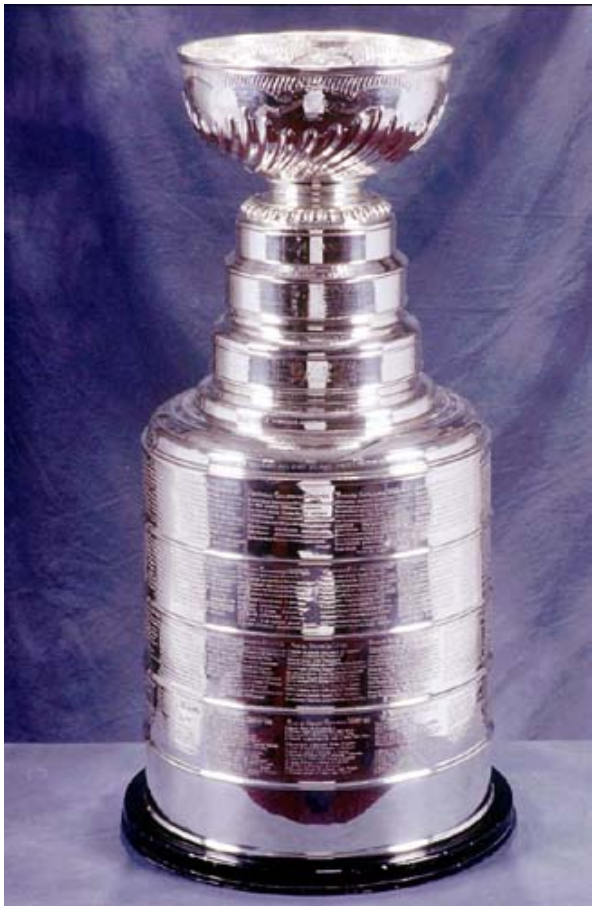

What started out expectedly has now become the unexpected in the 2011 Stanley Cup Final. Vancouver took care of business on home ice, winning the first two. But, one play in the span of about two seconds changed the complexion of an entire series and has the favored Canucks back on their heels heading home.

Vancouver jumped out to a 2-0 series lead and looked rather invincible. Roberto Luongo had been excellent, the Bruins top defenseman Zdeno Chara looked sluggish and exhausted, and the Bruins offense was stymied. Then, this happened . For a while, the Bruins looked stunned. Nathan Horton had been the team's best player all postseason, scoring a couple of huge overtime game winning goals in previous series. Their ensuing five minute powerplay looked like the rest of their postseason powerplays – disorganized and impotent.

Intermission came and something changed. The Bruins found out the news that their comrade was ok. Nobody really knows what was said in that locker room except for the players and coaches, but the Bruins came out and scored four goals in the second period and rode that wave to four more in the third for an 8-1 pasting in Game 3.

The complexion of the series changed with that Aaron Rome hit. A Canucks fan buddy of mine told me right after it happened that it reminded him of the Raffi Torres-Brent Seabrook hit from the Chicago series. Following that hit, also in Game 3 of the series, the Blackhawks seemed to perk up. They erased a 2-0 deficit in the game, and though they lost, it was Roberto Luongo who stopped their comeback. After that game, however, they rattled off three straight to force Game 7 in Vancouver, a game which the Canucks would need overtime to win.

This series has been sullied by a couple questionable plays, including the Rome hit which lead to a four-game suspension. Game 1 featured the now infamous biting incident between Alex Burrows and Patrice Bergeron where Bergeron's glove got in the face of Burrows and he chomped down on one of the gloved fingers. Since then, finger biting taunts have been regular in the series, going so far as forcing NHL Interim VP of Discipline Mike Murray to announce that any finger taunt would result in a two minute minor and ten minute misconduct.

Naturally, the non-hockey covering media in the sports world have decided to focus on the biting and the behind-the-play antics rather than examine the series for its play. The first two games were everything you could want from a SCF. Tight checking, low scoring, one goal games featuring one, albeit brief, overtime. The two in Boston were utter routs.

Now, the psychology of sport will be on display. Without question, the Canucks are going to get a huge lift from going back home where in the playoffs they have been dominant and over the last 17 Stanley Cup final games, the home team is 15-2. But, the Canucks come in reeling. The Sedins, Henrik especially, have been dormant in this series, except for Daniel in Game 2. The team defense in front of Luongo has been downright terrible.

Momentum is the name of the game in the playoffs and Boston has all of it right now. The Canucks, in recent years, are a team known for playoff collapses. There is talk that they just waited longer for this year's. Boston, meanwhile, seems to be playing free and easy right now while the Canucks appear to be pressing.

In my Stanley Cup Final preview, I cited three keys to the series. They were special teams, Zdeno Chara v. the Sedins, and faceoffs. So far, the Vancouver Canucks, who came in with a 28.3% powerplay success rate, are 1-for-19 in the series, including a 0-for-8 in the Game 3 blowout. The Bruins are 3-for-16, good for 19%. They were 5-for-61 entering this series.

In terms of the Chara-Sedin matchup, Daniel has been pretty good in the series while Henrik has been the Invisible Man. Henrik Sedin recorded his first shots on goal of the series in Game 4. He looked injured to me during the Nashville series, but credit has to be given to Zdeno Chara and Dennis Seidenberg for helping shut these two down.

With regard to faceoffs, ironically, the road team has won the faceoff battle in each of the four games. Henrik Sedin has been terrible in the circle, winning around 33% of his faceoffs. They have not played a huge factor in the series thus far, but with three big games coming up, they still can have an impact.

So, it's down to this. A Best-of-Three for the championship. This is how you dream it up as a hockey fan with no rooting interest in either team. The series has the makings of going a critical seventh game. While we all would have liked closer games in Boston, to watch the tide of the series shift is interesting to say the least.

Unfortunately, it's another year where talk of the NBA Finals has superseded the NHL Finals. The NBA is looking at its closest series by point differential in the Finals in a long time. Two of the four games have featured dramatic comeback endings. The NHL Finals have lacked that excitement at times, even though the breakneck pace of play has been entertaining.

In any event, both teams are a mere two victories away from hoisting Lord Stanley's Cup. Two of the hardest wins to get in sports. One team is confident. The other is apprehensive, but going home, looking to stop the impending collapse. The old adage in a long series is that you're never in trouble until you lose a game at home. Friday night may dictate what happens in this series.

If you are even the slightest hockey fan, if you catch only three games all year, these final three are the ones to catch.