

# New protocol is helping curb concussions, but NHL can do more, Eric Lindros says

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"You want players to live long, happy lives," says Penguins assistant GM Bill Guerin of awareness of concussions, like the one Sidney Crosby suffered in 2011. "If they have to miss a couple shifts for that to happen, then so be it." AP Photo/Gene J. Puskar

4:55 PM ET

- Chuck Gormley

On Monday night in Toronto, [Eric Lindros](#) was enshrined in the Hockey Hall of Fame for being one of the game's most feared and dominant players of the 1990s. But, despite his reputation as a hard-hitting, glove-dropping, goal-scoring freight train of a player, Lindros' legacy will also be his willingness to shed light on what remains a controversial topic: concussions in hockey.

"He was ahead of his time," said [Pittsburgh Penguins](#) assistant general manager [Bill Guerin](#), who began his NHL playing career in Lindros' rookie season of 1992-93. "He had a pretty deep history with concussions; his family knows it well. It's not always the popular move to come forward with something like that. It was a difficult one, and he brought it to the forefront. He should be recognized for that. It was a big step."

Lindros, 43, retired as a player in 2007 at the age of 33, after six concussions between 1998 and 2000 stripped him of what could have been the most productive years of his career. His decision to sit out the entire 2000-01 season heightened the NHL's awareness of concussions and how to treat them.

"It's not about the number," Lindros told ESPN.com. "It's about the degree of each one and the makeup of each individual person. Everyone is completely different. That's the hard

part of this. Some guys will take a big hit and feel fine and not want to come out of a game. No one is ever going to question how tough these guys are. That's why they had to take it out of the players' hands."

This season, the NHL and its players' association enhanced the concussion protocol by adding a group of certified athletic trainers who are the central league spotters. They monitor every game from the player safety room in New York and are authorized to require a player's removal from a game if he shows visible signs of a possible concussion.

"I think as a whole we understand they're doing their best to try to look after us and that you sometimes have to be taken out of the situation," said [Arizona Coyotes](#) captain [Shane Doan](#), who came into the NHL in 1996, one year after Lindros won league MVP (Hart and Pearson, which is voted on by the players). "There's no competitor who ever wants to be taken out of the situation. Sometimes, even if you feel like it's in your best interest to sit out, you still go out there. In our sport, there's a lot of pride in proving that you're tough enough to keep going. Sometimes you can and sometimes you can't, and you've got to trust the people whose job it is to make that call."

On Nov. 8, a concussion spotter requested that Rangers goaltender Antti Raanta be removed from a game against the Canucks after seeing Raanta hit the back of his head on the ice after a collision with forward Markus Granlund. [David Hahn/Icon Sportswire](#) On Nov. 3, late in the third period of a game between the [Philadelphia Flyers](#) and [New York Islanders](#) in Brooklyn, Flyers captain [Claude Giroux](#) was removed from the game after taking a high stick in the nose from [Casey Cizikas](#). The Flyers tied the score on the ensuing power play, and Giroux was seen motioning to an arena worker to open the door behind the net to let him back onto the rink in time to play the final minute of regulation and overtime. Giroux, who was cleared of a possible concussion, scored the winning goal for the Flyers in the shootout.

"I just got off the ice right away to get it out of the way," Giroux told reporters after the game. "Because when you get hit in the head ... with the protocol ... I was just trying to get it out of the way so I could play in overtime."

On Nov. 8, a concussion spotter requested that Rangers goaltender [Antti Raanta](#) be removed from a tie game against the [Vancouver Canucks](#) after seeing Raanta hit the back of his head on the ice after a collision with forward [Markus Granlund](#). Raanta, who suffered a concussion last season, was examined on the ice by Rangers athletic trainer Jim Ramsay after the collision, but he was removed from the game four minutes later at the request of an off-ice concussion spotter.

The Canucks scored a pair of goals on Rangers replacement [Henrik Lundqvist](#) before Raanta, who cleared concussion protocol, returned to the game 6:19 of game time after he was removed. After the Rangers' 5-3 loss, Lundqvist wondered what might happen if a similar incident occurred in a Stanley Cup playoff game.

"I think they really have to look into this rule because it's not like a [skater], where you can sit out a shift," Lundqvist told the New York Daily News. "A goalie, it's a whole other ballgame. If he's saying he's fine, at some point you've got to go with it. I think there's going

to be an issue if this is the playoffs and you have guys calling from upstairs to make that decision. I'm not going to go off easy, I'm telling you that."

Former and current players agree that pulling a player out of a game in November will prove far easier than pulling him out of a playoff game in April, May or June.

"You can always say, 'I've been hit harder than this before and I'm fine,'" Doan said. "You've got to watch that. You can't get caught up in trying to say that. It's always hard to be honest with yourself in the middle of the game. But with what we know now, it's impossible not to be aware if your bell's been rung and not want to figure out how bad it was."

Guerin said the real test will come in the postseason.

"This is a game where everybody prides themselves on not missing a shift, and sometimes it's not the best decision," Guerin said. "I think they're definitely on the right track of making things mandatory and taking it out of their hands and taking the pressure off them. I know sometimes players get frustrated with it, and it will become a real issue in the playoffs, but deep down they really know it's for their own good.

"We know more than we did a year ago and certainly more than we did 20 years ago. You have to take the information you have and do the best for the human being. Players aren't just players. They have wives and kids and parents, and you want them to live long, happy lives. If you've got to miss a couple shifts for that to happen, then so be it."

**Lindros says that widening rinks would make players less susceptible to open-ice hits like the one he took from Devils defenseman Scott Stevens in the 2000 Eastern Conference finals.** *AP Photo/George Widman*

Today, Lindros is a husband and the father of three young children -- 2-year-old Carl Pierre and 14-month-old twins, Ryan Paul and Sophie Rose. He's also the honorary chairman of See the Line, a concussion research arm at the University of Western Ontario, and he spends much of his time raising funds for the London (Ontario) Health Sciences Center, which received a \$5 million donation from Lindros shortly after his retirement in 2007.

"I feel lucky," he said. "Overall, I feel good. But you don't have to go very far to come across someone having a tough time."

Lindros said he's encouraged to see the NHL taking a hard-line approach to concussions but is concerned about the rise in open-ice hits and the long-term effects they might have on players. He believes the NHL should eliminate the two-line pass and consider widening the rinks.

"I've been saying to put the red line back in for five years," Lindros said. "But something else that can be considered is making the ice surface wider."

Lindros said widening rinks would allow players to accept passes from angles that would make them less susceptible to open-ice hits like the one he took from former [New Jersey Devils](#) defenseman [Scott Stevens](#) in the 2000 Eastern Conference finals.

[Tie Domi](#), who racked up more than 3,500 penalty minutes in his 16-year NHL career, believes putting the red line back in would help protect players such as his son, Coyotes forward [Max Domi](#), from predatory, blindside hits.

#### EDITOR'S PICKS



- [GMs gather to talk about blindside hits, expansion rules](#)

League general managers looking for clarity on what's a clean hit, whether Vegas can pull off funny business and the bye week.

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- [Lindros declines participation in concussion suit](#)

Eric Lindros was asked to take part in the ongoing concussion lawsuit against the NHL by former players but declined participation, as he wants to focus on the future and not the past.

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- [NHL to revamp concussion monitoring](#)

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly addressed three important topics on Wednesday, including revamped protocol for concussion detection, participation in the 2018 Olympics and a new doping policy.

"The game's just way too fast," Tie Domi said. "Guys are getting hit recklessly and getting concussions. [Putting the red line back in is] something they may have to consider."

Lindros and Domi played in an era in which neutral-zone trapping slowed the game to a crawl and led to the NHL allowing two-line passes in 2005. [Detroit Red Wings](#) defenseman [Mike Green](#), who entered the NHL in that post-lockout season of 2005-06, says he's not sure making dramatic changes to the game will produce the desired result.

"It's been a while since we played with the red line, and it's hard to remember what that was like," Green said. "Those are opinions. Right now the game is fast and it seems to be selling.

"I think the league has done a good job of reducing those high hits, those impact hits that are in open ice or along the boards, where guys are in danger at times. I think guys aren't running around and doing that anymore, and if they do, they're getting suspended. Guys are still finishing their checks, but the speed, especially with these young guys, is as fast as it's ever been. It makes for an exciting game every night."

[http://www.espn.com/nhl/story/\\_/id/18053749/nhl-nhl-new-protocol-helping-curb-concussions-league-do-more-curtail-head-injuries-says-eric-lindros](http://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/18053749/nhl-nhl-new-protocol-helping-curb-concussions-league-do-more-curtail-head-injuries-says-eric-lindros)