their normal job and family commitments or even the willingness to do anything to get there. You also have to have your own voice, obviously, which people will hopefully want to hear through your work.

## SATURDAY ACTION

Jen in Vancouver: “Chris, what’s a typical Saturday night like now that you’ve added Ramblings into the fold? I couldn’t believe it when I first heard you were going to do it because that’s the craziest night of the week!”

Chris: Great question Jen and you’ve been a regular reader of mine for years, so you know the routine pretty well. And to be completely honest, if I had really understood the timing of the Ramblings in the first place I might have initially been a little gun shy about this gig. I thought it’d be more of a Sunday afternoon thing, which is when I have a bit more time to write, but it lends itself better to the cause if I publish it near the end of Saturday night.

But now that I’ve been doing it for a few months, I think I’ve found a good rhythm and have blended the two blogs fairly well.

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A typical Saturday, which is generally the busiest night of the week, begins with me building the skeleton of my Live NHL Recap when I wake up. That just includes each game spaced out with spots where all of the goalie info, line combos, scratches, top power play times and trending info would go. Then I can go about my morning and get stuff in my non-work life done.

Around 1pm or so (I'm a West Coast guy, so games begin at 4pm for me), I'll strap myself into my desk and get cracking. That's when I'll go through my Twitter feed and get caught up on the day's news. If there was an early game and I didn't get a chance to watch it, I'll go over that (DVR, box scores and/or highlights) and get it caught up for the blog.

It really begins to get busy around 3:30pm, which is when I can often get a jump on the line combos that are known from warm-up or even the morning skate.

Then, once the first games begin, it's just a firestorm of action that includes gathering all of the info included in the recaps, flipping from game to game, writing the trending info as the box scores begin to fill up... and in between all of that, I make notes for Rambings that I may want to include.

Info for the recaps is posted from the time it's published before the first games to the time the final buzzer sounds on the last tilt and I can fill in the final stats. The Ramblings generally goes up before 9pm Pacific/ 12am Eastern and then I'll potentially add a few notes from the final few games or something else that's worthy (late injury news, etc) before I'm done for the night. I'll

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also usually add some fresh notes to Ramblings Sunday sometime.

So yeah, Saturday's are a true gong show. That said, weekdays include the morning routine for editing the Hockey Hearsay blogs and I don't do HH on the weekends. Some weekday nights there'll be the same amount of games as a Saturday, so I'll be dealing with that workload plus the HH blogs in the morning. It can be a bit much at times, but when you've been doing it for awhile you tend to get pretty streamlined at things.