

NHL Star Andrew Ference Throws Weight Behind Green Initiatives

INSIGHT Stanley Cup Champion Andrew Ference discusses the ways he has greened the NHL, his life, and business.



When Andrew Ference and Jonathan Toews exchanged text messages earlier this year, the two NHL players didn't talk shop. Instead, they touched on issues related to sustainability. Ference is a dedicated environmentalist and, since making his NHL debut in 1999, he has persuaded other players, teams and even the league itself to embrace green initiatives.

In 2008, he worked with the NHL Players Association to establish the Carbon Neutral Challenge, a program in which players paid a small amount of money to compensate for the miles they racked up traveling. More than 300 players took part initially and that number tripled within four years.

NHL a big user of green power

That program's success led to the establishment in 2010 of NHL Green, which promotes the various teams' sustainable energy strategies. Renowned environmentalist David Suzuki threw his support behind that initiative.

Two years ago, the NHL became the continent's first pro sports league to issue a report documenting and disclosing its carbon footprint. Today, the NHL ranks 20th on the Environmental Protection Agency's list of the biggest users of green power.

"Seeing what the NHL is doing now makes me smile," says Ference, who won the Stanley Cup with the Boston Bruins in 2011 and became captain of the Edmonton Oilers two year later. "When you start making changes to lighting and waste management systems at arenas around the league, it makes a massive impact. It moves the needle."

Ference, who sits on the board of the Green Sports Alliance, an organization that encourages sports leagues, teams and venues to become more eco-friendly, would like to see businesses of all sizes do their part for the environment. The first step, he tells business owners, is to determine how you're doing in terms of water and energy usage. "Track your data to see where you're at then set out to improve the numbers. Establish attainable goals," says Ference, who recently got his certificate in corporate sustainability from the Harvard Extension School.

These steps are not just good for the environment, he tells business owners, and they are good for your bottom line. "It's clear that societal values are shifting. We're becoming less tolerant of wastefulness overall — so the more sustainable a business is, the more appealing it is to consumers and potential investors."



Keep your car in the driveway

One person alone can't move the needle but every bit helps. "The biggest carbon footprint is in transportation," he says. "You can install low-flow toilets in your home and turn off the lights when you leave a room but the biggest impact you can make is to put fewer miles on your car," he says. "Riding your bike is good for the environment and good for your health."

Ference ended his playing career two months ago but he will remain dedicated to his health and, of course, to improving the environment. He is heightening his involvement with Fifth Season Ventures, a company that provides seed money for investors in environmentally conscious start-ups such as Full Cycle Bioplastics, which turns organic waste into biodegradable plastic.

"We use a tremendous amount of energy in the Western world and we have to do something about that," he explains. "It's not a matter of living off the grid. It's a matter of making little improvements. They really add up."

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