

**From Pond to Pro:
Hockey as a Symbol of Canadian National Identity**

by

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ABSTRACT

This work explores the origins of hockey from a sociocultural perspective, outlining its current situation in post-industrial western society in terms of its latent symbolism, the politics of gender and power; and illustrating hockey as a cornerstone of importance in Canadian national identity.

DEDICATION

To JonBoy, because he started it, and
to Pie, for being there when I finished

and also to food, light, air, and blessed sleep – I couldn't have done it without you.

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I would like here to acknowledge the help and advice of those who helped me to finish this monumental task, and to give me the courage to continue it to the next level. Firstly, thank you to my parents, John and Janet Bell, who listened when I had problems, and tirelessly discussed solutions with me; to my various friends and acquaintances, all of whom had a piece of advice or a tidbit of information for me to follow up; to my supervisor, Brian Given, for presenting me with that unfailing source of inspiration – a deadline; and, finally, to all the sportswriters and journalists whose works I combed over and tore apart in my search for the ideal story, with a special thank you to writer Roy MacGregor, who not only provided me with places to look, but was also the voice of reason when things got out of control.

Thank you, all.

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INTRODUCTION

MY JOURNEY THROUGH SPORT

Excitement: men in rapid, hard, close physical conflict, not just with bare hands, but armed with the knife blades of skates and the hard, fast, deft sticks which could break bones when used right. He had noticed how many women were among the spectators, and for just a moment he thought that perhaps this was why – that here actual male blood could flow, not from the crude impact of a heavier fist but from the rapid and delicate stroke of weapons, which, like the European rapier or the frontier pistol, reduced mere size and brawn to its proper perspective to the passion and the will. But only for a moment because he, the innocent, didn't like that idea either. It was the excitement of speed and grace, with the puck for catalyst, to give it reason, meaning.

William Faulkner (1955), "An Innocent at Rinkside."

*There's no such thing as
wind chill to Canadians,
true fans of the game.*

John Poch and Chad Davidson (2006), Hockey Haiku

When I was a very small girl growing up in the Maritimes, I wanted to marry Wayne Gretzky. I didn't know that much about hockey at the time. Halifax in the 1980s was more focused on the fisheries than on fun. It wasn't cold enough in the winter for outdoor rinks to last very long, and the closest team worth anything in that decade was the Boston Bruins. Despite my personal disconnection from the game, I knew that hockey was very important to my country, and I had a vague idea that the young rising star of Wayne Gretzky carried with it the hopes and dreams of a nation. He was a hero, and that was good enough for me.

As I moved around the country in the following years, I began to see more and more the hold that hockey had on Canada, and I felt a stronger desire to be a part of its history. And, unwittingly, I was. I had the privilege of attending one of the last games the AHL's storied Victoria Cougars played under that team name. But it wasn't until I moved to Canadian city with a real NHL team in it that I truly understood the way in which hockey is embedded in

Canadian culture. Ottawa is hockey-mad, and this condition is infectious. I quickly became a hockey watcher and a hockey player (although rather late in life, by Canadian standards), and set about trying to figure out what it is about this game that makes it so intrinsically Canadian.

Lacrosse may be Canada's *official* national sport, but it is hockey that has come to symbolize Canada's national identity. Many Canadians have fond memories of playing or watching the game as a child or as an adult, and many still enjoy the activity. Still others are more passive spectators, but can still remember great moments in hockey history, like the 1972 Canada-Russia series. Similar to the way in which many who were alive at the time remember where they were the day President Kennedy was assassinated, and where they were on September 11, 2001, many who were around in 1972 remember where they were when Paul Henderson scored the game-winning goal in Moscow.

Even those who do not follow the game, or even those who dislike the game acknowledge its importance in the Canadian psyche. And any Canadian who has grown up in this country, embedded in the ideology that hockey is, really, the best game you can name, can tell you the name of the greatest living hockey player in the world: Wayne Gretzky.

There are a thousand books, movies, and CDs on the market by hockey enthusiasts, both in poetry and prose, that discuss the deeper meaning and importance of hockey and its ties to Canadian nationalism. There are a thousand more that delve into the lives and times of hockey's greatest (and not so great) stars. These works dig into the players' pasts, and try to determine what it is about how they grew up that makes them great (or not so great), and what it is about the Canadian players' lives that has made them better than anyone else in the world.

Why is it that Canadians feel this strong need to identify with a game and its players? Why is hockey so important to Canada's national identity? What is it about these great players

that makes them so different from the rest? Why is hockey not the way it used to be, the way that those older than me remember it to be? As a hockey enthusiast and anthropologist, I will try to explore these questions in the following pages.

This work is essentially divided into two parts. The first part centres on the importance of play, experiencing play and the game, the mythology of the game, and a listing of those legends who made the game into the experience it is today. The idea is to paint a picture of what it is that makes up the complex nature of Canada's favourite game, and will provide some examples of how – not why, as that would be a matter of personal idiosyncrasy – hockey is so important to Canadians.

The focus in the second part is on those elements of the game that have contributed to certain issues in hockey today that have marred the face of the idealistic image of the game. In my conclusion, I will propose some future research aimed to return hockey to the ideal state, one which places the emphasis back where it belongs: on players, teamwork, and play.

CHAPTER ONE

GAMES AND LIVING: THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING WHY WE PLAY

The popular stereotype of athletes as brawny-but-brainless “jocks” and academics as brainy-but-beefless “nerds” has unfortunately proved a lasting one. The division between academics and athletics, between work and play, has existed for a long time, and has only recently been breached. This chapter will focus on the various fields of thought that exist in the social sciences about the world of sports. The examples I provide will mostly be based on team sports, especially my chosen sport of hockey, as the social dimensions in team sports are more obvious there than in more individualistic sports. I will illustrate various strengths and weaknesses in the study of sport, and will demonstrate the need to bridge the gap between the two so diametrically opposed disciplines.

Fields of Sports Research in the Social Sciences

Sports psychology is probably the most widely recognized field of sports study. Its long-establishment as a subdiscipline of psychology has led to the acceptance of sports psychology as a reputable field in its own right, and it is possible, as a student, to specialize in sports psychology even as an undergraduate (Gladson 2001).

Studies have shown that physical exercise is psychologically beneficial to the human brain as well as the body. In addition to burning calories and fat, and making for a more fit physique, exercise also encourages production of endorphins in the brain. These endorphins act as a natural form of opiate, reducing pain and inducing feelings of euphoria (Harari and Legge 2001: 32-33). It is important for people to understand the processes that are involved in this cause-and-effect process, and many have dedicated their lives to studying such phenomenon.

Many more have delved even further into different aspects of psychology as they relate to the human body and physical activity.

Some sports psychologists (such as Terry Orlick) have pushed for more intradisciplinary approaches in sports psychology, wanting a merge between the different psychological fields, like counseling and rehabilitation, and the sports field (Ryba 2005). These psychologists believe that implementing certain changes in the sports field, like augmenting communication between players and their coaches, and regarding the players as more than the numbers that they produce, will be an asset to performance enhancement (Orlick 1986:103, 133). This communication would also help to alleviate different stresses that are placed upon players when a team is not performing at its best (Orlick 1986:96).

Other sports psychologists focus on sports psychology from a feminist perspective, breaking down the notion that, although women are not as aggressive or as competitive as men, the idea of women in competitive sports is not an oxymoron¹ (Gill 1986:80; Ryba 2005). These researchers draw from the feminist work of such sport sociologists as Michael Messner (1988; 1990; 1992; et al 1993), and Donald F. Sabo (1980, 1994), who believe that aggression in sport is not solely a male trait, and neither is it a natural masculine method of letting off steam.

Still other researchers want to merge sports psychology with sociology and cultural studies. Their rationale in this is that “the intersection of cultural studies and sport psychology offers new trajectories for the future work in [the field of sports research]” (Ryba 2005). Since sports psychology, as a field, focuses on the individual, it is strongly connected to the identity and subjectivity of the athlete (Gill 2000:228). Because of this, according to Tatiana Ryba of the University of British Columbia, “the way the individual (or in poststructuralist/postmodern

¹ Female tennis players, for example, are known for their aggressiveness.

terms, the subject) is theorized is not merely central to the psychology of sport but also determines the focus of its research and practice (in terms of pedagogy, methodology, research methods and theoretical frame)” (2005). This focus on the individual significantly limits the lengths to which sports psychology can go in terms of study, because “athletes have multiple, fragmented identities and identifications within various discourses of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or geographic region, that athletics is a subculture within a larger culture, and that the institutions in which athletes are located attempt to control and mold their behavior” (Ryba 2005). All these factors have an intense effect on how the athletes live and perform. According to British sports sociologists, “sport science,” in its various incarnations, has been around for about two hundred years. Athletes look to sport sciences to enhance their performance and to remain healthy (Radford 1998). Unlike the individual-oriented aspect of sports psychology, however, the sociology of sport is based upon the fact that

A social being cannot escape society in order to participate in sport, rather, society consists of structures and agents who constitute - and reconstitute - sport, and sport sciences. Thus, the purpose of sport sociology is clear: it must study the sports/exercise person (at whatever level) as a social being in a particular social context; it must study social structures which endure and which have influence, and it has a self-appointed, moral imperative to study the processes and the outcomes of inequality . . . and ignorance in sport. It is, fundamentally, a complex, person-centred venture located within the multifarious facets and levels of sport, including elite sport and performance, coaching, health/exercise, social sport, and sport/physical education in schools. (Armour et al 1998)

There is, then, a strong reliance on social theory as a developing agent of this subdiscipline of sociology.

Because of this, sports sociologists tend to focus most on the social role of the athlete within the smaller sport group and within the larger community. Most of them rely, in some part, on the earlier work of notable sociologists such as Jerry Cloyd, for information on behaviour within small social institutions (1965); Harold Garfinkel, for his ideas on degradation

ceremonies and status among small groups (1956); Erving Goffman, for his work on identity and the state of embarrassment in role strain situations (1956; 1963a; 1963b); and William J. Goode, who studied various reactions to role strain in small groups (1960a; 1960b; 1967).

With this research basis in hand, sports sociologists came up with motivations for crowd and spectator behaviour at sports games and its positive or negative influence on the performance of the playing teams (Arms et al 1979; Bryan and Horton 1976; Greer 1983; Mizruchi 1991); with possible explanations for excess aggression and violence in various aspects of the social life of the athlete (Lüschen 1980; Mark et al 1983; Russell 1983); with theories of the ways in which athletes deal with success and failure (Ball 1976; Mizruchi 1991); with constructs of gender and gender relations in the sports communities (Hargreaves 2004); and many other socially motivated issues, all of which are mirrored in other social institutions aside from sport.

But what about *culturally motivated* issues? In the increasingly global atmosphere in which we live, where many people from many different places and backgrounds often cohabit and coexist at close quarters, would it not make sense that how and where they grew up affects how they play?

Cultural and identity issues did not previously come to the fore in sports research. Because the social science field belonged mainly to psychologists and sociologists who were focused on the internal workings of the athlete, individual and social influences were deemed to be universal amongst athletes. Anthropologists are only recently beginning to realize that sports are more than merely an anecdotal activity to record in an ethnography, and have finally established the subdiscipline of sports anthropology (Brownell 2000:59).

One of the most notable anthropologists in the sports field is Eduardo P. Archetti (1999; 2003; 2004), who has focused on the lure of football (soccer) in Latin America. He has written

of the almost cultish fan interest that surrounds football, and its strong cultural connections to Latin dancing and the tango. Another is Joseph S. Alter (1992; 1999; 2000), who has published many articles on Indian wrestling as a form of meditation and art as well as a construction of caste hierarchy. Finally, there is Noel Dyck (2000; 2003; 2004), whose original focus lay with Canadian First Nations and their relationship with the Canadian Government. He became involved with sports when his children were of an age to play, and he subsequently became a youth coach for both soccer and track and field. Sociologists and psychologists of sport, however, still greatly outnumber anthropologists of sport, and so my analysis of their focus and of issues in sport will unfortunately rely mostly on their output.

Social scientists in the sports field are concerned with many issues that are very similar to the social problems and situations addressed by their colleagues in the non-sporting community.

Focus of Sports Research in the Social Sciences

A hot issue at the moment, most prevalent in studies of contact sports such as rugby, football, lacrosse, and hockey, is that of increasing violence amongst players. Unlike the “stylized aggression” of professional wrestling, violence, and the damage it creates in these sports is very real (Arms et al 1979:275). Much of this aggression is sanctified in the game’s rules; that which is not is usually penalized, although there are some exceptions – these are mostly of the unwritten kind, and are specific to the sport. Most of this aggression is ostensibly there to force a player “off his game,” in order to make him angry and therefore unfocused on winning (Collings and Condon 1996:257; Dyck 2000a:26). Violence is also used as an intimidation tactic, as well – knowing that your chances of survival during the game are slim may inspire you to let the other team win (Guttman 1978:75; Mark et al 1983:96). Violence, in the highly commodified world of professional sports, is also sensational – and it sells. Those in

charge of marketing the game tend to glorify the violence it portrays, because that will sell more tickets (Frey and Eitzen 1991:510; Mark et al 1983:96).

Although some theorists tend to believe that releasing this aggression on the field, at other players, within the sanctioned confines of the rules of the game is cathartic for the player and allows him or her to “let off steam,” others posit that, in fact, violence on the field merely encourages violence off the field (Gill 1986:10; Russell 1983:159). Players who acted aggressively on the field had a tendency to actually express less guilt for their actions than they would under normal circumstances, leading Diane Gill to believe that players perceive violence in sport settings to be more socially acceptable than violence elsewhere (1986:202).

Sport science, as mentioned above, was originally concerned with bettering the outcome of events in athletic competitions: the healthier and more mentally prepared an athlete was, the better he or she would perform in a contest (Radfield 1998). Because the winner of a contest “gets the higher rank” with regard to status (Lüschen 1970:21), one party’s superiority over another in a competition is paramount: in short, one team must win and the other must lose.

There are many factors that may or may not contribute to the optimal performance of a team of athletes. Fan support, for one, has a great deal to do with the success of a team. In indoor sports, such as hockey and basketball, the crowd support is contained and intense, and it has been shown that home teams tend to have the advantage when the crowd is on their side (Gill 1986:177; Mizruchi 1991:182).

Player attitude and confidence are also significant factors in team performance, although confidence can be a double-edged sword: over-confidence after many successes can tend to put a damper on subsequent performance, while failure is a strong motivator to improve poor performance (Mizruchi 1991:181). As the sports historian, Allen Guttmann, writes, “teamwork

is the *sine qua non* of achievement” (1978:139), and so it stands that strong communication and solid teamwork would be a method of overcoming these problems (Orlick 1986:96).

A less-researched but nonetheless important aspect of player identity, as it relates to performance and failure, is the memorialization of athletes. Theorists of identity and the self argue that all human beings have a desire to leave lasting evidence of their time on the planet (Sydnor 2000). This “concern of a person with the presentation of his or her self in history,” is called the “postself” (Schmitt and Leonard 1986:1088). In regard to this, modern sport is an effective way of “creating, maintaining, and augmenting concerns about selfhood” (Schmitt and Leonard 1986:1093). When great players are remembered, it is through the “retirement” of their numbers, and the elevation of that player to something just short of legendary status (Armstrong 2004).

The above issues, of player identity, performance, and postself, are inarguably linked to the different roles that players maintain during their playing careers, especially if they are playing in a professional situation.

There are a multitude of roles on any given team. There are the non-playing roles of coaches, management, health, and training staff, and the people who occupy these roles are the ones who maintain the *status quo* of a team, depending, of course, upon the team’s success (Ball 1976:733). For the athletes on the team, it matters little what role the player has, as long as the player *has* a role, and maintains it at all costs. If a player does not fulfill his role satisfactorily, it will be detrimental to his performance and to that of his team (Goffman 1956, 1963a; Goode 1976). This is where studies of role strain come in (Cloyd 1965; Goode 1960a). This role strain means that the player’s inability to “satisfy standards of goal-related performance” will cause him to fail in the eyes of his teammates, and in his own eyes, separating him from the objectives

of the rest of the team (Ball 1976:726). Thus, maintaining a strong role on a team will encourage team cohesion, and ensure that no one individual gets left out of the team's success.

Isolation from a team because of role strain and role failure can also be due to the two final factors I will address here: ethnicity, and gender.

Ethnic stereotypes abound in professional sports. For instance, it is a well-established stereotype that black² people are better at basketball than at hockey, and that Latin Americans and the Japanese are better at baseball than anyone else. Much has been written of these stereotypes in basketball and baseball, but less so in hockey (Miller & Wiggins 2004; Rhoden 2006). It is my opinion that these stereotypes have only the smallest basis in ethnicity, and that perhaps access to resources is more the reason behind these generalizations, as I will explain below. The first black hockey player to play in the NHL did not do so until 1958, despite the rise of a large "Coloured League," out of Canada's Maritimes (McKinley 2000:31).

Rather than a racial inability to perform on ice, I suspect that, at least, the hockey stereotype has something to do with geography and economics. For one thing, the climate in the southern United States, where lives a large concentration of black people in that country, does not get cold enough to make outdoor ice rinks possible. In the northern states, the majority of black people reside in the crowded cities, where there is little or no room for an outdoor rink. Renting time on an indoor rink is very expensive, as is purchasing the equipment necessary to play the game. Many visible minorities have found it difficult to exist on an equal socioeconomic standing with the dominant, mostly white, majority. Pay equity being what it used to be, it is understandable that parents could simply not afford to get their children involved in such a sport

² I use the word "black" instead of "African American," because, firstly, the majority of black hockey players are Canadian, not American, and, secondly, because in the literature about them, the players tend to refer to themselves as "black."

at an early enough age to give them the skill advantage they would have needed to play professionally. This situation is, of course, changing. Mike Grier, a native of Hell's Kitchen, New York, is the first American-born and American-trained black man to play in the NHL (MacGregor 2002:299). According to black hockey players themselves, racial differences are fading in hockey today (Harris 2003). The same can be said of First Nations players in the game (King 2005; MacGregor 2002).

As second and third wave feminism has become more mainstream, so have studies of women in sports (Hargreaves 2004:188, 194). It is in this area alone where sports research has a solid academic base (see Heywood & Dworkin 2003; Silby & Smith 2000; and Smith 1998). Much has been written on women and sports. In fact, there is too much existing literature on women in sports to do it justice in these short pages. As my focus is predominantly on professional male athletes, I will merely touch upon the reasons for the current gender imbalance, and point out the ways in which this balance is shifting.

Historically, sports were a male pastime. Sports have been criticized, often, as being a form of sexual sublimation (Guttmann 1978:75). There is a strong stigma attached to women who play sports. It is posited that they become masculinized in appearance and behaviour; that their success in a sport will threaten the development of adolescent masculinity in boys if the girls play better than the boys do; that the female performance level is not as high as that of the males and therefore less worth watching or participating in; and that, as women are supposedly less competitive and aggressive than males, then the idea of women in competitive sports is an oxymoron (Frey and Eitzen 1991:516; Gill 1986:80).

Recently, however, more and more females are joining the athletic ranks, even in hockey, a sport which is characterized by its players' size and physical strength (Avery & Stevens 1997;

Robinson 1997). The mentality has shifted to the idea that sports are no longer just for boys (Messner et al 1993:122). In many respects, however, sports, especially group sports with a high emphasis on teamwork and solidarity, are still largely male-dominated; although women are making inroads into the sport community, they are still excluded from certain aspects of male-only team sports (Robinson 1997:151-152; Sabo 1980:xi). It will surely take a few more decades before these walls can be broken down.

The Future of Sports Research

Despite the two hundred year legacy of “sport science,” social science research of sports is still a relatively new and unexplored discipline, and, as such, there are numerous issues missing from its repertoire that should be addressed, in time.

Firstly, as is especially obvious in the field of hockey (although Eduardo P. Archetti has done work of this kind in relation to football and polo), I believe that too much attention is paid by the researchers to the performers, and that not enough attention is paid to those for whom the players are performing: the fans. As a sports fan myself, I know that fan culture is a subculture in its own right, with its own set of rituals and practices, its own unique rules, and its own ideologies and sense of community. I think it would benefit not only the marketing executives who sell the game, but the players themselves, to know for what kind of people they are playing. I will explore these issues later in chapter three.

Secondly, with the exception of a few anthropologists like Noel Dyck, there are very few researchers who are taking the emic, participatory role, in studying sports. How can we truly understand how the sporting world works unless we can experience it for ourselves? The closest I have come to seeing the inside world of professional sports is by reading the works of various journalists and sportscasters who involve both the players and the public in the workings of the

sporting institution, and in the biographies of professional athletes themselves (like Dryden [2003] and Esposito & Golenbok [2003]). I believe that the researcher, the psychologist, the sociologist, or the anthropologist, should take a more participatory and experiential approach and try reversing the roles of researcher and researched, if only for a little while. I will connect this in the following chapter to experience and experiencing the game.

While living in the sports world and interacting on a personal level with athletes as equals, the researcher could look at what kind of pressure is related to being a sports celebrity. What does that pressure do to a player? How does he or she cope with that? With what kind of mechanisms is the player equipped to live so much in the public eye? Synthia Sydnor (2000) has written something of this in connection to Michael Jordan, one of the greatest professional basketball players of all time. She writes of the reverence or disgust attached to the things Jordan had touched or was associated with (various sports paraphernalia), depending on whether he was at that moment winning or losing.

This also connects to the later chapters of this work and the idea that who a player is as a person, and how he or she interacts with teammates and with the non-sporting community, affects how the player performs in any given game. I believe a player's background, the influences of his or her family and environment, have just as strong an effect on the player's abilities as they do on the player's adult personality.

It could not be detrimental, either, for the researcher to examine more closely the different rituals and rites that accompany an athlete's career in sports. Much has been written about rituals and rites of passage by all manner of sociologists and anthropologists, but mostly with respect to religious institutions. Sports are institutions, too, and I think there should be some way to connect the two schools of thought, ritual and sports institutions. Rituals can be

both sacred and profane, and I think it is important to recognize the effect that rituals in sport have on their participants. Both Allen Guttmann (1978) and George Gmelch (1972) have done some work in this area, but there is certainly a need to update these works.

A further look at rituals and ritual praxis in sports would also help to solve certain current social problems in the sports community, exemplified by the recent crackdown on dangerous initiation and hazing rites in college and university football and hockey teams. Some of these rites verge on criminal acts of assault, but I think more needs to be understood about their purpose, and perhaps a more humanitarian solution should be found, before such things are abolished altogether.

Conclusion: Why Study Sports?

For many researchers, “sport research is often an ‘afterthought,’ pursued as an academic interest only after ‘serious’ work is done” (Frey and Eitzen 1991:518). It seems inappropriate, somehow, to study such a thing as recreation when there are other, more pressing, issues in the world at large. There is, then, a stigma associated with focusing on the realm of fun and games, as opposed to more serious ventures, and the reverse is also true; this is exemplified by the fact that there are very few of those in the field of sports who obtain a PhD or a research degree, and by the fact that in the academic world there is a dearth of curricular programs available for those interested in studying the academic aspects of sports³ (Bryan and Horton 1976:2-3; Frey and Eitzen 1991:518).

Sports are simply not seen to be enough of a ‘social problem’ to necessitate further study; they are perceived as neither complex nor culturally varied enough to warrant any serious

³ The same could, of course, be said of anyone trying to study any sort of subculture, whether it is recreational or occupational.

attention. Sports are seen as entertainment: they are nothing more. This is not merely the view of the academics, either, as few sports professionals will participate in academic studies, seeing sports as purely recreational (Bryan and Horton 1976:3).

Researchers and athletes who believe this are mistaken, however, and some are beginning to see the connection between sports and enculturation. There is also a strong connection between sports, the body, and human identity; cultural expressions essential to human comportment are also embedded in the standards of the recreational institution (Dyck 2000a:27). Culture is “an infinite, abstract, convoluted, unpredictable soup that humans live in, on, around, and through”; furthermore, culture “is a mystery with no need of solution, made up of metacommunications about a myriad of activities, representations and performances that humans engage in while on earth” (Sydnor 2000:223). It is in this “unpredictable soup” that sports are enmeshed, both reflecting and magnifying cultural symbols and values that the society at large may espouse. In this same way, sports also reflect and magnify certain social issues and problems that exist in the greater community, and by addressing these issues on a small scale in the sports community, one can perhaps create an example to follow in trying to find a solution for the larger issue:

Most of us, as we assiduously avoid defining sport, believe we recognize it when we see it. Sport is entertainment and it is also business, it is fun and it is also hard-work, it is education but it is also ceremony and ritual. It is however, none of these alone. Sport has the ability to ennoble but also to demean, it can produce pride and also embarrassment, it can produce heroes and also scapegoats. Sport is as much about the vanquished as it is about the victors. (Radford 1998)

The world of sports is both immense and complex. In consideration of sports, one can look at the highest levels of professional competition, together with its large consumer fan base and accompanying spectator traditions, one could turn to a simple impromptu baseball game played by some children in someone’s backyard, or to a one-on-one football match between two

youths in the dusty streets of Ethiopia. There is an incredible amount of cultural influence on the games that people play, and I believe that these factors are worthy of anthropological study. Perhaps anthropologists should turn to the field (pun intended) they most often leave to the sociologists and psychologists, and see what strides they can make towards creating a strong bond of understanding the sports community with that of the academics. An extended understanding of both worlds may, in fact, give each side a different perspective on their own development and future. Further, by experiencing sports for themselves, social scientists can get a better understanding of the underlying structure of games and why we play.

CHAPTER TWO

GAMES AND GEERTZ: EXPERIENTIAL METHODOLOGIES AND ETHNOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

“There are a few more completely academicized professions, perhaps – paleography and the study of lichens – but not many” (Geertz 1988:130).

“Just as Bobby Orr took off for the net, Derek took control of the puck and passed it to him, and bang, the game was over. And in my mind I can still see that famous picture of Bobby flying through the air” (Esposito & Golenbock 2003:81).

Introduction

Consider the words of Clifford Geertz cited above, who lamented the fact that by Being There, one could gain all the experience that was necessary to write an ethnography, but that only by Being Here, separate from the world that created the original experience, could one get one’s work read (Geertz 1988:4-5, 130). Then consider the words of Phil Esposito as he reflects upon winning the Stanley Cup of Hockey for the first time in his life. In reading his words, can the reader truly get an accurate impression of what it was like to be “kings and queens, queens and kings” (Esposito & Golenbock 2003:81)?

How do you accurately write about something that you’ve never seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted, or even remembered? It is next to impossible. You cannot conceive of anything unless you have experienced some aspect of it for yourself. How, then, do you accurately write about something that you *have* experienced, without taking away from the quality of the experience itself?

This is also a problematic question. The act of putting what are mostly non-verbal experiences into words taxes the human ability to accurately convey meaning and have it understood in the same mode as it is expressed.

Ethnographers face this conundrum every time they conduct fieldwork and come out on the other side. Most classic ethnography was performed in far-off, so-called “exotic” places,

where rituals and events experienced seemed, because of their “otherness,” to exude that iota more of authenticity that made for a good story. It warrants saying that contemporary ethnographies have come a long way from the first “classic” studies, yet few ethnographers have turned to the more “mundane” world of sports to gain the same sort of experience, and this is their loss.

Sports, in any country, especially professional sports, contain many rituals and practices that could be deemed to be exotic by any outsider. In the Olympics, for example, when hundreds of different countries come together under the guise of unity, the rituals that take place are highly nationalized and patriotic, and it is worth noting that the celebrations of the Olympics are so large and complex that participants can only see one aspect of the Games, while the audience can only see another (Bourdieu 1996:79).

For ethnographers, sporting institutions are veritable petri dishes of growing issues to study, enabling those who research them to make many original and important contributions to our understanding of the nature of sport. They can address such questions as the following:

What types of resources are required to stage different types of games and athletic competitions not only on one occasion or for a season but over a period of years? Which people tend to play which roles in given sport activities, and how does their participation in these activities relate to or influence other aspects of their lives? What, in specific terms, does involvement in particular games and sports offer to different types of participants? What parallels can be drawn between the orchestration of large-scale sporting events and other types of social events? How can the development or discontinuation, geographic dispersion or containment of particular games or athletic competitions be explained? (Dyck 2000b:24)

These and many other issues are there for the exploring. But how exactly will they be explained?

In this chapter, I will try to address the difficulties of expressing and representing an experience. I will do so by first exemplifying play, games, and sport, especially in the Western

context, as a set of rituals and experiences worthy of anthropological study. I have been heavily influenced by Noel Dyck in this respect, and will use his work extensively. I will then examine the nature of experience, according to such scholars of ritual as Bourdieu, Bruner, Dilthey, and Turner, and relate it to the experience of sport. I will also relate my own experiences playing hockey and working with semiprofessional hockey players to this discussion.¹ Finally, I will rely on the works of Geertz and others to discuss issues of representation as they relate to the experience of sport. I hope that this chapter will reinforce not only the need to study sports, but to study them from a first-hand perspective. It is through this method only that one can begin to understand why sports, like hockey, are so important to individual and national identity.

Play, Games, Sports, and Ethnography

According to Johan Huizinga, “play is older than culture, for culture, however inadequately defined, always presupposes human society, and animals have not waited for man to teach them their playing” (1950:1). Animals, like people, set up the same sort of rules when it comes to play: a mock sort of seriousness, and a promise to do no intentional harm to any other party involved. As Marvin Carlson puts it, “for the metacommunicative message ‘this is play’ to operate, some mental operation must establish what is and is not included in ‘this’” (1996:18). Play, however, is more than just fun – there is a significance to it. It goes beyond the physical or biological confines of the physical, and is more than instinctual: “in play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action. All play means something” (Huizinga 1950:1).

In fact, social theorists, such as those interested in the fields of ethnomethodology and social constructionism, have attributed to many aspects of every day activities the improvisation,

¹ All interview responses were obtained with full informed consent.

experimentation, and openness that their theories have normally associated with play states (Carlson 1996:53). Play, it seems, is a part of most aspects of our lives. Every situation leaves us room to play, and games and sports are the venue in which there is the most room. So why not study sports?

Firstly, “Social and cultural anthropologists who investigate and write about games and sports have been, not to put too fine a point on it, far better received outside their discipline than within it” (Dyck 2000a:1). Sports are not seen as enough of a social issue to warrant any further study. Studies of sports have been seen as peripheral to more central anthropological issues, such as kinship and marriage, and the evolution of the state. However, sports are also “a human universal,” as every culture studied by social scientists enjoys some kind of athletic sport (Brownell 2000:43). This factor is a strong indicator that sports can contribute in many ways to social and cultural identity.

Secondly, scholars of ritual regard sports as being “liminoid” rather than “liminal,” and this liminoid activity is associated with the devaluation of ritual importance in what are mostly Western industrialized nations (Turner 1982:85). However, with the disappearance of liminality has come a perpetuation of rituals (their former meanings somewhat diluted, of course) in the leisure sphere. Although the rituals of traditional religions have, in some cases, lost their transformative capacity, this can be regained somewhat (although not completely) in the realm of the performative genres, such as drama, carnivals, and sports, because “modernity means the exaltation of the indicative mood” (Turner 1982:86).

Athletic sports are, by their nature, embodied and physical activities, which, in itself, is reason enough for researchers interested in identity to take notice. Gregory Bateson posited that play states, like sports, are engaged in when there is awareness that there is an alternative, a more

“serious” situation from which play is an escape. Noel Dyck agrees with this idea, stating that “what is marked and celebrated by athletes, spectators and sports enthusiasts are varying forms of ‘play with purpose’ that they choose to valorize in contrast to the ‘alternatives’ offered by everyday life” (2000b:28).

Some of these alternatives are the everyday cares of the working adult. This is why child’s play has so much nostalgic allure. It reminds adults of an alternative time, an era where the stresses of growing up did not exist, and where the only thing counting against you in your game was your own endurance and imagination. For children, the realm of play is almost like another form of reality, and the part of life that isn’t immediately involved in playing the game disappears. It is this feeling that adults remember the most. Dyck says as much in his analysis of children’s “pond” hockey:

Children’s sport: what could be simpler, safe and of less consequence to anyone but the participants themselves? On the face of it, children’s play seems prosaic and juvenile stuff that hardly warrants much in the way of adult concern, let alone ethnographic analysis. Indeed, in Canada a nostalgic and oft-invoked national representation of both sport and childhood is that of ‘pond’ or ‘river’ hockey. In this scenario children are envisioned as clearing snow from naturally occurring ice surfaces and entering into spontaneous and free-flowing games that incorporate any number of players and feature whimsical and inventive forms of play. Scores, if kept at all, tend toward ties, for the initiation and continuation of this type of fluid, informal contest depends solely upon the inclination of players to brave the cold and to keep the ‘game on.’ In this romanticized rendering of ‘old-time’ hockey as the quintessential Canadian pastime, skaters glide freely, enthusiastically and creatively into a zone of playful exuberance and delight that stands well apart from and in marked contrast to the workaday world of adults and the tutelary realm of the schoolroom. ‘Pond’ hockey cannot be readily envisaged without at least an implicit sketching in of attendant qualities of freedom, fun and innocence. Thus, adults *qua* adults rarely figure in public imaginings of this confluence of sport, childhood and nature that resurfaces rhetorically and intermittently from one sport setting to another. (Dyck 2003:55)

Richard Schechner argues that this nostalgic attitude persists into the world of adult games and professional sports. While all that surrounds the game, the economic considerations,

the political conditions, the size of the spectator audience, can fluctuate widely and rapidly, the game, the activity itself, remains for the most part unaffected, because the players themselves are oblivious to anything but the game. Although Schechner lists play as a separate entity in his consideration of games, sports, and theatre, the idea of child's play is similar to that of professional sports: "the rules are designed not only to tell the players how to play but to *defend the activity against encroachment from the outside*. What rules are to games and sports, traditions are to ritual, and conventions are to theater, dance, and music" (2003:13, original emphasis).

Research shows that play, games, and sports are not just liminoid, time-passing activities lacking in outward significance. I mention these issues in this chapter because play is an aspect of life for everyone on this planet, and it is an experience that everyone shares, to a certain degree. Physical action is a sensation that all can relate to, and so

Anthropology has much to gain by belatedly turning its attention to the ways in which games and sports are played and the manner in which athletic competitions of many kinds revolve around bodily performance, cultural celebration and the observation, creation or transcendence of social and cultural boundaries. (Dyck 2000b:34)

While factors such as discerning normal from deviant in social protocol, or good from bad, may come into play when analysis and remembrance of experience is required, experience itself relies heavily on the physical senses. You remember what you felt, not necessarily why you felt that way, and it is important to note that, while culture shapes experience, there are some experiences that simply cannot be described within a certain cultural lexicon.

Experience and Experiencing the Game

What, then, is experience? The word "experience" itself "has such flexibility and can serve us so well in tying together the ordinary and the extraordinary; so much of life is already

there, enshrined in its circle of meaning as it is used in the vernacular” (Abrahams 1986:49). Dilthey called experience “the diluted juice of reason,” but experience is much more than sense data and cognition stored into memory; it also involves feelings and expectations. The anthropology of experience deals with how events (such as rituals or games) are actually received by an individual’s consciousness, and how people truly experience their culture (Bruner 1986:4).

No experience is ever truly unadulterated and pure, however, as “with every experience in the present we have one eye on the past and the other on the future” (Bruner 1986:15). This “double consciousness” means that, as we experience, our actions are modeled after previous, possibly similar, experiences, and our actions are also changed in reference to the future (Bruner 1986:15).

This idea is well-applied in terms of a player engaged in team sports. Pierre Bourdieu writes extensively on the engagement of the athlete, and it is his analysis which fits best with my own experience. Although Bourdieu’s analysis is based on what he calls “social games,” it can easily be extended to mean athletic games.

He writes of the “feel for the game,” or *sens*, that makes for a good athlete. He argues that this feel is what gives the game a subjective sense – a meaning and a purpose – but also a direction for its eventual outcome. Those who maintain an investment in the game, in its outcome, in its presuppositions (or *doxa*), are so involved that they become totally caught up in the game, and some become so enmeshed in the game’s rules, rituals, and construct that they tend to forget that it is, after all, just a game (Bourdieu 1980:66-67).

Bourdieu calls this sort of spell that bewitches those interested in the game *illusio*², after Huizinga (1950). *Illusio* is more than just a passing attention to the game. It is “the fact of being in the game, of being invested in the game, of taking the game seriously” (Bourdieu 1998:76). This *illusio* means being caught up both in and by the game, and believing that it is worth the effort it takes to play (Bourdieu 1980:66, 82; 1998:76-77; Dyck 2000b:31). Bourdieu mentions that the word *interest*, in regard to the game, has almost the same connotation: “*interest* is to ‘be there,’ to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognize the game and to recognize its stakes” (1998:77).

Illusio, however, will only really exist if “your mind is structured according to the structures of the world in which you play” where “everything will seem obvious and the question of knowing if the game is ‘worth [it]’ will not even be asked” (Bourdieu 1998:77). The feel for the game, then, comes from the fact that the games that matter to you “are important and interesting because they have been imposed and introduced in your mind, in your body” (Bourdieu 1998:77).

This feel for the game is, I think, what Bruner meant when he spoke of the double consciousness of looking at the past and the future at the same time.

Bourdieu says that the feel for the game comes through *habitus* – in sports, this would be *practice* – which enables a player, through past experiences, to anticipate the future of the game through the present state of play (1998:25). As he says,

Having the feel for the game is having the game under the skin; it is to master in a practical way the future of the game; it is to have a sense of the history of the game. While the bad player is always off tempo, always too early or too late, the

² This could also be similar to A.S.C.s, or altered states of consciousness, brought on by meditation or pharmaceutical aid.

good player is the one who *anticipates*, who is ahead of the game. Why can she get ahead of the flow of the game? Because she has the immanent tendencies of the game in her body, in an incorporated state: she embodies the game. (Bourdieu 1998:80-81, original emphasis)

It is a player who is caught up in the game, in the spell of *illusio*, who can anticipate the play and use that to the team's advantage in confounding the opponent.

Illusio, like a spell, can be broken, as “one only has to stand outside the game, *as the observer does*, in order to sweep away the urgency, the appeals, the threats, the steps to be taken, which make up the real, really lived-in, world” (Bourdieu 1980:82, my emphasis). This implies a sort of indifference, an ambivalent approach to a game. While not exactly a disinterested outlook toward the game, this is more of an internalized indifference – what the Stoics called *ataraxia*. *Illusio* is the opposite of *ataraxia* – the state of indifference experienced by those who are not caught up in and tied to the game (Bourdieu 1998:77-78). I will develop this further in relation to *communitas* in chapter three.

I am reminded here of the first (and last) two times I took my two older brothers to a professional hockey game. My middle brother and I, both being hockey fans, spent the whole game with our eyes on the ice. We were totally involved in every move made on the play, and we celebrated and mourned with the rest of the fans in the arena, identifying with every triumph and failure of *our* team. My eldest brother, however, who is not a hockey fan, spent much of his time admiring the arena itself, and not the game at all. Instead of commenting on good and bad plays, he would point out a funny advertisement or an attractive spectator. He was always late in his reactions to the play, because he was simply copying the actions of his siblings and the crowd. He enjoyed the intermission activities far more than the game itself, and, in fact, gladly gave up his ticket to the next game to a friend of his who was more invested in the team.

The obviousness of the game being worth playing will not be as obvious to those who are not interested in it, those who do not participate³. Thus, those who are indifferent to the game will be less able to master it than those who are possessed by it (Bourdieu 1998:79).

These points were also exemplified in the research I conducted with a varsity level men's hockey team in 2005. For one thing, it was taken for granted that, if you were there, then you thought hockey was the best game in the world. It was a given. It was also a given that you automatically understood any jargon and vocabulary associated with the game. Showing your ignorance of a certain term would imply that you were not as invested in hockey as the rest of the players were.

Practice and *habitus* were emphasized as one of the most important aspects of success on a team. Implicit in this was having a good feel for the game. Of the three team statements excerpted below, the first was from an offensive player, the second from a defensive player, and the third from the team's athletic therapist. All had been playing hockey since their childhood. It is obvious from these statements how, important having a feel for the game, regardless of the role being played, really matters:

Just the little things you don't realize really, like the knowing where to set up on certain plays, like on breakouts or something, you don't think about it but you're there, because of repetition, you've done it so many times right that it just comes natural. And that's why practice is so important, as far as I'm concerned – it's repetition on tactics, like power plays and penalty kills and stuff like that – it's just repetition. You do it so many times . . . that it just comes natural. You don't even think about it any more. That's what makes you go that second faster, because you're already there. (Leblanc 2005)

After every game, I tend to analyze missed opportunities, especially if I miss a shot. The next practice, I like to try to recreate that situation and practice that shot again and do it and make sure it's successful. . . . The thing about hockey, or any

³ Participation does not necessarily mean that one has to play the game. Observers of the game can be just as involved, and their enjoyment can go beyond that of experience – collective enjoyment, or *communitas*, is an experience of its own.

other sport, is the unpredictability, what's going to happen during the game. Anything can happen – that's what makes it so much fun and so exciting. The routines and superstitions that guys use are the one thing that they can control about the game. Up to the point you step on that ice, you try to control as much as you can. Once you get on it, it's all reaction. (McLeod 2005)

To the untrained eye, you see a hockey player, you see a hockey player, but when you know their injuries, or the little things that everybody doesn't see, that we see, you can clearly see on the ice that he's not playing to his full potential. They play differently, and by playing differently, they make themselves easier to get hit again or get injured again, because they don't do the same movements they usually do. (Vibert 2005)

The idea of repetition and *habitus* leads to a discussion of the nature of experience versus *an* experience, and here we turn to Victor Turner, the anthropologist of ritual and experience, for his interpretation of the scholar Wilhelm Dilthey.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant's theory of perception was that the mind was the active originator of experience and not simply a passive recipient of perception. In other words, it was not that the object made representation possible, it was that representation made the object possible. According to Turner, Dilthey, who wrote in opposition to this idea, believed that the "data of experience" was not, in fact, formless, although he conceded that such data often contained certain relationships, which *were* intangible, and which could be analyzed (Turner 1982:12). It followed, then, rather than the "experiencing subject" imposing categories and relationships upon the experience, that it was "thought's work" to discover the structural system that was apparently implicit in every unit of experience (Turner 1982:13).

Turner stressed this as being what Dilthey called "lived experience:" "a many-faceted yet coherent system dependent on the interaction and interpenetration of cognition, affect, and volition" that is based not only on personal observations and reactions, but the cumulative wisdom, the body of experience, or "tradition of *communitas*," of the collective mind. The

wisdom of this is acquired through participation in the performance of every day life – in short, the experience of living (1988:84).

Lived experience is neither a synchronic nor a detached entity, either. Because of this body of collective experience, each experience is influenced and charged with its own emotion and volition, and is judged accordingly, based on past precepts (Turner 1982:13). Everyday experience, “mere experience,” is simply a passive acceptance and endurance of the daily onslaught of things to be analyzed and judged.

An experience, on the other hand, “like a rock in a Zen sand garden, stands out from the evenness of passing hours and years” (Turner 1986:35). These experiences pop out of routine and repetitive behaviour, much like scoring a goal or becoming injured in a hockey game would do, and begin with “shocks of pain or pleasure” which “summon up precedents and likenesses from the conscious or unconscious past – for the unusual has its traditions as well as the usual” (Turner 1986:35-36). Experiences and emotions of the past, revived by the shock, then influence the experience of the present, prompting us to then find a meaning for the experience, to try to put past and present together (Turner 1986:36).

The problem with experiences, whether invested experiences or indifferent experiences, mere experiences or out-of-the-ordinary experiences, is that they “happen to individuals and are therefore sometimes to be regarded as idiosyncratic” (Abrahams 1986:49). As well, there is increasing value placed on the action of experience itself, of experience for its own sake. Because of this, “the breaks in the routine order of the everyday world come to provide the measure of whether life is being lived to the fullest” (Abrahams 1986:67).

No one is ever short of experience: it is making it understandable to others that is the problem, and a failure to make an experience properly understood is often seen as a failing of the

experience itself, not of the words used to express it (Geertz 1986:373). Below are some examples of attempts by hockey players to articulate how they experience aspects of the game. You will find that their descriptions, because these experiences are not your own, and are not as intense and salient to you as they are to the players, are far from satisfactory:

I like to win. I like the challenge of every game. . . . It's important to show the other team that you're ready, so you go on the ice running. It's mental. They see you come on the ice and you look lazy, and you don't really want to go, they will be like, "oh, they don't want to play today." It's mental. . . . If you go on the ice and you're running, it's not the same thing. They're like, "oh, fuck, it's going to be tough tonight." (Hérard 2005)

If you want to say you had a bad game because you didn't have your lucky shirt, well, to me that's bullshit, because it means you didn't work, and you didn't play well. It's not because you didn't wear your right shirt, you just didn't play well. . . . You get lucky every once in a while, but luck doesn't last – you gotta make your own luck, as far as I'm concerned. (LeBlanc 2005)

It's a battle as well, to show up every game and be ready to play and there's always a lot going on, especially at university. (Bliss 2005)

[If we win] we go and congregate around our goalie, give him a tap on the head, and "good game," and congratulate everybody, and then we line up and shake hands with the opposing team. . . . If we lose, we do the same thing. We go out and console each other, and then you line up and shake hands. (McLeod 2005)

When you win, all the questions are erased, and it's just peaceful. (Smith 2005)

I get very excited right before a game. I'm smiling, I just want to play hockey – I love it. I want to go on the ice and skate. I'm on the bench and I'm waiting for the next shift and I'm ready to go. It's like a drug. You don't need drugs. If you like hockey, you're like, "wow, I just want to go on the ice and do something – I wanna play." It's the best rush. (Hérard 2005)

The main difficulty with experience, as illustrated above, is that we can only experience what is absorbed into our own consciousness in our own lives, and we can never really know another's experience, even through we may share some element in common – it is simply not possible to accurately articulate that experience (Bruner 1986:5; Kapferer 1986:188).

The only solution, at least for an ethnographer, is to engage in some form of participant observation in order to be able to share more than just a small amount of the same experience. As a rookie hockey player myself, I find that my ability to share certain experiences with veteran players – I know what the vibration of skates cutting through ice feels like, I know how much a stick weighs, I have felt the pain of falling and hitting my head on the ice – makes it easier for me to conduct my research, and most ethnographers find the same is true of their research (Weiss 2000:184).

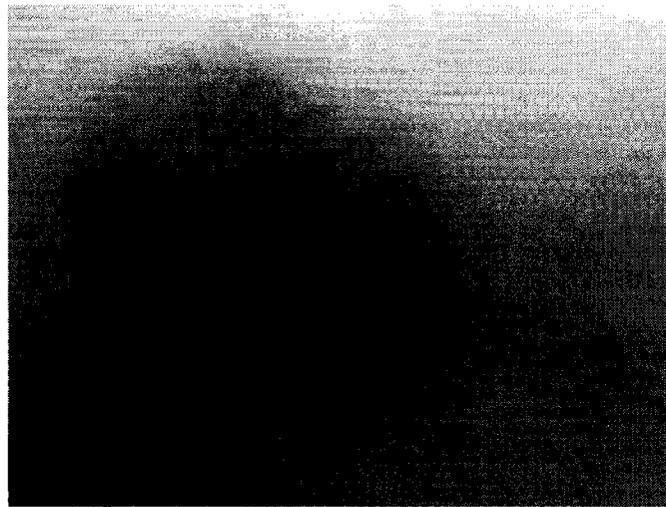


Figure 1

Participant observation has its own problems, however. Sharing such intense experiences as athletic contests, and “getting inside” the activities is less an issue of feasibility (as in, how to gain access and obtain data) as it is of objectivity. Gaining information from total immersion in an activity is easy; however, once the shared body of experience is in place and active, it becomes very difficult for the ethnographer to maintain the distance needed in order to represent it (Dyck and Archetti 2003:13; Marcus 1998:6, 193).

Geertz and Issues of Representation

Recalling Turner’s use of the liminal and the liminoid, Clifford Geertz came up with his own distinction between “deep play” and “shallow play” in performative genres (like

professional sports). It is the performances involving participants in “deep play,” like Bourdieu’s *illusio*, that are “likely to raise real concerns about the fundamental ideas and codes of the culture” (Carlson 1996:24). Although Geertz’s famous “Balinese Cockfight” is a fair distance from what we could consider the ideal of sport, his idea of a cockfight, between animals, as representing a cultural text, could apply to sports involving human competitors as well (Brownell 2000:44; Fischer 2005:82).

The implications of our analysis of cultural texts like the cockfight are, to Geertz, a worry, as he seems to think that moralities of such are concealed from the ethnographer until it is too late to do anything about them. Gambling, as he says, with the real passions that ethnographers believe are involved, instead of just the apparent shallowness more commonly associated with play, is a dangerous thing (Geertz 2005:115). As ethnographers, however, it is our job to concern ourselves with the emotions and significance of experience, and not satisfy ourselves with the supposedly emotionless mental attitudes analyzed by, say, psychologists (Huizinga 1955:15).

In the same way that the passions ethnographers study are real, so are the emotions that the ethnographer feels when engaged in such an intense form of participant observation. Engaged performance cannot possibly be objective, and involvement in such necessitates a certain discipline and concentration that negates the possibility of remaining detached (Carlson 1996:31). In the realm of professional team sports, the correlation is clear: to be a part of a team and not be wholly immersed in its habits and collective would only be detrimental to the team’s goal of success. Ethnographic inquiries are situated intentionally in a specific place and time, unlike the universalizing methodologies favoured by sports sociologists, and so researchers must ensure that they are completely grounded in that particular space, and nowhere else (Dyck

2000b:17). There are, of course, problems with this approach, especially with regards to studying in a particular time and place very similar to the ethnographer's personal time and space – a symptom of generalization known as “home-blindness,” which entails a comparison between the ethnographer's hometown and his or her place of study (Dyck 2000c:138).

Certain aspects of sport, such as the seemingly shallow and consumable pleasures that the institution offers, the cultish following and total absorption of its fans, and, especially, the idea of sports as being an “opiate of the masses,” a tool for “killing time” in a “world without meaning,” may have been the very qualities of the idea that has for so long kept sports from being an institution worthy of study (Dyck 2000b:31). Ethnographic inquiry into these activities, on the other hand, and studying the relationships and the deeper meanings of sport, requires an immense investment of time and interest (here Bourdieu's *illusio* surfaces again). This time spent may well take the ethnographer away from the main fields in anthropology, but will also open up other fields of study in matters that may be of fundamental interest to anthropology (Dyck 2000b:31). This investment may also turn descriptive anthropology towards a focus on the traditions of sport and the social change involved therein, a topic that has been lamentably absent in much contemporary ethnography (Dyck 2000b:14; Marcus 1986a:165).

Again, it is the representation of these issues that is the problem. Ethnography “offers a means of combining both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ approaches to sport,” but once the ethnographer has gained the inside access necessary to obtain data, he or she falls back on “the usual practices of ethnography,” which, as I have illustrated, do not go very far towards elucidating the experiences of those who are studied (Dyck and Archetti 2003:13). While ethnographers gather data through in-depth interviews that are formulated through their own experience, there exists within the ethnographers the dichotomy between emic and etic. They try to present in the

ethnography a unified view of the studied group, but are unable to accurately do so because they stand on both sides of the line between inside and outside.

As Geertz reiterates time and time again, “experiences, like tales, fetes, potteries, rites, dramas, images, memoirs, ethnographies, and allegorical machineries, are made; and it is such made things that make them” (1986:380). People create things that create experiences, which, in turn, are fodder for ethnography, which is also created. Ethnography then becomes, like poems and novels, “a mere game of words” – if you expose the way it is played, it will only show that it isn’t played at all (Geertz 1988:2).

The fact that most ethnographers become “university types of one sort or another” (Geertz 1988:130) seems to distance the ethnographer from the experience even further than if the researcher had written an ethnography straight from the field. Competition in the academic world means only that the game of words becomes more intense, and ever more analyzed, taking away from the actual work of the ethnography itself (Geertz 1988:130). In this situation, it is very important for those researching the sport to become more and more involved in their subject, to see both the deep and the shallow aspects of it, and to try to fall under sport’s spell and experience it for themselves (Dyck 2000b:23).

Conclusion

Ethnographers are ever more conscious now that their right to write ethnography – something that can create only a bare simulacrum of real experience – is in jeopardy (Geertz 1988:133; Marcus 1986b:262). The “inadequacy of words to experience, and their tendency to lead off only into other words, has been something both poets and mathematicians long have known; but it is rather a new discovery so far as ethnographers are concerned” (Geertz 1988:138). Poets express themselves through a choice of words, assuming that the reader will

choose still others to arrive at meaning, while mathematicians have done away with words altogether.

The premise of ethnography, despite its problems, is that it is there to describe, to tell a story, if you will, of an experience (Geertz 1988:140; Marcus 1986a:171). This is problematic, as a) it is nearly impossible to experience someone else's experience as it first entered his or her consciousness, despite his or her willingness to describe it, as b) words simply cannot convey all the aspects of the experience necessary for it to be shared. In writing ethnography, a further problem is encountered: "ethnography originates in orality and only makes the transition to writing with difficulty" (Marcus 1986b:264-265). Geertz, as always, explains it poetically:

The strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands we talk about it without fuss – a spade is a spade, a rose is a rose – on pain of illusion, trumpery, and self-bewitchment, leads on to the even stranger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact. (Geertz 1988:140)

In sport, it seems, the only way to surmount this problem of semantics is to throw objectivity to the wind, lace up your own pair of skates, and do the best you can.

CHAPTER THREE

“MY TOWN, MY TEAM:” HOCKEY COUNTRY AND FANDOM’S NATIONAL IDENTITY

At an Ottawa Senators hockey game I attended in January of 2004, I sat beside two gentlemen who didn’t appear to know very much about what was happening on the ice. They remained in their seats, quiet, while the rest of us shouted, cheered, and jumped up and down. At the midpoint of the second period, however, something happened to change this. A home player, Tyler Arnason, was involved in a collision that brought him to the ground and knocked off his helmet. The opponent subsequently kned him in the head as he skated by. Arnason slowly got to his feet and tried to make his way back to the bench, but, too woozy to go any further, fell into the arms of a teammate, Chris Neil. Now, hockey, on the surface, appears to be a very dangerous sport, and it is true that the accumulation of a career’s worth of injuries can wreak havoc with a player’s physical well-being. In the end, however, it is just a game, a performance, and intentionally injuring someone for no apparent reason is out of line. The fans protested, but no penalty was called on the play.

The gentleman sitting next to me leaned over and inquired as to what had transpired, and I explained it to him. On the next play, Neil, an enforcer for the team, headed towards the offending player to seek retribution (this is justifiable in consideration of the infraction that had just occurred, and Neil’s role as enforcer of the “code” on this team). Before he could get there, a star player on the other team caught him with a vicious slash across the forearm which prevented him from fighting. The star player received a penalty, but it was said later that, had the situation been reversed, and had Neil hit the star player, he would have been suspended and fined. The gentleman next to me leaned over and explained the situation to his companion. I knew that they finally “got it” when they joined the rest of the crowd in soundly booing the star

player for the opposing team every time he touched the puck, from that time until the buzzer at the end of the third period. As we got ready to leave the stadium, the gentleman and I shook hands, friends in the face of this affront to *our* team.

My experience is not a unique one. Fans of professional sports all over the world engage in some form of interaction (friendly or otherwise) at every game they attend. This interaction has many different consequences; on the one hand, it can inspire feelings of *communitas* and national pride, can be treated as a sacred experience, and can have positive effects on the performance of the team being watched. On the other, intense emotions in the crowd can cause a rupture in the accepted social order, develop into a very profane situation, and can result in violence and destruction. It can also mean the defeat of the home team through lack of social support.

Sports spectators' actions are due in part to the culmination of a number of factors, some of which will be addressed in this chapter. The ways in which they act depend on the level of professionalization and commodification of the sport they watch; the socioeconomic backgrounds, preferences, and histories of the spectators themselves; the emotions and actions of other spectators around them; and, finally, the geographic location and political situation surrounding the sport they watch. All of these factors contribute to the idea that sports act as a social microcosm of society, and also as an integral part of society, "which serve a variety of personal and collective (i.e. social) functions" (Giulianotti 2004: 147; Goldstein 185:162).

I will examine these various factors in terms of three specific sports, ones whose histories or professionalization are inextricably linked to the industrial and socioeconomic development of

the modern nations in which they maintain their popularity.¹ These sports are, in Europe, football;² in the United States, baseball;³ and, in Canada, hockey.⁴ These three sports are a stronghold of the values espoused by their mother nations, sacred rituals that reinforce cultural practices and accepted behaviors, and which infuse nearly every aspect of citizens' lives and help to create a part of their individual and collective identity, regardless of their affiliations with these games (Novak 1985:34, 36, 47). I will conclude my review with an example of how all these factors contribute to the Canadian love of hockey, and how this love has contributed to a regional marketing scheme that plays on all these ideas.

Commodification and the Spectacle

Lipsky refers to the highly commercialized spectacle of professional sports, with its massive profit-minded administration that presents an alternative reality from the mundane aspects of real life where values are not held in the same traditional regard, as *SportsWorld* (1985:73). Burstyn calls the “highly lucrative, multibranching transnational economy of enormous scope and influence” the *sport nexus*, which is “composed of distinct sectors of economic and political interests, associated together in various clusters of overlapping and interlocking organizations, strategies, and personnel” (1999:17). Regardless of what you call the

¹ The professionalization of sports coincided with the Industrial Revolution (see also Lasch 1985:51).

² Because only North Americans call this sport “soccer,” I will call the sport by its more globally accepted name, and any reference I make to American or Canadian gridiron football will be delineated as such.

³ Baseball's origins stem from the British game of cricket. The game emerged in part as a distinctly American response to British imperialism.

⁴ It should be noted here that there are two different kinds of hockey: that played on the field (mostly by women) and that on ice (mostly by men). The sport I refer to herein is the latter, and Canadians take it for granted that it is played on ice, so they just call it “hockey.”

sporting enterprise and all it encompasses, it is evident that the professionalization of sports means that a game is no longer just a game (Goffman 1961:27; MacAloon 1984:242).

Sports act as a panacea and a refuge for an industrial society suffering from widespread alienation, a more personal, concrete, and intense ethical realm that nourishes the spark of individual and collective spirit that the rest of the world merely drains away (Lipsky 1985:73). This “sportization,” as Norbert Elias termed it, was a “key mechanism in the civilizing process” because it allowed for a regulation of the frustrations of a newly industrialized world, and prevented the oppressed masses from realizing their situation and achieving “revolutionary solidarity” (Hill 2001:296; Lasch 1985:60). Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Olympic games, saw sports as a way of building that same solidarity (although in the context of friendship) within nations and across the world (MacAloon 1981: 149, 267). Other social theorists see this in a different light. If sport is a mirror reflection of society, as I mentioned above, which helps to indoctrinate young people with culturally-dominant values, then sport serves to inculcate such “values” as “militarism, authoritarianism, racism, and sexism, thereby perpetuating the ‘false consciousness’ of the masses” (Lasch 1985:60). Sports distract fans by cutting them off “from serious life by immersing [them] in a demonstration of possibilities” (Goffman 1961:34). These “possibilities” are the ways in which states can socialize their citizens through sport, by emphasizing values and norms that bolster the current hegemonic system (Sage 1990:76). Because different sports inculcate different norms and values, it is understandable that different sports appeal to different societies, as the legitimacy of the existing social order in each area depends on socializing its citizens in different ways (Goffman 1961:71).

Professional sports are generally determined as any sport for which a player obtains financial gain, although the extent to which monetary reimbursement should be received is a hot

debate (Dunning 1999:114). The economics of modern professional sports have become the driving force behind the entire sporting institution. The activity itself remains unaffected, but those who participate in it are no longer inspired by their love of the game – it is the love of money that spurs them on, and they become mere performers displaying their skills for the public, much like circus performers (Schechner 2003:13, 45).

The professionalization and commodification of sports in the past century and a half has changed the way in which people in society are socialized. As the rules and attitudes surrounding the structure of sports changed, so did the attitudes towards and valued characteristics of the players, moving from a valorization of manly character and Christian self-restraint to a more rough and sexually aggressive ideal. In the new culture of consumption, it was discovered that sex and violence sold, and the rough sex appeal of sport was selling fast (Burstyn 1999:110; Lasch 1985:61). Sports that emphasized such values, such as gridiron football and hockey, became more popular, and the advent of television and technological advances in architecture enabled the ideals of such sports to spread to areas where they could not have previously existed. For example, hockey has spread to the southern United States, and the Stanley Cup final is played in June – feats not possible before modern refrigeration techniques and cable television (Burstyn 1999:136; Lasch 1985:55; Sage 1990:141).

The influence of television on sports should not be ignored, but is only in the past two decades beginning to be studied (Chandler 1985:84). The rise of mass production has intensified the needs which sport supposedly satisfies. At the same time, it has increased the technological capacity to promote this satisfaction to a wider audience, through television. What this does, however, is put the spectator – the target of this promotion – into a state of passivity: “the very antithesis of the health and vigor sport ideally promotes” (Lasch 1985:51). The influence of

television and its push of sports to the realm of the spectacular also validates and licenses the role of the passive observer: the spectator (MacAloon 1984:269). The passive audience has become more vocal in what it wants to see in sport: in order to appeal to larger audiences, those who might not normally watch the sport, promoters have encouraged more violence and bloodshed in every day performances, instituted dance numbers by scantily clad women during intermissions, the re-drawing of various lines on the field of play, and the changes of rules and regulations to make the game more exciting to watch (whether it is more exciting to play or not is not the point) (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:57-58; Dunning 1999:106; Lasch 1985:55; Sage 1990:116-124) – all to turn a profit (Sage 1990:122-123).

Television served to enclose sport into a package easily contained and viewed. This mirrored the enclosure of sport stadiums in urban communities in the early 1900s, when the distinction between urban and rural space began to be more sharply defined.

As stadiums began to enclose spectators in what John Bale calls a “carceral city,” emphasis on territoriality grew, and each game became a pitched battle as teams tried to defend their own turf, by whatever means were necessary (Bale 1993:15; Cole et al 2004:212). This enclosure of sports also brought sports into the same institutional realm as churches and theatres: spaces that went relatively unused for long periods of time, fallow spaces in prime real estate that remain empty for no apparent reason, and then experience an intense period of activity for a short length of time – an arrangement that fosters celebratory and ceremonial feelings (Bale 1993: 18; Schechner 2003:14). This spatial specialization pushed professional sports further into the realm of the spectacle.

Sports are ritualistic activities. Professional sports, however, are more than just simple rituals – they are spectacles. “Ritual is a duty, spectacle a choice. Consequently we speak of

ritual “degenerating” (‘de-genre-ating’) into spectacle” (MacAloon 1984:243). As well, according to MacAloon, “Spectacle is a dynamic form, demanding movement, action, change, and exchange on the part of the human actors who are center stage, and the spectators must be excited in turn” (1984:244). By this statement he acknowledges, firstly, that spectacle is a performance, and secondly, that spectacle requires an audience. Any general range of emotions can be experienced in viewing or participating in a spectacle – but they must be intensified by the grand nature of the spectacle itself (Bale 1993:6-10; MacAloon 1984:246).

Those who act in spectacles become “the object of an identification with mere appearance which is intended to compensate for the crumbling of directly experienced diversifications of productive activity” (Debord 1994:38). The frustrations of an alienated industrial society are channeled and all emotions are directed at these “spectacular representations of living human beings” (Debord 1994:38). Spectacle, according to Debord, alienates citizens from the true meaning behind many rituals, and instills in them a false consciousness of the society in which they exist: because of their involvement as passive observers of spectators, they are rendered unaware of their own exploitation (1994:37, 117, 122, 158). Debord goes on to conclude, among many other things, that

The spectacle is the acme of ideology, for in its full flower it exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement and negation of real life. Materially, the spectacle is “the expression of estrangement, of alienation between man and man.” The “new potentiality of fraud” concentrated within it has its basis in that form of production whereby “with the mass of objects grows the mass of alien powers to which man is subjected.” (Debord 1994:151)

The irony in this statement is that this so-called spectacle is that which induces states of spontaneous communitas.

Experience and Communitas

The idea of getting “inside” the activities and experiences of athletes is one which has long appealed to many fans – who would not want to be out there with their favourite team when it celebrates winning the World Series, the World Cup, or the Stanley Cup (Dyck and Archetti 2003:13)? All sports fans want to share in that moment: to do so would enhance their own understanding and experience of the situation, and help to brush aside some of the spectacle (Abrahams 1986:49). This emphasis on “the action,” on experience for its own sake, “provide[s] the measure of whether life is being lived to the fullest” (Abrahams 1986:67). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bourdieu calls this full engagement with a game and its outcome *illusio* – a state in which the outside world ceases to exist and those involved often forget that it is “only a game” (1980:66-67). Csikszentmihalyi calls the same phenomenon *flow*, and adds that, in a state of flow, a sense of time is suspended, and other external concerns take a backseat to involvement in the activity (1975:65; Goffman 1961:42). This same state of consciousness has been likened to religious ecstasy or meditative transcendence (Schechner 2003:109), and so it is no wonder that discussions of sports tend to take on the language of the divine: “faith, devotion, worship, ritual, dedication, sacrifice, commitment, spirit, prayer, suffering, festival, and celebration” (Wann et al 2001:198; see also Reiss 1989:94).

Another similarity between sport and religious rites and rituals is their liminal quality, where on offer is a blend of “lowliness and sacredness, or homogeneity and comradeship” that is presented as “a moment in and out of time,” and reveals “a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties” (Turner 1969:69). This phenomenon is what Turner and others call *communitas* – a *shared flow* between participants that “denotes the holistic sensation when we act with total involvement,

when action and awareness are one” (Turner 1988:133). This *communitas* is generally, with respect to sports, spontaneous, and involves “the dissolution of boundaries shutting people off from each other. The resulting experience is of collective celebration” (Schechner 2003:156).

As Burstyn agrees,

Sport is everywhere in contemporary society: in schools, community centres, summer camps, public recreations systems, country clubs, union halls, and corporate offices. As a result, the identification spectators feel with the spectacle is based to a large extent on personal sports participation in childhood and adolescence, especially for boys and men. In this sense, the spectacle of modern sport is not, as some would have it, only a passive and nonparticipatory experience. There still exists a shared, common experience between players and their legions of fans. (Burstyn 1999:141)

Sports, especially large scale professional sports, are highly ritualistic, and employ the same aspects of liminality and the rites of passage described by Arnold van Gennep and later by Victor Turner. Sports on a grandiose scale, like the Olympic Games, are a spectacular example of such rites. The enclosed nature of the venues in which these games are performed, and the disconnection between the spectators who are present and “everyone else” who isn’t there, correlates with the segregation aspect of the archetypal rite of passage. Opening ceremonies, where different nations come together and give up their own national identity in favour of the collective identity of athletes belonging to the Olympic community, follows the liminal stage, and the closing ceremonies re-aggregate the athletes back into the community. For spectators, the ceremonies and the games are rites of intensification. The closing ceremonies, which is “a symbolic expression of the humankindness necessary and available for all men and women, a final display and emotional ‘proof’ that patriotism and individual achievement are not incompatible with true internationalism but are rather indispensable to it” then releases the thousands of assembled spectators into “an extraordinary expression of spontaneous *communitas*” (MacAloon 1984:250-253).

Not all of these experiences are celebratory, however. Urban anomie at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution facilitated the inception of the sporting fraternities that “sought to maintain a traditional life-style in the midst of rapid social change and the rise of a more mainstream sporting subculture that promoted moral athletics as a palliative for urban pathology” (Reiss 1989:14). But that didn’t mean that these feelings and frustrations went away. Instead, those dissatisfied with their lack of individual identity in the industrial world now had an acceptable social outlet for their frustration and aggression (Reiss 1989:207). I will address this issue later on.

Spectators

Different spectators of sport identify with different sports for different reasons. In Turkey, for example, committed fans watch their Turkish wrestling as well as international football. To watch football denotes them as European sophisticates, while watching wrestling evokes a traditional and oafish world – so it is all a matter of taste and keeping up appearances (Stokes 1996:21, 27).

The term “fan” is an abbreviation or derivation of the word “fanatic” (Bryan and Horton 1976:4). Sport fans are those who follow a sport, team, or athlete that they are interested in. Sport spectators (or, in this commodified world, sport consumers) are those who actively witness a sporting event live or through some form of media, like radio or television (Guttman 1986:5). This is not to say that “fans” and “spectators” are mutually exclusive (Wann et al 2001:2-3). Fans may not be able to witness the event, and may only be able to get information about it from the newspaper, the radio, or conversations with others, while spectators may know nothing of the game, not be involved at all, and are simply there because they got a free ticket.

As established above, fans participate in sporting activities mostly because it provides a diversion from their daily existences, and allows them to become completely immersed in a world that is an escape from their own (Bourdieu 1998:76; Bryan and Horton 1976:3; Wann et al 2001:38). Nonfans lack the ability to become involved, and do not experience the *illusio* or *flow* that fans experience (Bourdieu 1998:77). They do not become a part of that community of sport that seems to constitute the identity of sport fans (Bryan and Horton 1976:2; Douglas 1986:24, 127).

Why else do people become fans? For one thing, sports are something out of the ordinary, a mimetic ritual that maintains an element of the ceremonial, and this has a de-routinizing effect (Dunning 1999:27). Fans identify with other members of the community associated with the sport: many people cited that their reason for becoming a fan is because their families or friends are fans – it has little to do with the relative success of the team (Wann et al 2001:5).

Fans who are also spectators also tend to follow a certain demographic. Social class tends to have an effect on the decorum of spectators at a game (Guttman 1986:173). I will illustrate Guttman's argument with my own experience attending professional hockey games. Those of a higher economic standing, those who can afford good seats in the lower bowl, closest to the ice, tend to be older, and are more likely to be more reserved when observing the actions of their team. Those with less money (and I include students in this group), cannot often afford to sit anywhere lower than the nosebleeds. To make up for being unable to see all the action that goes on below, spectators in the second bowl and higher tend to create their own action. Being younger than those in the lower bowls, they also have more energy, and I have found that their tolerance for alcohol is lower while their desire for it is higher. Hence, those who attend sports

in the higher bowls tend to be at least twice as noisy and active as their lower-bowl counterparts. Those who sit in more expensive seats also tend to have a better knowledge of the game – why buy good seats to a show about which you know nothing? There are exceptions to this, of course. Some people with less money are fortunate to have the connections or luck it takes to get tickets to sit in the lower bowl. I have been one of the lucky ones on several occasions – but I find that those like me tend to bring some of the spirit of the higher levels with us when sitting near the ice.

Highly-identified spectators, those who feel strongly connected to their team of choice, are more likely to attempt to influence the outcome of a sporting event (Wann et al 2001:4). They are much more active than the traditional image of the passive spectator permits. Those who scream obscenities at a referee making a bad call *should* know that their voice cannot be heard among the thousands present, yet they yell all the same. It is their way of becoming involved with the game, and (they hope) of having some influence on its outcome. Fans of the home team believe that, with the support of the majority of fans behind them, they have a higher chance of winning. So they yell.

Studies have shown that the myth of home team advantage is not really a myth at all (Mizruchi 1991:182). Although the technicalities of how it works are not exactly clear, it has been established that home teams in organized sports have a substantial advantage over visiting teams, both in terms of success, and in other, non-quantifiable and non-outcome-related measures of performance (Greer 1983:252). The influence of the home team crowd has been found to be strongest in indoor, enclosed sports, such as hockey and basketball (Greer 1983:252; Leifer 1995:83), and less influential in the later stages of playoff series, due, in part, to increased pressure caused “by a rise in self-consciousness as the possibility of victory became imminent”

(Mizruchi 1991:182). This home team advantage can mean, in statistical terms, that home teams are 30% more likely to win a game than their visiting opponents, who are playing on unfamiliar and hostile turf (Leifer 1995:82).

“The presence of an audience alters the entire meaning of games and game playing” (Bryan and Horton 1976:4). There is now a distinction between “play” and “display,” and the presence of spectators diminishes the play content of sport, which then becomes nothing more than a spectacle, a performance for the audience and not the players (Bryan and Horton 1976:4). With this in mind, it makes sense that crowd support and dissension would have an effect on the outcome of a game:

by their shouting, the spectators share with the team members the violent impulses directed against the opposition. This sharing of otherwise unacceptable impulses allows fierce competition between the opposing teams, perhaps causing the athlete to feel that he is only carrying out the mandate of his fans and, therefore, any evil consequences which might develop are not his responsibility. (Bryan and Horton 1976:4)

“Razzing” has detrimental effects on subjects performing a motor task. Booing of the opposing team by home spectators has a strong tendency to result in the immediate improvement in performance of the home team, and a decline in visitor team effectiveness (Greer 1983:253-255). This is exemplified by a passage in “Punch” Imlach’s autobiography, when he mentions that his team, the Toronto Maple Leafs, were playing so badly that their home crowd was booing them, and it wasn’t making it any easier for them to win (1969:57). He also hints at an acknowledgment of the powers of home advantage when he says

It’s easy enough to be aggressive at home. You’ve got the crowd with you. Any bunny rabbit can look like a tiger at home, especially if his home rink is Boston or Chicago. In there every time a home-team player looks hard at his check a cheer goes up as if he’d just won the world heavyweight championship. But you take a team from another city into one of those rinks and it is something else again. When every guy in the place is howling for the home team to clobber you, that’s when toughness of spirit counts. You skate out knowing that everybody in the

rink is hostile to you, that even the referees sometimes react to the emotion of the home crowd. Then you've only got two choices. You take the hostility and ram it back down their throats, or you let them intimidate you. (Imlach 1969:89)

Once they are established as fans, spectators also strongly identify with the successes and failures of their team. For a highly-identified fan, watching an exciting game of one's favourite team entails riding an emotional roller-coaster. There are many researchers, like Turner and MacAloon, who believe that this emotional arousal and the accompanying *communitas* leads to a kind of cathartic climax at the end of the spectacle. Other research has shown, however, that this catharsis does not really exist in most cases, and that sports "tend to increase rather than reduce propensities to aggression" (Dunning 1999:27-33).

Spectator Violence

It was not my intention in researching data for this chapter to examine spectator violence and the phenomenon of "soccer hooliganism" in Europe and all over the world. However, the majority of information that deals with feelings of *communitas* and nationalism among spectators inevitably leads to a discussion of spectator violence. In fact, this is the dominant motif for most works that focus on the actions of spectators. Much has been written on the subject and there is an exhaustive list of examples I could provide – but this is not the point of this chapter. I can only suggest that the reader review one of the many works on spectator violence cited in the bibliography to this work, like that of Ball, Bryan and Horton, or Collings and Condon, for example.

The majority of the information on spectator violence is focused on football. Its long-standing status as a religious and socioeconomic symbol has ensured that it has always and will always be surrounded in conflict. In baseball (although this is changing), the players and the fans pride themselves on their socialization to behave in a genteel manner; in hockey, the brutish

behaviour (generally) remains on the ice, although this may be because players are separated from the fans by a large sheet of glass. Since the installation of high glass shielding to protect hockey watchers from flying pucks and sticks, fans have not been as involved with the players as they perhaps were before the high glass went up (like during the Richard Riot of 1955 – see McKinley 2000). It requires a supreme amount of effort to get over the high glass and into the play. These who make it over usually fall onto the ice, and a concussion and a quick arrest are all they have to show for it. That said, there are exceptions to this: there are no professional sports in operation today (and I include basketball, golf, rugby, lacrosse, figure skating, and gridiron football, among others), where spectator violence has not been a problem at one time or another.

“If sport teams are points of identification with other systems, such as schools, communities, and nations, rivalries coming from other sources may be introduced into a sport contest and thus lead to more dissociation and, in extreme cases, to severe conflict” (Lüschen 1970:28). Football matches have started bloody wars in recent history (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:79-80). Hockey games have ended in riots and deaths from spectators trying to engage with the players on the ice by climbing the protective sheets of glass (Arms et al 1979:275). Inuit spectators in the Arctic have begun to change their nonconfrontational practices because of the aggression they feel while watching hockey games (Collings and Condon 1996:256-257). Football hooligans have raped, killed, vandalized, and destroyed property before, during, and after football matches in Britain so often that former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher considered shutting down the football institution for good (Burstyn 1999:200; Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:6; Redhead 1997:24). American gridiron football fans have destroyed sections of bleachers simply as a result of hearing bad news (Dunning 1999:173). Thousands of

spectators have been crushed, trampled, concussed, burned, and otherwise beaten in stadium riots all over the globe (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:7; Williams et al 1984:xxi).

With all this in mind, there is very little evidence to support the idea that spectators watch sports to achieve some form of emotional catharsis (Arms et al 1979: 275; Goldstein 1985:167; Guttmann 1986:154-155; Wann et al 2001:116). In fact, viewing aggressive sports only seems to increase spectators' personal aggressive tendencies (Goldstein 1985:168). Despite appeals to the good nature of fans, policy changes, and instigation of new laws, this sort of phenomenon has occurred for centuries (Guttmann 1986). Perhaps some spectators go to games because they know that the spectacle will arouse their emotions. Perhaps feeling angry and aggressive is better than not feeling much at all in the conformist modern society in which spectators live.

There is not a lot of agreement about what causes this violent behaviour. Some believe that it is caused by aggressive and violent acts on the part of the players; some by the disinhibiting affects of alcohol; issues of masculine insecurity, problems of class inequality, or simply because of the surfeit of emotion experienced in an over-hyped and oversold economic spectacle (See Arms et al 1979; Bale 1993; Dunning 1999; Goldstein 1985; Guttmann 1986; Smith 1983; Williams et al 1984; and Wann et al 2001). Because no one can agree on a cause, there is no set solution to the problem of spectator violence.

I suspect that, because fan and spectator attitudes seem to stem from the same roots as those of the players, by way of their socialization process, the solution to spectator violence problems is the same as it is for other problems in sport. The steps will have to be taken slowly, as this is a massive institution with several centuries of tradition backing it up, but the can be taken to instill a different set of values into the mindset of sport spectators and fans across the

globe. Shifts in dominant ideology take time, and so those interested in changing the values held in sport must be prepared to be patient and to face many obstacles along the way.

Nationalism and Values

Sport and nationalism are arguably two of the most emotive issues in the modern world. Both inspire intense devotion and frequently lead to violence. Furthermore, their fortunes are often linked. Sport is frequently a vehicle for the expression of nationalist sentiment to the extent that politicians are all too willing to harness it for such disparate, even antithetical, purposes as nation building, promoting the nation-state, or giving cultural power to separatist movements. Ironically, however, at the start of a new millennium both the relationship between sport and national identity and the fate of the nation (especially the nation-state) itself are being seriously questioned. Globalizing impulses are thought to be diminishing the significance of national identity in general while simultaneously weakening the link between sport and expressions of nationalism. (Bairner 2001:xi)

Sports are an important and powerful socializing institution in constructing certain identities, such as masculinity, or social class (Bairner 2001:1). Sports are seen as a way of bonding communities together. In the Olympics, the advent of television has enabled those who couldn't previously attend the Games to identify as a nation with the success of their athletes (Bourdieu 1996:79). In other international competitions, sports are used as a way of establishing a pecking order between countries (Jackson and Meier 1999:174). In football, the local nature of the teams encourages this view, in that each town identifies with its local team, but the violent behaviour of the spectators does not comply with this perspective, in that those who unite around their team often rebel against others, even from the same country (Bale 1993:175). Baseball celebrates its inception as coinciding with a split between British imperialism and American ideals (Thorn 1995).

As Burstyn notes, "different kinds of sport represent different crystallization of ideologies" (1999:30; see also Bourdieu 1996:80). They are not, however, intrinsically

associated with these meanings or values – and these values are not set in stone: “rather, a sport is an embodied practice in which meanings are generated, and whose representation and interpretation are open to negotiation and context” (MacClancy 1996:4). Sports fill a plethora of functions regarding ideology: they have helped to establish commercial values for human attributes; they reveal underlying social values and construct social identities, and, by this, sharply define social boundaries and enforce dominant hegemonies (MacClancy 1996:1-14).

In North America and Europe, this crystallization of ideologies includes a certain way of regulating violence (Collings and Condon 1996:257), and often involves ways in which different nations build up their own sense of national identity by degrading others (Skillen 1998:169; Williams et al 1984:131). In this section, I will examine sports’ effects on national identity, mostly as it relates to football and baseball. Hockey merits its own section.

“In almost every country in the world, the way that the national pastime is played is seen as a guide to the national character and identity” (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:ix). Both baseball and football have become cultural icons for the countries they inhabit. The way they are played emphasizes the way in which the people who play them were socialized (Snyder and Spreitzer 1989:43-58). Sport teaches people a way to behave that is valued by a particular social or cultural group (Snyder and Spreitzer 1989:50). Sports also reflect the esteemed virtues of each group.

Baseball combines residual and dominant themes, a throwback to its earlier days as a gentleman’s sport, and a modern commitment to reflecting the dominant hierarchies in existence in American culture (Burstyn 1999:31). Baseball’s origins are attributed to the British gentlemen’s game of cricket, a game played by the elite and the upper-middle class, where decorum and Christian values were emphasized. Baseball, on the other hand, developed in urban

New York and was quickly adopted by the working class, where it underwent the same transformation endemic to the professionalization of all sports – the increasing emphasis on sexual appeal and aggression (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:14-18). Despite this move, baseball has not changed as much as other American institutions of equivalent age: it still maintains the same “languorous rhythms and conservative resistance to innovation” (Thorn 1995:53). Players’ journeys through the American baseball system tend to reflect the values held in American society (although they are not necessarily consistent with behaviour): these are hard work, continual striving, and deferred gratification (Eitzen and Sage 1978:59-64). The competitive nature of baseball reflects the aggressive nature of American society, where increasing influence by the mass media and increased leisure time has put sports at the forefront of entertainment, and American fans clamour loudly to be entertained (Eitzen and Sage 1978:66-69).

Americans, enculturated by their immigrant forefathers to appreciate the value of hard work, do not like “quitters” in any aspect of social life, including sports, and they value conformity and conservatism in social behaviors: “Coaches, generally, demand that their athletes conform to the behaviour norms of the community in hair styles, manner of dress, and speech patterns (Eitzen and Sage 1978:71-73). This might explain why the flamboyant dress and attitudes of basketball star Dennis Rodman were never really accepted in American sport culture.

Baseball’s allure has been remarked upon by a number of great literary figures: “Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Thomas Hughes, Mark Twain, Thorstein Veblen, Robert Frost and Robert Lowell all have considered the value of leisure activity at one time or another” (Smith 1975:5). There is a poetry to the pace of the game

that makes it understandable why Americans like to contrast it with the frenetic speed of their modern urban society, and still label it as “the Greatest Game” (Smith 1975:138).

Football, on the other hand, is more of a universal game, and is played and celebrated, in some form or another, all over the world. It is the great equalizer of sports, because of its global nature, even though it is known by a different name in some parts of the globe: “when British soldiers in Afghanistan and southern Iraq wanted to befriend the locals, they played a soccer match. On Christmas Day, 1914, British and German soldiers in the First World War trenches did the same thing” (Szymanski and Zimbalist 2005:1).⁵ It has also, conversely, been the game where ethnicities can compete against each other for bragging rights – Catholics versus Protestants in Ireland, for example (MacClancy 1996:9). Because of this, football is often more associated with patriotism and nationalism than any other sport; these strong emotional attachments also tend to accentuate society’s hegemonic attitudes, to the point of discrimination due to race, sex, class, and language (Kirby et al 2000:105-106). However, because the British often hold to the “stiff-upper-lip” stoic belief, where such displays are merely manly ones and all in good fun (Hill 2001:283), football only serves to contribute to the self-perception of a nation (Krauss 2003:199).

The football players who exemplify these attributes are heroes in the eyes of those who adhere to the values they espouse: players are valorized as mythic heroes even if they are not great thinkers or theorists, and their ability to bring forth miracles attracts more faithful than, perhaps, the Church (Krauss 2003:200-201).

The elements of football nationalism that lead to conflict have been mentioned earlier in the section on spectator violence. Another sport, however, where conflict is key to its institution

⁵ The British hold that, despite football’s universal nature, the game belongs to them, as founders of the Football Association.

is hockey. If sporting communities reflect the ideology of the larger society, and, if we agree with conflict theorists that conflict is both useful and necessary to the smooth running of a state, then it is logical that hockey should reflect the values of a society that has been in conflict since its birth as a nation (Hill 2001:283, 285; Krauss 2003:207). It is also obvious that “many nations have particular climatic, geographic and resource advantages that can maximize the probability that their athlete will be successful” (Petrie 1975:214). This might also explain why Canadians think that they are the best hockey country in the world.

Hockey Country

Canadians are culturally diverse people, and these divisions run deep and along many different lines, such as language, ethnicity, and history. Canadians are influenced heavily by the French language, the British political system, and by American popular culture. Accordingly, some say that Canadians have no unique national identity of their own (Bairner 2001:115). Canada, however, is a nation of innovation, and Canadians have had a great influence on their neighbours to the south. Basketball, despite its massive popularity in the United States, was invented by Canadian James Naismith. Even baseball, that all-American game, can trace its origins to a gentlemen’s game in Brockville, Ontario. Neither sport enjoys the popularity or media coverage in Canada that it does in America, but the facts stand (Bairner 2001:121-122). Canada’s sporting community is renowned for its commitment to fair play and equal opportunity, and is determined to uphold these values. Canadians are also notably committed to physical activity, and approximately 40% of active Canadians are involved on a personal level with some form of sport – perhaps baseball and basketball no longer held the same set of cultural values that they once did, and consequently were dismissed from the Canadian mentality (Brackenridge 2001:17; Wilson 1975:157-158).

Hockey, on the other hand, is a sport that Canadians invented, and kept. Its roots run deep into small town community values, and it is celebrated as something quite unlike any other sport (Richards 1996). The game and its symbols are used nationwide and internationally to market the country, and this is not simply in terms of a particular team or athlete – “More broadly, there are artifacts everywhere that suggest the equations, Canada is hockey and hockey is Canada” (Bairner 2001:124). Canadians use hockey as a tool for survival in the long, cold, and dark winters, a pastime that keeps us active and keeps us going (Robinson 1998:1). “Hockey is a game with a tremendous grip on the Canadian psyche, and regardless of where one is in Canada, hockey will eventually turn up as a suitable topic of conversation” (Collings and Condon 1996:257). In addition to conversation about the latest professional statistics, there is also talk tinged with nostalgia about the pond hockey, road hockey, and shinny hockey many Canadians played in their youth – and continue to play (Gaston 2006; Gzowski 2004). Even if they weren’t players, the idea of pond hockey and the dreams of those who play it have become a romanticized notion that is unequivocally Canadian (Dyck 2003:55; Imlach 1969:63).

Generations of hockey fans have been adamant in their insistence that hockey is a truly Canadian sport, and history supports this idea.

Immigrants, mostly those from Ireland, brought a version of a stick and ball game called hurley across the water to Canada in the country’s formative years. They noticed that both the Iroquois and the Mi’kmaq in the areas in which they settled already played a version of this stick and ball game (some called it *hoghee*) – except that they played it on ice. For amusement in the long winters in the dark forests of Canada, the two groups played together, and the game of hockey was born and grew – unlike baseball and football, hockey began amongst the working class, not the elite (McKinley 2000:13). Like football stadiums and baseball parks, however,

hockey likewise became an enclosed sport, and it was indoors that hockey gained its popularity and character as a Canadian institution (McKinley 2000:12).

Two incidents can be noted when considering hockey's connection to Canadian nationalism: the first is the Rocket Richard Riot of 1955, and the second is the Canada-Russia Exhibition Series of 1972. In both situations, spectators placed their national ideologies and frustrations on the backs of hockey players – a sure sign of hockey's importance in Canadian culture. I will illustrate these examples below.

In the second week of March, 1955, NHL commissioner Clarence Campbell suspended Maurice "Rocket" Richard, star player for the Montréal Canadiens, for a vicious slash he had given to an opponent the week before. Richard was largely credited at that time for being the voice of the Québécois: his reluctance to learn English on a (at that time) mostly Anglophone team and his rural Montréal roots endeared him to the Québécois, and his harsh three-game suspension was seen as a personal slight to all French Canadians. Rocket's absence at the following game, on 17 March 1955, coupled with the presence of a smug Anglophone commissioner, sparked the rage of an already disgruntled crowd. Campbell, who arrived late for the game, accompanied by not just one but three single women (that one of these was his fiancée was not the point) was too much. Insults were hurled in his direction, followed by rotten produce. Several spectators physically engaged the flustered commissioner personally, but mass confusion didn't break out until someone threw tear gas. A choking crowd streamed out of the Forum onto the streets of Montréal, where they encountered a group of Francophone protesters who had boycotted the game and set up a picket outside. The groups combined and wreaked havoc on the downtown core. To prevent further mayhem the next night, city officials persuaded a reluctant Richard to appear on the radio to say that his sentence was justified, and that, if he

accepted it, his fans should, as well. The masses obeyed, but it was a bitter time in Montréal (McKinley 2000:2-3, 185-189).

Most people in Canada remember the year 1972, when Canada, cocky with its abilities as a world hockey power, decided to take on the Soviet Union and prove its total domination, in a “friendly” exhibition series held both in Canada and in the USSR. The Soviets figured they had put together a pretty good team, and wanted to see how they measured up to hockey’s progenitors. Canada cobbled together a team from its top NHL stars, and Canadian fans settled back to watch their team slaughter the Communists. To the nation’s dismay, however, the Canadian team was soundly beaten on their home turf, and so was soundly booed by its fans. Phil Esposito, a player on the team, went before television cameras and castigated the nation for its lack of support: “We’re doing our best. They’re a good hockey team, and we don’t know what we can do better, but we’re going to have to figure it out. But to be booed like this is ridiculous” (Esposito & Golenbock 2003:104). The Canadian team headed to Eastern Europe to face the Soviets on their home ice. Paranoid about living in the Communist environment in which they were placed, and faced with the privations that came from not being in a free country any more, the Canadian team, with nothing better to do, bonded with each other and began to work out together. They discovered the work ethic that had been lacking in the Canadian system, and, as they became better as a team, they found that their reception was better with the fans. Even the Soviet spectators began to cheer them on as they improved. Eventually, it all came down to the last few games, which Canada won, despite the odds that were stacked against them, and their success was largely credited to the work of Paul Henderson, a player of average skill whose four seconds of effort on the game-winning goal made him an instant Canadian hero

(McKinley 2000:260-271; Esposito & Golenbock 2003:104-117; Young 1976:32):⁶ “Canada won to great national rejoicing, but the narrowness of the victory did little to restore the self-perception of Canadians that their hockey players were the best in the world” (Petrie 1975:213)

My mother remembers that this series brought the country together in an unprecedented way. Carleton, the university she was attending, essentially shut down, as students and staff alike clustered around televisions set up in the hallways, in a way that I saw in Carleton’s hallways only during the attacks of 11 September 2001. She and her cousins joined the throng to watch this international game, played by international rules – “clean hockey.” And my mother doesn’t even *like* hockey.

In both of these situations, Canada’s national sport came under attack from outside forces – the burgeoning skills of other countries. In 1969, approximately 99% of the players in the NHL were Canadian, lending credence to Canada’s belief that its athletes dominated the sport. As of today, only slightly more than half are Canadians, and the rest is almost evenly divided between Americans and Europeans. Is Canada losing its national sport, and, incidentally, part of its national identity (Richards 1996: *passim*; Wann et al 2001:186-187)?

Perhaps, as a reaction to this, Canadian hockey associations are circling the proverbial wagons (although nets would make a better analogy), and bringing hockey once again to the forefront of Canadian consciousness:

In 2003, the National Capital Region (which includes the greater Ottawa area and the Outaouais region), with the help of the areas three professional hockey teams, the NHL’s Ottawa Senators, the OHL’s Ottawa 67’s, and the QMJHL’s Gatineau Olympiques, designated itself as

⁶ Interestingly, Henderson himself remembers it differently – his only wish was that his dad had been alive to see his goal, and his view of it was the only one that would have mattered (MacGregor 2002:1).

“Hockey Country.” The reasoning behind this decision is related to the rich hockey heritage in the region. The original Ottawa Senators were among the first NHL teams to win several Stanley Cups (as well as being the birthplace of the Cup itself), and the region has spawned a number of modern-day all stars. In addition, the region also plays host to over a thousand university, junior-level, amateur, and recreational hockey teams, as well as boasting the longest skating rink in the world, together with thousands of community and backyard rinks (Kyle and Hunt 2003). The region currently sponsors the winningest coach in hockey history, Brian Kilrea, and one of the best teams in the NHL today, the Ottawa Senators (CBC 2003). Ottawa also plays host, every year, to the Bell Capital Cup, a international hockey tournament for young hockey players all over the country, who come together with the idea of making friends and having fun (Kyle and Hunt 2003). Recently, other countries have participated in this tournament. Teams from Russia have formed lasting friendships with teams in the Ottawa area, and, in 2005, a few teams from as far away as China came to join the fun. In 2006, the tournament broke a Guinness World Record by bringing over 500 teams to the city.

This “Hockey Country” campaign is designed to put hockey more into the public eye in the region, and it is hoped that local businesses and other organizations will take a financial interest in amateur area of the sport (Kyle and Hunt 2003). The banding together of the hockey teams in the region was also designed as a ploy to strengthen support for Ottawa-area teams when they play against their rivals, namely the Toronto Maple Leafs. As a diversionary tactic to redirect attention from his budget cuts, former Ottawa Mayor Bob Chiarelli once banned Maple Leaf paraphernalia at the Ottawa Senators rink in order to boost support for Ottawa’s home team (CBC 2004a), and encouraged small businesses in the area to boost their own success by getting involved in the success of their local team (CBC 2004b).

Whether or not this ploy has worked, the region's designation as Hockey Country has succeeded in drawing popular attention to the area's (and, by extension, the country's) commitment to the sport (Stevensen 2003; Wikipedia 2006).

Conclusion

Most of the information I was able to gather for this chapter about sport spectators was outdated by at least ten years. The study of spectators seems to have gone out of fashion when incidences of spectator violence decreased in the 1990s. In addition, almost all of the data I found pertained to the values espoused by spectators of the great American and British sports, which are gridiron football and baseball, and football and cricket, respectively.⁷ For generations, Canada has been touting hockey as its national game, as a pastime that unites our tiny population across a vast and mostly frozen expanse better than any form of telecommunications or transportation network ever could. Hockey is part of the Canadian ideology. Why, then, is the emphasis on national values relegated to the depths of player biographies and taken for granted in daily conversation? There are plenty of nostalgic tomes written by journalists and players alike about the joys of the Canadian game, but here, too, the national connection is taken for granted, not explored. Where is the research examining the heart of Canadian values as they relate to the national sport? How have these values changed with the evolution of hockey into the vast commercial and international empire it has become? These questions are hard to answer, as the data does not exist. I do not think that it is accurate enough to infer answers to these questions based on analogy to the values supposedly generally espoused by the British and the Americans. They may be very similar to us in many ways, but if Canadians are so insistent

⁷ With the admirable (albeit abridged) exception of the work of Alan Bairner (2001).

that they are ideologically different, that their sports are different, and that they behave differently, then it must be because they have a different value system.

Some day in the near future, I would like to find my own answers to the above questions. These answers can only come through talking to Canadians about things that are important to Canadians specifically. Sports are reflections of society, and such answers cannot come about through comparison to other such societies:

Sport is, has always been, and will always be, a reflection of the mainstream culture or the society. Those who claim that we could or should keep sport free of politics, or free of commercialism, or free of ideology are fools. If sport were not such a reflection, it would be nothing more than an isolated sanctuary, an irrelevant little circus, and hardly worth considering. But sport is, as I firmly believe it should be, a critical part of the lives of every man, woman, and child in the country and in the world. Furthermore, it should be accessible, inexpensive, and fun. (Lipsyte 1985:120)

Because sport is such a reflection of its society, it stands that the problems we have in society are also reflected in sport, a subject I will address in the second half of this work. It is also important to note, however, that these values that society holds in such high esteem are often those espoused by the group's heroes and heroines:

This public myth about the personal value of heroes and goddesses is still sunk deep in our national folklore. It is not clear in what ways it survives but there is an argument to be made that it *should* survive and that, however *démodé* it sounds, a society without heroes is not simply without moral bearings, it is unimaginable. (Inglis 1977:76)

With that in mind, let us turn next to those heroes and heroines that reflect much of the values of our current society – the sports stars.

CHAPTER FOUR THE WAY IT WAS, THE WAY IT IS, AND WHY

The composite hero of the monomyth is a personage of exceptional gifts. Frequently he is honored by his society, frequently unrecognized or disdained. He and/or the world in which he finds himself suffers from a symbolical deficiency.

(Campbell 1949:37)

The last act in the biography of the hero is that of the death or departure. Here the whole sense of the life is epitomized. Needless to say, the hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror; the first condition is reconciliation with the grave.

(Campbell 1949:356)

The first part of this work examined the circumstances surrounding today's hockey game. We looked at why games are so important to the survival of culture, how hockey grew out of a meeting between two so very different worlds, and how this origin has served to unite a country so often divided. We also saw how hockey has changed over the years, and the ways in which it has remained the same – and some of the consequences of these changes and non-changes. In essence, this has been a summary of parts of hockey's cosmology: its origin myths and emerging axiology.

But what of those legendary players who helped to shape this myth? What about those superhuman heroes of the game who overcame adversity to make the game the greatest there is? How do they contribute to the myth's relevance in Canadian ideology?

In this final part, I will explore some of the players whose names have become embedded in the legend that is hockey.¹ In addition to providing the game with a strong foundation, these players have also become iconic to the development of the Canadian nation.

¹ Because of the popular nature of hockey's mythology, it stands to reason that information about these legends would be passed on, not just through historians, although biographies abound about the players of the past, but through more popular media, such as newspapers and the Internet. Some of the information that follows will have come from such sources, and its possible inaccuracies are tempered, I think, by the fact that these popular illustrations *exist* in the popular media at all, showing that the legends are still alive.

These choices are not arbitrary, as they were names that came up again and again in my years of research, but this is a mere smattering of the legends of this great game. Hockey has too deep a mythology for me to be able to enumerate all the great players in the game. These are also only the *players* in the game: hockey has also been dominated, in the past and present, by legendary coaches, managers, owners, and officials. It would be a Herculean task to illustrate the legendary upbringings of all of hockey's stars.

That said, it is my position that these following legends had something in common with that mythic hero – all had to face some sort of trial or hardship to get to where they are today. In league with Joseph Campbell's archetypal hero, all the legends below, of past, present, and future, underwent some sort of struggle before they became truly great. Those who never made it into hockey's mythology, those whose names are quickly forgotten, never went through that mythic struggle.

An example of one whose name will become forgotten in the annals of hockey history is Alexandre Daigle. Notorious only for his failure, Daigle was drafted first overall by the Ottawa Senators in his draft year and failed to come up with the numbers to prove his worth. He is now struggling to regain his success in the minor leagues overseas. Did he overcome some great hardship to be where he is? No. Did his parents fail to support him in his dream? No.

They never pushed. No yelling. No recriminations. No despair. No bragging. They were, in fact, almost precisely the parents who would win the approval of those who have studied the minor hockey phenomenon. One such expert is University of Ottawa sports psychologist Terry Orlick, who would end up working for the Senators and, from time to time, with a struggling Alexandre Daigle. After two decades of study, Orlick knew that the minor hockey experience goes wrong when "the outcome of the hockey game becomes more important than the outcome of the child." With the Daigles, the child was always what mattered first. (MagGregor 2002:220)

Daigle grew up in what is seen to be the perfect situation for his hockey development; however, the ideal environment obviously failed. Once out of that supportive environment and in the harsh reality of the NHL locker room, Daigle did not have what it took to overcome the shock and survive in the big leagues. He will be annotated in hockey history as a mere footnote of a bad decision made by the management of a contending team, and otherwise completely forgotten. It is the imperfections that we remember, the flaws in character or development that make someone unique, and so the legends we remember are about those who didn't have the perfect upbringing of Mr. Whatsisname.

Those Who Overcame

Fred “Cyclone” Taylor (1884-1979) was born in Tara, Ontario, but raised in Listowel, Ontario. He didn't stop there. Known as the first professional player, the first player to accept money for playing hockey, Taylor traveled throughout the country, plying his trade, accepting offers from the highest bidder and touting his considerable skills to get the biggest price. His confidence in his skills is reflected in his facial expression in period photographs. Nicknamed “Cyclone” for his dizzying rushes, Taylor is also known for having scored a goal while skating backwards through the entire opposing team (Hockey Hall of Fame 1996:21 [Internet], 2007a; Wikipedia 2007a [Internet]).



Figure 2

Hobart “Hobey” Baker (1892-1918) was arguably the first great American-born hockey player. Believing that good sportsmanship was to be valued over all else, Baker's intention was

to play hockey for the sheer enjoyment of it, and so he never played in the professional leagues, preferring to present his skills at the collegiate level. He had to compensate for his lack of size by becoming one of the fastest and most skilled stickhandlers of his era. The Hobey Baker Memorial Award is given each year to the top American college hockey player. Baker distinguished himself as a pilot during the First World War, but tragically lost his life as a result of a post-war flying accident in France in 1918 (Hockey Hall of Fame 2007g; Wikipedia 2007f).

Howie “the Stratford Streak” Morenz (1902-1937), a native of Mitchell, Ontario, was acquired by the Montréal Canadiens early in his career. At first, his now legendary speed was hampered by his opponents, and the subsequent criticism from the harsh Montréal crowd was a heavy weight on his heart, which was already wracked with homesickness. With the support of his teammates, he overcame his insecurities and began to electrify crowds with his skill and speed, and became hockey’s first real superstar, dubbed “the Babe Ruth of hockey.” He cemented his place in hockey history when, on 28 January 1937, he crashed awkwardly into the boards as the result of a check and shattered his leg. He died on 8 March, of complications due to the break. Officially, his cause of death is listed as a coronary embolism, but everyone who remembers him says he died of a broken heart, knowing he would never play again for the city that had become his home. Montréal united at his death, embracing their honorary Francophone by attending his funeral in force. Over 10,000 people arrived to pay their respects at the Montréal Forum, where Morenz’s body lay in state at centre ice (Hockey Hall of Fame 2007h; National Archives of Canada 2002b [Internet]; Wikipedia 2007g).

Maurice “the Rocket” Richard (1921-2000) was the first player to score 50 goals in 50 games in 1944-1945. A taciturn individual who kept everything to himself, Richard has become an icon in hockey’s history, especially for French Canadians. Considered too fragile to join the



Figure 3

army during the Second World War, Richard’s pittance salary as a hockey player forced him to work as well as a machinist. Richard overcame multiple injuries, many that would have been considered career-ending in his time, to become one of the most physical and skilled players the game has ever seen. He once scored five goals in a game after spending the day moving his family, household possessions, and his piano, to the third story of a triplex in suburban Montréal. His goal-scoring prowess made him a hero amongst the

Québécois, who viewed him as a modern-day David “sticking” it to the Anglophone Goliath. Struggling to overcome the language and class barrier between Francophone and Anglophone Canadians, Richard faced criticism both off the ice, and on it, sometimes getting into three fights a game. His iconic standing was established permanently the night of the “Rocket Richard Riot,” in March 1955. Tensions between the French and English came to a head when Richard was harshly suspended after a fight-filled game at the Forum. At the next game, fans assaulted Colin Campbell, the NHL commissioner, and when someone threw tear gas, the panicking Forum occupants emptied into the streets to join an angry mob already outside. The ensuing riot lasted into the wee hours of the next morning, and resulted in over \$500,000 of damage to the

businesses of downtown Montréal. Richard as an idol of the French Canadians, was later immortalized in Roch Carrier's *The Hockey Sweater* (1979), long considered a Canadian children's classic. The only thing that interrupted his single-minded drive to play hockey was his devotion to his family. He wept at the birth of every child, and once asked his coach, Dick Irvin, to change his number from 15 to the now-eponymous number 9 because that was the birth weight, in pounds, of his first daughter, Huguette. His death in 2000 triggered a huge outpouring of grief and a nationally televised state funeral (Carrier 2001; Goyens and Orr 2000; Hockey Hall of Fame 2007k; MacInnis 1998; McDonnell 2004:146; National Archives of Canada 2002c; Wikipedia 2007k).

Gordie "Mr. Hockey" Howe (1928 -) originally had to share his first pair of skates with his sister Edna. At first, they both skated around the backyard on one foot. When Edna got cold and went inside, Howe put on the other skate, and essentially never took them off again. Shy and unassuming, Howe was controlled by his overbearing father, who never thought he would amount to anything, and constantly berated him to stand up for himself. On the ice, Howe became one of the most vicious players in the league, using his elbows as often as possible. He was also one of the strongest, once scoring a goal after skating the entire length of the rink with two opposing players literally hanging off his back. Off the ice, however, Howe continued to defer to those he perceived to know better. As a result, his coach, Jack Adams, continuously domineered over him and shortchanged him in his pay for his entire career with the Detroit Red Wings. He is famous for the longevity of his career, coming out of retirement at age 50 to suit up and play on the same line as his two sons, Mark and Marty, in the now-defunct WHA, and then again at age 70 to play one shift with the IHL's Detroit Vipers (National Archives of Canada 2002a; Couch Potato Hockey 2003b [Internet]; Cruise and Griffiths 1991; Hockey Hall

of Fame 1996: 123, 2007d; Howe 1999; MacSkimming 2003; McDonell 2004:80; Wikipedia 2007d).

Guy “the Flower” Lafleur (1951 -) was also known as “the Blond Demon” for his terrifying rushes down the ice, his hair flowing in his jet stream. He skated like the puck was glued to his stick, and electrified crowds with his lightning-fast rushes. As a child, he loved hockey so much he would sneak out of his house at all hours to go down to the local arena in Thurso, Québec. As an adult, Lafleur led a hectic lifestyle, full of parties, drinking bouts, and general reckless behaviour. He lived like a rock star, and fans adored him. It was found, at one point, that Lafleur had an unusually large heart, and this was credited as the reason he was able to live the life he did and still play with such unusual skill and flair. He would often arrive at the arena four to six hours before the game, get fully dressed in his uniform, then undress and dress again several times before the puck dropped. His tumultuous life, however, was nearly put to an end in 1980, when he fell asleep at the wheel of his car and crashed into a highway fence. A metal post pierced the windshield, missing his head by inches and severing part of his ear. It was only after this incident that Lafleur decided to slow down a bit (Couch Potato Hockey 2003c; Hockey Hall of Fame 1996:168-175, 2007f; MacInnes 2004; McDonell 2004:99; Wikipedia 2007e).

Wayne “the Great One” Gretzky (1961 -) has been labeled as the greatest hockey player the game has ever seen. Whether or not that is so, he is certainly the greatest living hockey player in existence at this time. He reached – and broke – nearly every hockey record in history, and most of his records still stand undefeated. By statistics alone, he is the greatest player of the 20th century. His father, Walter, coached him as a child, and early on his potential was obvious. A star at the age of 6, the diminutive player skated with his large sweater tucked into his pants

and endured the taunts and boos of the spectators who thought he was taking attention away from their children. Even the parents of players on his own team criticized his play.

Daunted, Gretzky left his hometown of Brantford, Ontario, at 14 to play with relative anonymity in Toronto. His father warned him that the world would be watching him for the rest of his life, and they would be waiting for

him to make even a tiny mistake, and he took that to heart, living as a model player and citizen, struggling only to overcome the constant scrutiny under which he existed. His marriage to American actress/model Janet Jones in 1988 was treated as if it were a royal wedding. His trade to Los Angeles from Edmonton in 1989, while being regarded as the saving grace for American hockey, is largely treated as the greatest tragedy in the history of Canadian hockey (Cohen 2006; Gretzky 2001; Gzowski 2004; Hockey Hall of Fame 2007m; MacGregor 2002:77; McInnes 2004:70-71; National Archives of Canada 2002d; Wikipedia 2007m).

Figure 4



Stopping History

I would be remiss in my listing of hockey legends if I did not mention the passage of hockey's great goalies. Goaltending requires a special sort of person – one has to be a little bit crazy to willingly stand in front of flying pucks day in and day out. As a result, almost every one who has stood between the goal posts has an interesting back-story. Unfortunately, as with the players who protect them, there are far too many to mention. I cannot, however, be satisfied until I have illuminated those who I believe were quintessential to the game.

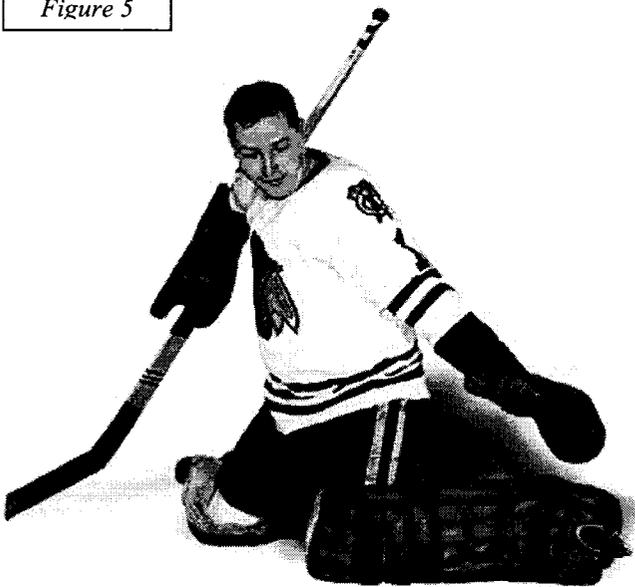
Georges “the Chicoutimi Cucumber” Vézina (1887-1926) was the first goaltender in history to record a shutout by leading his team to a 9-0 win over the Toronto Arenas in 1918. In 1918, he was also the first goaltender to be credited with an assist, helping with a goal from teammate Edouard “Newsy” Lalonde. In addition to his list of firsts, he also led the Montréal Canadiens to their first two Stanley Cups in 1915-1916 and 1923-1924. Goalies of this era were forbidden to fall down onto the ice to make a save, so Vézina perfected the early “stand-up” style. He was a calm, clean-living man who operated a tanning business in his hometown during the off-season with his family. It was his family, unfortunately, who was the source of his tragedy. He was a prolific and proud father – however, only two of his twenty-four children lived to adulthood, and that hung over him at times like a black cloud. At the beginning of training camp in 1925, it was obvious that Vézina was not in good health. He still excelled in the exhibition games, but on the night of the home opener, after a shutout first period, he collapsed in his net at the start of the second period against the Pittsburgh Pirates. It was found that he was running a fever of 105 degrees Fahrenheit, and he was soon after diagnosed with advanced tuberculosis. He died on 27 March 1926 at the age of 39, just after his successor on the team, George Hainsworth, had won the first Vézina trophy (Hockey Hall of Fame 1996: 35, 2007b; McKinley 2006:82, 100; Wikipedia 2007b).

Jacques “Jake the Snake” Plante (1929-1986) was also a pioneer for the game. Despite chronic asthma, Plante was one of the greatest goalies of all time, one of the first to skate behind the net for the puck, one of the first to perfect his stickhandling skills so he could pass intelligently to his teammates, and the first to raise his arm to let his teammates know when there was an icing call. He used to raise his arms in a “V” victory salute when his team won a key game, and used to knit his own underwear while traveling by train from game to game. He also

holds the dubious distinction of having his name misspelled the most times on the Stanley Cup. But his greatest contribution to the game was the result of an accident in 1959. Plante, who had been using a face shield in practice, but was forbidden to do so during a game, was hit in the face with a puck by Andy Bathgate of the New York Rangers. When Plante returned from the dressing room, where he received multiple stitches, he was wearing the mask, and refused to play unless he was allowed to wear it. His coach, Toe Blake, was livid, but had no choice, and let Plante return to his net. The Canadiens won that game, and, with the mask, Plante continued to help his team win many more – in fact, the Canadiens went undefeated for 10 games after the incident (Couch Potato Hockey 2003d; Hockey Hall of Fame 2007i; Mason and Gunn 1999:73-77; Wikipedia 2007h).

Glenn “Mr. Goalie” Hall (1931 -), like those before him, put his unique stamp on the

Figure 5



game. While in the minors, Hall perfected his own new style of goaltending – the Butterfly – a style that allowed goaltenders to go down on their knees to block low shots, drastically improving their goals-against statistics.

Criticized for a style that was seen as “flopping around” in goal, Hall nevertheless persevered. Hall did not wear a mask when he played, but he did not lose any games to injury from 1955 to 1962 – he played 502 consecutive games, a record that will likely never be broken.

Ironically, his streak ended not during a game, but before it, when Hall strained his back while

putting on his pads. Hall didn't like to practice, probably because he didn't like to face teammate Bobby Hull's famous slapshot, and he hated exhibition games, seeing them as stupid and pointless. He would often remain at his home in Alberta long after he was instructed to report to training camp, citing that he had to "paint the barn." Hall also had a problem with nerves, and vomited before nearly every game. Games before which he didn't vomit he played badly and self-consciously, and the sight of his legs in the toilet stall before a game inspired confidence in his whole team (Couch Potato Hockey 2003a; Hockey Hall of Fame 1996:113, 2007c; McDonell 2004:72-73; McKinley 2006:174; Wikipedia 2007c).

Ken "the giraffe" Dryden (1947 -), one of the lankiest goaltenders to stand between the posts, may have only played for the Montréal Canadiens for 7 seasons, but his statistics at that time are unparalleled by any goaltender before or since, and he holds five Vézina trophies to prove it. Dryden's struggle at this time was with himself alone. Torn between the desire to finish his education in law school and gain experience in the legal field and the desire to play hockey, Dryden, although very articulate and well spoken, nevertheless felt slightly detached from the rest of his teammates. His well-known stance of leaning on his stick both after good saves and bad goals added to his aloof image. His largest contribution to the game actually came after his retirement, when his 2000 Open Ice Summit report changed the way that violence was treated in the game. A prolific and educated writer, he was elected as Minister of Social Development for the Liberal Government in 2005 (Dryden 2003; Hockey Hall of Fame 1996:146, 2007j; McKinley 2007:307-309; Wikipedia 2007i).

Patrick "St. Patrick" Roy (1965 -) retired in 2003 with a record 551 wins – the most in NHL history, and is widely regarded as the greatest goalie of all time, but was first attracted to goaltending merely because he liked the thought of wearing the pads. Roy's take-no-prisoners

attitude to the way he played meant that when he was on the ice, emotions ran high, and this got him into trouble with his original coach when he was playing for Montréal. The coach, Mario Tremblay, was critical of Roy's broken English and criticized his unconventional goaltending style. It all came to a head in 1995, when Tremblay forced Roy to stay in net during an 11-1 loss to Detroit. Roy was recorded as saying that it would be the last game he would play for Montréal, and four days later, he was traded to Colorado, where he became the greatest goaltender the NHL has ever seen (Brodeur 2006:*passim*; Hockey Hall of Fame 2007; Mason and Gunn 1999: 81-85; McDonnell 2004:152; McKinley 2006:330-331; Wikipedia 2007).

Black Ice

The reader may have noticed that none of the players I mentioned above were anything but white. While there have been no shortage of black players with equal or greater skill to white players over the decades, because of racial and/or economic disadvantages, black players have not really emerged as legendary members of the hockey myth until just recently. The Maritime Coloured League of the early 1900s tried many times to challenge for the Stanley Cup, but were forbidden because of the colour of their skin, not their skill level. The first player to make it to the NHL was Boston Bruin Willie O'Ree, who played out an indifferent career in the 1950s.

With respect to black players of legendary quality, there are only two that come to the fore in popular consideration. The first is current Calgary Flames captain Jarome Iginla, whose career is in its zenith, and his place in history is yet to be written. He is a man whose scoring totals and ability to mix it up on the ice is only surpassed by his tremendous leadership abilities and his commitment to his community. It is only a matter of time until he stands among the legends of the game as the game's number one ambassador (*The Hockey News* 2005:11-12).

The other is goaltender Grant Fuhr, who was once told by Glenn Hall, “Don’t be a goalie. Goalies are insane,” and who describes his goaltending style as “mad panic” over anything else. He holds the record for the most games played in a regular season – 79 of 82 – and played with Gretzky in the heyday of the Edmonton Oilers. He also holds the record for single-season points by a goaltender: 14. He is one of only six goalies to reach the record of 400 career wins and has five Stanley Cups and a Vézina trophy to his credit. He published his thoughts of goaltending in 1988, which included his analysis of his life outside of hockey, which included dealing with a substance abuse problem, and being the only black goalie in the NHL (Brodeur and Cox 2006: 56; Hockey Hall of Fame 2007e; Mason and Gunn 1999:5; McDonell 2004:59).

Essence of an Era

Hockey legends are the stars of their era, and many pundits and laymen alike argue that you could never play one against another from a different time, like Gretzky versus Richard, because the game has changed so much. I think, however, that it also has a lot to do with the players’ sociocultural surroundings at the time. The legend’s rise to stardom depends greatly on the political and socioeconomic situation at the time he was playing. It may seem tautological, but I believe that *hockey stars are legends of their era because of the era in which they played.*

Let me elucidate with a few examples. Maurice Richard became an icon for the Francophone struggle during the Duplessis era, a time when the English influence was strongest in Québec, and the anti-English sentiment was at its peak. This same phenomenon did not occur with either Richard’s predecessor, Morenz (who was English and yet still revered), or with his successor, Lafleur, who was about as French as they come. It apparently depended on the era to make Richard a star. He said himself that he never thought he was the best player on the ice.

On the other side of the border, American hockey needed a pick-me-up. They needed someone who could stand for American values, of conformity, and obedience, and who could exude that sort of clean-cut idealism that Americans were so keen on at the time. So they picked Gordie Howe, a shut-up-and-play sort of character – it is ironic that Howe is actually a Canadian. In Richard and Howe, you had the clashing of Titans: French versus English, Canadian versus American. The rivalry between the two number nines still stands as one of hockey's greatest.

Move forward a few decades and you see Canada entering a period of economic prosperity, a period of self-indulgence and outrageousness, where rock stars were revered as gods. This is the time of the Flower. Lafleur was really only a great player for six seasons or so, and many blame his decline on the lifestyle that he led – but what a lifestyle! He drove (and crashed) fancy cars, wore flashy clothes, and was seen at the hottest clubs every night he was in town. He smoked two packs of cigarettes a day, sometimes stealing puffs between shifts on the bench, and then would jump up to race down the ice, his blond sideburns streaming in the breeze he created. He was the quintessential rock star for a rock star generation.

A decade later, the NHL was looking for change, something that would shake up the game that was quickly turning into a gong show, where pugilism was more valued than puckhandling, and young people were more interested in music videos than sports shows. Enter Wayne Gretzky, a skinny kid whose journey to greatness magically coincided with the resurgence in NHL popularity. Who better to show off the NHL to the new generation than a player who was *of* that generation?

O Canada

While the list of players above is arbitrary, I do not believe that it is any coincidence that, with the exception of Hobey Baker, all the players I chose are Canadian. Hockey is so

entrenched in the Canadian psyche that, not only are the names of the greats etched on the minds of Canadian hockey enthusiasts, but that the greats themselves, with the same sense of the history of hockey in Canada on their minds, used that influence to become a part of the Canadian Legend.

It would be impossible to illustrate to the reader the importance of hockey to Canadians without actually hearing about it from Canadians themselves. What follows are excerpts from hockey enthusiasts, players, journalists, and experts. These paragraphs will illustrate better than anything else the iconic importance of hockey in Canada.

To spectator and players alike, hockey gives the release that strong liquor gives a repressed man.

(Hugh MacLennan, in MacGregor 2002:303)

I began to think then that I would go back home, to my childhood home, and see the place again where we went sliding. Where we played hockey on the river. I would make the pilgrimage, for it had to be made.

I would smell the flat ice and the smoke over the dark, stunted trees again.

(David Adams Richards, in Richards 1996:7)

The room was already filled with players who are hockey legends, like Mario Lemieux and Steve Yzerman and Joe Sakic, and players who one day will be, like Jarome Iginla and Martin Brodeur, and yet here was Trent Evans, a perfectly average guy, a Zamboni driver from Edmonton – and how much more Canadian can you get than *that?* – who had just become a true hero in his own right.

The guy who hid the loonie at centre ice.

(Wayne Gretzky, in MacGregor 2002b:5)

And every kid over the boards listens for the sound;
The roar of the crowd is their ticket for finally leaving this town
To be just one more hopeful in the Junior A
Dreaming of that miracle play,
And going up flying, going home dying

(Stan Rogers, in MacGregor 2002:249)

Ice hockey for Canadians is a part of who we are. It's as natural to us as wine is to the French, as downhill skiing is to the Austrians, as business is to the Americans. Canadians grow up with an understanding of ice hockey. Everyone learns to skate. And most of us have played the game in some form, whether on

the street, on a pond, or in an arena. It is also very possible that we will have fallen in love with this wonderful, exciting, fast, addictive game.

(Bob Gainey, in Arnold 2002:1-2)

Then, the love drug took hold. Not that I felt a sudden pull for the cowboy-booted fellow with the hairy bum, but the E had its effect. I felt a great surge of love, it turned out, for hockey. . . . Suddenly, I saw hockey for the subculture that it was – tribal, fetishistic, Canadian – a ritual that had been cloaked against much of the outside world, sort of like mumming or falconry.

(Dave Bidini, in Bidini 2005:82)

I would rather have played for the Leafs than be Prime Minister of Canada.

(Lester B. Pearson, in Podnieks 2006:x)

The Canadian unity celebrated by the triumph of Team Canada in international ice hockey helps reinforce the hegemony of English-speaking, central Canadian patriarchy, and the legitimacy of high performance as the ultimate measure of cultural validity in sport.

(Joseph Kidd, in Bairner 2001:18)

The sound of the first slapshot, the first puck hitting the boards, was and is the first shock of psychic electricity that unites hearts and minds in this country. All that irrespective of regions, time zones or ethnic backgrounds, because if there ever was a visible, passionate and inspirational spirit of our magnificent multiculturalism it was, and is, hockey.

(Alasdair Graham, in MacGregor 2002:42)

Every night in Canada during the hockey season – roughly from the beginning of October to the end of March – 2000 hockey games are played in the system set up by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association. Every winter, more than half a million Canadian kids play in more than 3000 rinks. Every year, 1.5 million games are played and 2 million practices are held. In all, at least 2 million Canadians play hockey for fun, while more than 4.5 million are involved in the sport as volunteers, players, or employees.

(Ed Arnold, in Arnold 2002:7)

Sometimes it takes an outsider to notice the unusual in what might seem common to others. When Barbara Berson, the editor of this book, moved from New York to Toronto, she was struck by two very Canadian traits: one, the overwhelming passion for hockey, and two, the number of times during television interviews that players would talk about their fathers and the role they had played in their development as players. There was no sense that mothers were excluded – quite the contrary – but there was also no denying that the relationship between players and their fathers, who were often their coaches, drivers, patrons and friends as well, was somehow different, somehow more powerful than any father-son sports

relationship Berson had noticed while growing up and working in the United States.

(Roy MacGregor, in MacGregor 2002:2)

The stories in this anthology transport us back to a time when our game was still played in winter, in the cold, with freezing hands and feet. Our extremities were always in danger. Even the Original Six teams were ours then: Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Boston were not far from the border. The first two were only water away – and that was frozen six months of the year. The Rangers and the Bruins were always awful, so nobody in their Canuck mind bothered about them, and all the players in the world were Canadian, so what did it matter anyway?

(Doug Beardsley, in Beardsley 2005:9)

The symbolic importance of Rideau Hall – the idealized Canadian residence – setting up a skating rink in its backyard cannot be overstated. If Rideau can have a backyard rink, so can any other Canadian home. If Lord Stanley loves hockey, so should we. If his daughter, Isobel, can play on a women's team, so can any Canadian girl.

(Andrew Podnieks, in Podnieks 2006:12)

The kids who came through Peterborough had that kind of passion, an obsession that propelled them into the NHL. They loved to play or coach the game, twenty-four hours a day if they could. They would also do anything it took to score a goal or win a game. They hated to lose. They didn't play the game because their parents wanted them to or only when someone took them to a rink. They didn't play the game with the goal of improving their skills of making it into the NHL. Making it to the NHL was a dream, not a goal. They didn't play in those outdoor rinks, streets, parks, and parking lots thinking it would be good to *practise*. They never wanted to practise, they just wanted to play games.

(Ed Arnold, in Arnold 2004:333)

We never called hockey “shinney” where I came from. I suppose there are a million things to call hockey and none of them right. But I don't remember ever hearing the word *shinney*. When, now and then, I hear up-to-the-moment CBC reporters talking about shinney – as if this is the name that will reduce hockey to its embryonic, to its pleasant and nostalgic centre – it leaves me cold.

And of course we NEVER EVER called it “ice hockey” – or “NORTH AMERICAN hockey.” Let the Europeans and some Upper Canadians do so. All of these things are blasphemous to me.

(David Adams Richards, in Richards 1996:27)

The Maple Leafs had won something spectacularly unimportant – a game maybe, or perhaps they got a shot on goal, or managed to miss the playoffs by fewer points than last year. Whatever the reason, the entire city had spilled out into the streets, whooping and cheering. Later, as Ian elbowed his way down Yonge Street, he stopped. Looked around. There were men and women. Young and

old. Kids in turbans. Guys in tailored suits. Paunchy oldtimers and noisy “*whoooooo!*” girls perched atop jock-drunk shoulders. Jamaican kids and Vietnamese, laughing, chanting, fingers pointed heavenward. It was Little Italy and Chinatown, new Canadians and old, all jumbled together as they celebrated . . . The Game. Our Game. That singular common denominator that crosses solitudes, that unites us as a nation. It was a beautiful moment.

“So you’ve converted?” I asked. “A Leafs fan now?”

“Fuck no,” he said.

(Bill and Ian Gaston, in Gaston 2006:vii)

When I think of the backyard, I think of my childhood; and when I think of my childhood, I think of the backyard. It is the central image I have of that time, linking as it does all of its parts: father, mother, sister, friends; hockey, baseball and Dave – big brother, idol, mentor, defender and best friend.

(Ken Dryden, in MacGregor 2002:259)

Hockey is played in the cold, and a generation of movies from Hollywood that have influenced our outlook about ourselves has shown us that cold weather is something *abnormal*.

However we are the coldest country on earth. And everyone except the children want to deny it. Thousands of us froze our hands, our feet and our ears every day just walking to school. And where we went after school was to a cold rink to put on frozen skates to play hockey on ice.

So our hockey is evidence, to outsiders, of our coldness, and with our coldness, our abnormal lack of sophistication, etiquette, and probably humour. As I say, a thousand movies have been made to reinforce the stereotypes we use against ourselves.

Hockey now becomes a kind of verification for outsiders and for ourselves, of how Canadians hate to be labeled in the first place.

(David Adams Richards, in Richards 1996:40)

I couldn’t have said it better myself.

Conclusion: Polishing up the Ice

In this chapter, I have established that Canadians hold close to themselves an image of hockey as a great and noble pursuit, an idyllic pastime for whiling away the long, dark hours of winter, a pure and simple game that is as much a part of us as the blood in our veins.

But hockey is not the perfect game it is portrayed as in nostalgic stories of youth. It is a game with a not-quite-so-hidden undercurrent of darkness, which we will examine in the second

part of this work. However, as long as there are people who still hold in their hearts the view of hockey as the best game you can name, I believe that there is a future for our winter sport. It will not be easy, and change will not come quickly, but it is only a matter of keeping an open mind to things that are a little bit different, just like the stars above who were a little bit different, and who made our game the way it is today.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SWORD, THE SPEAR, AND THE STICK: CONSTRUCTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND THE MODERN WARRIOR

“For it is not war that is serious, but peace. War and everything to do with it remains fast in the daemonic and magical bonds of play” (Huizinga 1950:209).

Having established a base of understanding about hockey and its importance to Canadian values, we can turn to some of its deeper issues. These next few chapters will focus on the masculine aspects of hockey, and some of the problems associated with this perspective. Although women’s hockey is very popular, and boys and girls of all ages are encouraged to play hockey, the game at its highest levels is still entirely dominated by men, and this is firmly embedded in hockey’s history and ideology.

To quote Bruce Dowbiggin, hockey aficionado and author of *The Stick: a history, a celebration, an elegy*: “a player’s bond with his stick is one of hockey’s mysterious imponderables. Call it superstition. Call it whatever you like. Just don’t mess with success” (2001:126). The hockey stick has become one of the most recognizable symbols of Canada’s first winter game. To the people who use one, it becomes almost an extension of their bodies. Hockey Hall of Fame member Phil Esposito once said this of his stick: “I always skated with a stick. I don’t even know whether I can skate without one. You get a balance with a stick, *like a third leg*” (Esposito & Golenbock 2003:10, my emphasis).

In this chapter, I will illustrate that a player’s bond with his stick is not as mysteriously imponderable as it first may seem. In fact, attachments like those of a player to his stick can be seen with men and their tools and weapons throughout history and the globe. In this way, it could be said that the hockey stick is the modern warrior’s spear – in a westernized North American context, of course.

In the first section I will explore aspects of what it means to be masculine, both historically and publicly, and analyze it in terms of one of the more masculinized sports: ice hockey.

There is an over-abundance of current anthropological literature on women and sports; thus, I do not feel the need to explain just how women are slowly breaking down the barriers of male-only areas of sport. I will mention this subject in passing; however, I will only do so in relation to the male barriers as they still exist.

The second section will examine hockey as a semi-symbolic modern form of battle, to which men are best suited. I will illustrate this using a current advertisement campaign of the National Hockey League, and the repercussions of this in terms of both gender differences and in reinforcing the battle ideology. A more in-depth study of hockey as a battle will follow in the next chapter, where I will point out the similarities and differences between past and current ideas of war.

The final section of this chapter will tie the first two sections together, as I focus on a main symbolic element of hockey: the hockey stick. I will compare examples of various types of weaponry and tools throughout random points in history and geography that are traditionally male objects, and illustrate the treatment of these objects by those who use(d) them. I will then compare the use of these implements with that of the hockey stick. A brief history of the evolution of the stick will precede some examples of the ways in which hockey players treat their sticks. Some of the data for this section was obtained during my fieldwork with a university-level varsity men's hockey team.¹

¹ All fieldwork information was obtained with fully informed consent.

I aim to illustrate that the hockey stick, in its symbology, is the modern man's weapon of war. It is my aim in this chapter to show, by illustrating this example, that hockey is a far more complicated game than first impressions will reveal.

Real Men Play Hockey

As this chapter tends toward psychoanalysis, I will begin with some thoughts on people and power from Freud and Jung.

Jung found it hard to believe that man (and by this he probably meant humankind), for all his inventions and developments, spent his time evaluating himself, and humankind, as worthless, in the grand scheme of things. It is this "uncertainty of judgment," he says, that led man to this quest for self-analysis and self-improvement (Jung 1958:55). Freud spoke of people who admired those who were wealthier, more successful, and more powerful than themselves, and then spent their lives trying to make themselves in the image of those they admired – this, again, is the concept of the "postself." What he pointed out (and which we should keep in mind, especially when thinking of the world of hockey) is that those who are admired may be idolized by their contemporaries, but that their "greatness rests on qualities and achievements that are quite foreign to the aims and ideals of the many" (Freud 2002:1). What he meant was that those who were great were only likely appreciated by a minority of people in their life time, while the rest of the world had no knowledge or interest in them. With the rise of global media, this has lost a great deal of meaning in regard to famous athletes. I do find, however, that in regards to hockey, those who are revered are idolized by only a select few people, and most of those are confined within Canada's borders.

That said, Freud's thoughts certainly apply in the world of hockey especially, as it is a rather small sport in terms of world popularity. Those who venerate hockey players for their

strength and admire the game for its show of masculinity are those who understand the game. For the rest of the world, hockey and its gender issues are of little importance.

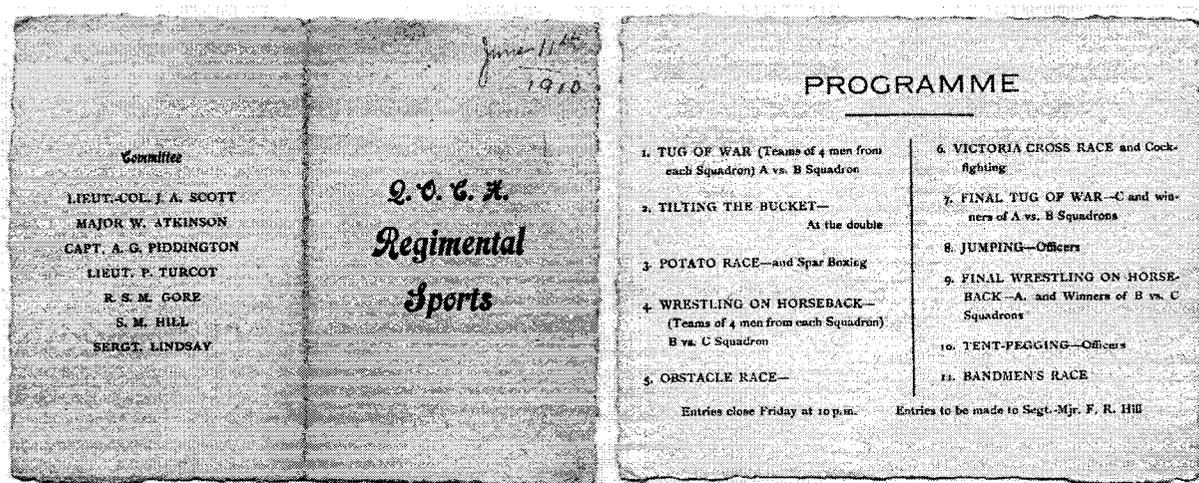


Figure 6

In many different groups of people, traditionally it is the men who participate in the more aggressive and physical sports, such as archery, spear-throwing, racing, wrestling, or any other sporting activity that would prepare them for success in battle. Hockey, and its various forms, like shinny and field hockey, are included in the list of masculine sports. Women are the spectators in these situations. The 1910 programme above is an example of the masculinization and militarization of sports. This programme was handed to women who came to watch soldiers display their strength and agility. They watched while the men worked, essentially; they were passive, while the men were active. It is usually only group games, like tug-of-war, in which women are allowed to participate (Foster 1944:197; Messner et al 1993:126).

Hockey is a very violent sport: hits in hockey, such as body checks, are intentional and they are meant to hurt:

Checking opponents is just as much a part of the game as passing pucks and scoring goals. A good body check is an effective way to gain control of the game by making the opponent cough up the puck. What's more, with an adversary out

of play and recovering from a blow, the overall ability of the other team is affected. (Haché 2002:101)

Hockey is not the only violent sport by any means: football and rugby, to name two, are equally as rough. But “there is a distinctive spirit that makes hockey stand out from the rest” (Haché 2002:101). In hockey, fighting and roughness are encouraged, and infractions related to these are not as highly penalized as they are in any other sport. It is this “culture of toughness” that has produced a number of hockey “enforcers” or “goons” whose job it is to engage in physically violent and highly masculinized activities, such as fighting (Haché 2002:101). Goons are not the flashy players on the team – their statistics do not show up in goals and assists. Instead, they show up as number of hits (checks) and penalty minutes in a game (Warren 2006:B1, B3). In today’s NHL, however, with its faster pace and emphasis on skill, not size, goons have been forced to become more proficient at the finer points of the game in order to assure themselves a niche in the ever-changing sport (Scanlan 2006:B1, B3).

Violence is encouraged in hockey, in its hard checks and spectacular fights, but none of it seems to have any serious consequences. Although injuries are frequent, none of them are grave, and few of them relate to these incidences of aggression. Protective equipment is designed to take the main shock of checks and collisions, and players themselves do not check indiscriminately: aside from the danger of injury, there is the danger of getting away from the play and possibly missing a scoring opportunity. Although many critics argue that hockey is a savage and barbarous sport (even though few of these critics have ever actually played the game), this supposedly ruthless violence is controlled in many ways. There are rules, after all, and some of them form an unwritten code, to which all players must adhere if they want to be successful (Haché 2002:103).

So what does this say about the men who play this game? The stereotypical “jock” is “always willing to ‘compromise his own long-term health; he must fight other men when necessary; he must avoid being soft; and he must be aggressive.’ By demonstrating this power and strength, the jock wins the approval of other men and the adoration of women” (Media Awareness Network 2005a). These elements are considered to be the characteristics of masculinity.

“Anthropology has always involved men talking to men about men, yet until fairly recently very few within the discipline had truly examined men as *men*” (Gutmann 1997:385, original emphasis²). Ironically, the study of men and masculinity did not really become popular until the rise of second-wave feminism; previous to this, being male was taken for granted in most studies (Marshall 1998:396). What, then, *is* masculinity? A basic dictionary definition would read something like, “the characteristics of, and appropriate to, the male sex” (Marshall 1998:396). This definition, of course, is problematic because, as with studies of femininity before it, masculinity is a social construct – what masculinity represents, from any perspective, from men, women, or anthropologists – is not exactly clear (Gutmann 1997:387).

Masculinity, according to Gutmann, has four concepts: the first is that it is everything that men think and do. The second is that it is whatever men think and do that makes them men. The third is that there are some men who are either ascribed or inherently more “manly” than other men. The final concept is that masculinity is essentially everything that women are not. In respect to this last concept, constructions of masculinity are therefore subject to men’s relations to women. In other words, women have to be present in order for men to be men (Gutmann

² I rely heavily on Matthew C. Gutmann’s work here in my discussion of masculinity, as the Brown professor is one of the more accessible and all-encompassing masculinist anthropological writers in action today.

1997:386). Anthropologists' role in the study of masculinity is in the exploration of these subjective perceptions "of men about being men, including the relation of being men to claiming, seeking, and exercising various forms of power over other men and over women" (Gutmann 1997:398). Because there is no real systematic theorization of masculinity, however, studies of masculinity tend to focus on one or two subjects, such as friendship ties, the body, or contests over power (Gutmann 1997:387).

One of these subjects is that of male spaces and "homosociality," male-only enclaves in which men engage in a form of "commensal solidarity" – but this exclusivity tends to be better documented than it is understood (Gutmann 1997:393). One of these segregated areas, of course, is that of sports. In sports, above many things, the competitive and physical nature of such activities as playing hockey entails an overt male jockeying for power. It is through this power struggle that men prove themselves to be men (Gutmann 1997:397). Notice here that none of these concepts relate specifically to the simple possession of male genitalia – masculinity is a cultural concept, not a biological one – testosterone can be a hormone *and* a metaphor (Gutmann 1997:403).

Because modern sport is still almost entirely male-dominated, it serves to construct a culturally dominant ideal of what is "exemplary masculinity:" "much of the continued salience of sport as an institutional site for the construction and legitimation of masculine power lies in its role as mass-mediated spectacle" (Messner et al 1993:122). Sports media has the potential to transmit worldwide images of power as being manly and masculine, and competition and violence as being acceptable as a natural masculine trait (Media Awareness Network 2005b; Theberge 1997:69). More will be discussed about the influence of the media on masculinity in a later section.

These images of masculine power, however, are being challenged by the dramatic increase of female athleticism in the past three decades: the combination of skill and force as purely masculine, or of men, muscles, and power, is beginning to disappear (Messner et al 1993:122; Theberge 1997:69). Images of violence and masculinity are also being challenged on the legal and economic front. Much recent work on masculinity has focused on questions of nationalism, war, domestic violence, and their changing perspectives on the same (Gutmann 1997:398): “the historical grounding of masculine hegemony in force and power has been eroded by the willingness of the legal system to intervene in domestic violence, increasing automation, and the growth of the service sector in the economy, and the declining importance of physical work” (Theberge 1997:70).

In my opinion, however, this challenged hegemony is simply a result of the changing subjective nature of the concept of what is masculine and what is feminine. I think that this is happening purely because more women are studying men and more men are studying women: it is inevitable that this would change anyone’s range of experience of gender definitions. Gutmann raises a similar point when he stresses the importance of incorporating the opinions and experiences of women with respect to men and masculinity – he just does not know how exactly to go about doing this, as, he says, “some anthropologists have argued that, as men, they are severely limited in their ability to work with women” (1997:400). I have found this same problem in my fieldwork experience with a large group of men. They simply did not believe that I could relate to their perspective, and did not afford me the chance to prove them wrong. The trick in overcoming, this, I think, is in prolonged contact, where a group of men or women can become so accustomed to the researcher that his or her gender is eventually forgotten.

Unfortunately, in the sports world, those who are involved in it have not yet learned to turn a blind eye to gender differences. The existing homosocial atmosphere of sport still bolsters the ideology of male superiority, and, in fact, seems to be trying to “reconstitute an otherwise challenged masculinity” (Messner et al 1993:121). Even though the “muscle gap” – the physical difference in measurable athletic performance between men and women – has closed considerably in the past few decades, the male ideology still stands, and female sports, even those with equal amounts of physicality and risk of injury, like women’s hockey, are not seen as “the real thing” (McKinley 2000:29; Messner et al 1993:122; Theberge 1997:70).

Women’s sports are trivialized because the language of the male ideology is still prevalent. Female athletes are often referred to as “girls,” and their athletic abilities are praised as signs of “confidence,” while male athletes are “men,” whose athletic success stems from their “strength” and “power” (Messner et al 1993:124). Anyone who watches a women’s athletic performance that is presented in the hegemonic language of men will derive meanings from the event that will be affected by this ideological framing of the contest (Messner et al 1993:132). This idea leads me to a discussion of representations of sporting events, especially through the lens of the media.

Fishbowl Battles

Historically, as it was men who were the athletes, so it was with war: men went to battle, and women stayed home. In his overview of the most famous conquests in recorded history, author Jared Diamond mentions women only in respect to their food-gathering abilities or as casualties of conquering looters. The word “woman” or even “gender” does not appear even once in his extensive index (Diamond 1999: *passim*). This suggests that – from the point of view

of a western philosopher of war – women have had very little impact on battle strategies in the world’s history.

As I have stated above, sports are a masculine activity, hockey especially so. The language and strategy that makes up the ideology surrounding hockey make it that way. In the same way, the same language and strategy of hockey make it a sort of battle on a small scale. As language is never truly neutral, an analysis of it will reveal “embedded social meanings, including overt and covert social biases, stereotypes, and inequities” (Messner et al 1993:122). The language of sports reinforces perceptions of “violent masculinity” in its praise of perseverant athletes who play through injury, in its glorification of the violent aspect of the game, and its discussion of the same using the language of conflict (Media Awareness Network 2005b).

Because of the language used in describing athletic competitions such as hockey, it is easy to conceptualize them as miniature battles: each contest has opponents who seek victory over the other. In hockey, players *wield* their sticks, which they sometimes employ as *weapons* used to *spear* others as they *battle* in the corners of the rink for *control* of the situation, or as they *challenge* each other to *duels* at centre ice, taking into account the *casualties* of the *contest* and, ultimately, *winning* or *losing* it all.

To me, hockey is a battle in a fishbowl, of sorts. The players glide and fight across a sheet of (albeit frozen) water, enclosed in a round glass confine, through which thousands of people are watching to see their next move. And, like the medieval battles of old, this small-scale skirmish is contained in an area that isolates those involved from the rest of the community. As in old-fashioned warfare, these athletes fight hand-to-hand, armed with their sticks (which I will examine more closely later), without the benefit of guns and explosives – a hard-fought and

strategic battle from which one side usually emerges as conclusively the winner (Lacey and Danziger 1999:157).



Figure 7

I am not the only one who sees this construction of hockey as a battle and its players as warriors. The National Hockey League (NHL), in an effort to bring back the excitement for hockey after a spat of arguments by the Players' Union and the League owners that meant a year-long lockout of the players and no professional hockey to speak of in 2004, revealed a new advertising campaign in 2005 called "My NHL." This five-part series of television commercials and print ads was released with the first television spot in September 2005. The spot, some snapshots of which are presented above, "depicts a hockey player preparing for a game with the backdrop of a mythical temple, like a Samurai *warrior* getting ready for *battle*" (Canadian Press 2005, my emphasis). These spots are intended to give fans an on-ice view of hockey players, their feelings for the game, and culminates in a final commercial with a fan's celebration of the game and a glimpse of the hockey player's Holy Grail, the Stanley Cup (Canadian Press 2005).

The initial advertisement attracted quite a bit of attention, mostly for its representations of supposed gender differences:

The spot opens with a quote from Chinese military philosopher Sun Tzu: "A clever warrior is one who not only wins, but excels at winning with ease." A bare-chested player sits on a wooden bench in the glow of a candlelit room with a backbeat of drums and rattling sabers. He is approached by a woman in a bra and

gauzy robe, who touches his shoulders, asks "Ready?" and helps him put on his shoulder pads and jersey.

She says "It's time," and he heads to the ice to the cheers of a man and young boy in the stands. The ad ends with "My NHL, coming 10.05." (Associated Press 2005)

This advertisement garnered much criticism from feminists, most notably from Martha Burk, who is renowned for her unsuccessful attempt to allow female golfers at the Augusta National four years ago. She has called the ad "gratuitous" because it portrays a supposedly scantily clad female in servitude to a powerful masculine figure. Burk objects to the commercial on the basis that it is ostensibly supposed to appeal to families, but instead appeals to men and sexist ideals. According to Burk, the woman is seen as a groomer, a sex object, the ad is encouraging sex and violence, and the young boy is supposedly a witness to an adult situation (Associated Press 2005; Nicks 2005; Westhead 2005).

The NHL disagreed with this analysis. Spokeswoman Bernadette Mansur was quoted as saying, "We're surprised that Ms. Burk would come to that interpretation. This ad shows no disrespect for women. On the contrary, the woman is the spiritual and physical trainer for the 'Warrior' and is his mentor, preparing him for the competition" (Associated Press 2005; Westhead 2005). Others have argued that, if anything, the spot objectifies men. Not much is seen of the female partner (who, in actual fact, is fully clothed under her filmy white robe); instead, the action focuses on the male hockey player, who, at the beginning of the commercial, is bare-chested and passive. The boy in question clearly belongs to the following scene, which follows the fully-dressed player stepping on to the ice, and so he could not have been witness to whatever non-situation existed in the dressing room (Nicks 2005).

What caught my eye about this advertisement was the battle aspect that the promoters were trying to bring to the game.³ The epigraph from Sun Tzu, a famous military strategist, was especially interesting, as I have often compared many battle strategies to Sun Tzu's terse aphorisms.⁴ What follows, then, is my analysis of what Sun Tzu might have had to say about hockey, were he alive in these current times. I will attempt here to show the similarities between hockey and small-scale warfare.

Sun Tzu advises that, "In night fighting use many torches and drums, in day fighting many banners and flags in order to influence the sight and hearing of our troops" (Sun Tzu 1963:107). This is strongly preminiscent⁵ of the fanfare, the loud music blared, the theme songs played, anthems sung, and bright colours worn by the fans and those surrounding the game to show their support for their team. He also recognizes the importance of home-ice advantage⁶ (and studies have shown that home teams tend to succeed more than visiting teams, partly due to crowd influence [Mizruchi 1991]): "Generally, he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the scene and rushes into the fight is weary" (Sun Tzu 1963:96).

Sun Tzu also emphasizes the importance of psychology in a game. The age-old technique of "getting a player off his game" is exemplified in the following exhortations: "Anger

³ In fact, I barely noticed what the woman was wearing, save for a passing thought that the commercial was a potential public relations nightmare, and a wish that there was someone around to help *me* put my equipment on before a game – if the woman had to be portrayed in such a role of power, why couldn't she be shown wearing a business suit?

⁴ For decades, people have been applying Sun Tzu's philosophies to many different situations, such as legal proceedings, conflict management, and marketing analysis.

⁵ Every anthropologist should coin a term in his or her career, and this one is mine. I find it problematic for something very old to be reminiscent of something that hasn't yet happened. "Preminiscence" is therefore something that is reminiscent of a *future* advent or idea.

⁶ Home-ice advantage is the belief that the team upon whose field/court/rink/arena the event is taking place will have a higher chance of winning over the visiting team, simply because they are in familiar and friendly territory.

his general and confuse him” (Sun Tzu 1963:67); and “He who intimidates his neighbours does so by inflicting injury upon them” (Sun Tzu 1963:113). The Confucian philosopher also had several strong ideas about players’ physical stamina in a game: “Keep him under a strain and wear him down” (Sun Tzu 1963:68); and “He wearies them by keeping them constantly occupied, and makes them rush about by offering them ostensible advantages” (Sun Tzu 1963:114). This is very similar to the technique of icing the puck in hockey, forcing the other team to chase it the entire length of the rink in order to regain control (NHL 2005: Rule 65). If a player is successful in these maneuvers, then he will encourage the opponent to make mistakes, some of which may result in costly penalties to his team (NHL 2005: Rules 25-31): “If quick-tempered you can make a fool of him” (Sun Tzu 1963:114). The player who is successful in getting an opponent off his game can then capitalize on these mistakes (NHL 2005: Rule 53). This is not to say that the player himself cannot lose his temper and fight; however, a good player will know that there is a time and a place for fighting, and he must understand the consequences of such (NHL 2005: Rule 56): “He who knows when he can fight and when he cannot will be victorious” (Sun Tzu 1963:82).

Sun Tzu is also a proponent of anticipating the play, of putting players ahead of the game: “Appear at places to which he must hasten; move swiftly where he does not expect you” (1963:96). Anticipation of the play is only possible with good leadership, and Sun Tzu’s advice to his armies’ generals is applicable to the captains and coaches of hockey teams. He stresses that “He who understands how to use both large and small forces will be victorious” (Sun Tzu 1963:82); that “Invincibility lies in the defence; the possibility of victory in the attack” (Sun Tzu 1963:85); and that “One defends when his strength is inadequate; he attacks when it is abundant” (Sun Tzu 1963:85). This relates to hockey in situations when penalties have occurred and a team

is either down a man (short-handed) or up a man (power play, or, in French, *supériorité numérique*) (NHL 2005: Rule 25-26). These are called “special teams,” and good coaches know how to put them together properly in order to play well defensively and offensively.

Success stems from the proper use of good players and good teamwork, and it is up to the coach to make sure this happens, for “Generally, in battle, use the normal forces to engage; use the extraordinary to win” (Sun Tzu 1963:91), and “In battle, there are only the normal and extraordinary forces, but their combinations are limitless; none can comprehend them all” (Sun Tzu 1963:92). Good coaching strategy is not the only aspect that Sun Tzu may have considered; the philosopher also spoke of due consideration of all aspects of the game: “By taking into account the favourable factors, he makes his plan feasible; by taking into account the unfavourable, he may resolve the difficulties” (1963:113), and then “He selects his men and they exploit the situation” (1963:93). This due consideration could not, of course, come without a full understanding of all the favourable and unfavourable aspects of the game, and the information comes from what Sun Tzu called “spies” and “secret agents,” but which the hockey community calls “scouts,” who “Determine his dispositions and so ascertain the field of battle” (1963:100) and “Probe him and learn where his strength is abundant and where deficient” (1963:100).

Of course, Sun Tzu’s battle strategies do not all fit perfectly to an analysis of hockey and masculinity. As battles go, hockey is (usually) not fatal, and its rules ensure that the same strategies are played out over and over again for decades. In any case, this comparison of hockey to a battle will help me to illustrate my final comparison of the sticks that players use to the weaponry of older forms of perhaps more serious warfare.

Weapons and Warriors

Following along the lines of Freud and Jung, the phallus is generally regarded as a symbol of male power, or, at the very least, of male fascination with the penis (Diamond 1997:145; Gutmann 1997:388; Jung 1964:81). In some cultures, men will wear an elongated covering for their penis, termed a phallocarp: it is “a conspicuous erect pseudopenis representing what a man would like to be endowed with” (Diamond 1997:144). I think that the idea of the phallocarp and what it represents is similar to what swords, spears, and even hockey sticks represent, albeit unconsciously, to most men. They are highly visible extensions of the masculine identity, and so it is that it is the men who wield them, not the women.

Edward Evans-Pritchard, in his various studies of the Nuer, came to notice the importance that a man’s spear held in his every day life. Evans-Pritchard reasoned that, as westerners who had no spears of our own, we would not be able to understand the significance of such an object; however, to a society that had no knives to speak of, save that used in the circumcision of boys at initiation rites, the significance of being in possession of such a strong and sharp object was not undervalued. Nuer men took great pains to care for their spears, constantly sharpening and polishing them, and rarely allowing them out of reach. The spear, to Nuer men, is an extension of the right hand, and so “stands for all that the right hand stands for, for what is strong, virile, and vital, and consequently for masculinity” (Evans-Pritchard 1956:233):

It is suggested that the spear as projections of the right hand symbolizes the vitality of man, the manhood of man with the associations of lineage values that go with it. It is within the logic of representation that we speak only of men. *The spear stands for masculinity. Women do not bear fighting-spears. The spear does not go with femininity.* (Evans-Pritchard 1956:236, my emphasis)

Boys are not allowed to possess spears, either. A boy's father presents him with a spear when he is initiated into manhood, and not before (Evans-Pritchard 1956:238). Among the Bunyoro, the situation is the same. At the funeral of his father, his heir is presented with his father's spear and stick and is inundated with information about his new responsibilities as patriarch of the family (Beattie 1960:65).

Men and boys are the ones who carry and employ these pointed and stick-like objects, not women. Among the Dogon people, it is the men who carry the *dòmolo*, a hooked stick use for many different purposes, like plucking fruit or as a light weapon (Calame-Griaule 1986). Like the *dòmolo*, there are many different uses for a hockey stick, as well.⁷ With the Orokaiva, it is the man's job to use the digging stick to plant yams and cassava and to make sago. Women and children are relegated to menial tasks such as weeding and grubbing (Schwimmer 1969:149; Williams 1930:21). In Icelandic legend, the masculine gods are those who carry swords, spears, and other weaponry. The aggressive Surtr, Icelandic god of the sun, carries a blazing sword of fire as a symbol of his status as a masculine warrior (Linke1992:267). The Japanese Samurai took their weaponry to an entirely new level of masculinity. Refinement and artistry were signs of high class and power, which was why the Samurai fought gracefully with finely crafted swords: to do so was the epitome of manliness. In contrast, the peasantry adopted firearms in order to combat the oppressive power of the Samurai. This ungraceful way of fighting, coupled with the distasteful nature of the weapon itself (it was a foreign invention), eventually led to the abandonment of guns in Japan in the seventeenth century (Diamond 1999:257-258).

⁷ Such as ice sails, catapults, pasta dryers, firewood holders, beach chairs, doll cradles, sundials, curtain rods, luges, travois, canoe paddles, quilt stands, wind blocks, water balloon launchers, pot racks, geodesic domes, lamps, croquet sets, windmills, stilts, trellises, hat racks, shoe horns, marimbas (Manchester 2002), and benches (Gretzky 2001:204-206).

Failure to make use of these manly objects in the way in which they are intended results in a failure of the holder's masculinity. Among the Ohafia Igbo, whose ancestors were legendary warriors, for a warrior to come back from battle with his sword unbloodied and without the head of an enemy in his hands was to be branded a coward and to be ostracized from community life (McCall 2000:79-80). Conversely, women who rejected all cultural constructs of femininity could then take up masculine behaviors. There are tales among the Chuckchee of girls rejecting the life of a woman and adopting male behaviors and dress, and, most notably, *carrying a spear* (Borogaz 1904:455). Another tale, this time of a widow in the West Indies, has her cutting her hair to look like a man, "putting on masculinity and virility," and going off to war with a *wooden sword* to avenge the death of her husband, who was eaten by the enemy (Thevet 1928:250). Nuer women, after passing through menopause, could then enter into more masculine tasks, as they were no longer at risk of defiling them with the taint of their reproductivity. One of these tasks included employing the *digging stick* in the garden (Hutchison 1996:182).

Just as language characterizes concepts of battle and gender in sports, so it also characterizes objects as gendered in different cultures. For example, in the Sa'Dan-Toraja community, the man's "sword" is his weapon of violence, whereas the woman's "sword" is her weaver's beam (Noo-Palm 1986:329). Similarly, Maasai language

distinguishes by the article two genders or classes answering approximately to masculine and feminine. As a general rule the former signifies big, strong, and masculine; whilst the latter may be taken to mean something of a weak or feminine nature, and also of a diminutive or affectionate character. (Hollis 1905:9)

In this way, an object in a man's hands may be called a "sword," while in a woman's hand it is just a "knife" (Hollis 1905:9). These examples go to show that it is masculinity that is wanted in warfare, and those who do not display masculine qualities are not welcome on the battle field.

As exemplified with the Nuer, objects of war, such as swords and spears, or axes and arrows, are not simply items to be used in battle and then discarded. As extensions of self, they are meant to be cared for as such, and this is evident in markings and decoration on the weaponry recovered in archaeological digs, because why bother ornamenting something that means nothing at all?

Evidence from the Battle of Hastings indicates that archers could propel their iron-tipped arrows anywhere between one hundred and three hundred yards away. Excavations have uncovered English arrows that bear personal markings, which suggest, as a beaten iron arrow tip represented a substantial investment on the part of the person who made it, that he wanted to retrieve it after a battle (Lacey and Danziger 1999:155). Atlatls, spear-throwers, have been uncovered in South America showing skillfully carved surfaces indicative of a sacred or ceremonial object, although not one necessarily intended for real use (Bushnell 1905:218). Lance-butts and curved swords have been removed from tells in the Middle East and the dunes of Egypt upon which are inscribed not only the markings of the designer and craftsman, but exhortations to the gods for repeated success in combat (Gordon 1958:23; Serjeant 1953:120; Speiser 1933:12-13).

Skillfully constructed and decorated weapons were also signs of high status, much like the swords of the samurai. A carefully wrought war hammer found in a museum in Venice shows markings that imply it was owned by the Carara family of Padua. One can only assume that this means the axe's owners were proud to possess such an ornate object (de Cosson

1923:191). Even in more industrialized and supposedly genteel European countries, as late as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (and probably even today), having a beautiful weapon at one's side was the ultimate in high-status male accessories (Nickel and Pyhrr 1982:25-26).

Hockey sticks, although much simpler than Renaissance glaives and smallswords, are nonetheless not simply pieces of curved wood. In fact, they have a history⁸ of their own, and each stick is appraised not only for its craftsmanship and durability, but for what it brings to the performance of the player who uses it.

The original hockey stick was carved from alder trees by the Mi'kmaq of Nova Scotia, and they used it to play their winter game of Oochamkuntl. When the Irish settlers came across the water to help to build Europe's idea of a country, they brought with them the game of hurley, which was rather similar to the game the natives were playing. The Mi'kmaq then created a modified version of their original game, adopting some of the rules of hurley, and moved the game onto the ice. They called this new game Alchamadijk. The settlers soon took this game, which they called hockey, into their towns and settlements, but the best stick carvers remained the Mi'kmaq. The Mi'kmaq made the best sticks out of hornbeam (also called ironwood, for its strength) roots, which were naturally bent at the proper angle, and, as a root system, were made of the strongest wood in the tree, with a grain that flowed naturally from trunk to root, to the shaft and blade of the hockey stick. When the hornbeam groves eventually wore out, the Mi'kmaq switched to yellow birch, a more flexible type of wood. When manufacturing companies took over, they tried to use the same technique. Starr Manufacturing, of Dartmouth,

⁸ For this particular history, I will rely exclusively on the work of Bruce Dowbiggin, who, through many years of research and effort, gathered together from various sources all the information he could find, on the evolution of the hockey stick. To ignore his work, or to fail to give it its full credit would make for a severely under-researched representation.

Nova Scotia, sold its first line of sticks under the Mic-Mac brand name.⁹ Starr was the first to dip its Mic-Mac and its Rex brands in oil, giving the sticks a dark, rich finish, and making them nearly indestructible in the harsh conditions of what was then an outdoor winter game (Dowbiggin 2001:8-17).

As demand for sticks increased, available groves of appropriately bent wood decreased. Steam-bent sticks began to replace carved versions. The first of these were developed by a company out of Hespeler, Ontario, in the 1920s. Steam-bent sticks, however, had a tendency to return to their original shape after extended use, and so another solution was needed. Two-piece sticks began to be developed, but manufacturers such as Hespeler had difficulty maintaining the integrity of the glue that held the blade to the shaft. In very cold weather, the glue became brittle and would often shatter. This problem was later solved with a series of rivets. Hespeler is also credited with the invention of the modern goaltender's stick at this time, with its three-piece design and strong resemblance to a warped cricket bat. As competition for the stick market increased, more and more companies, like CCM and Northland, began to take up stick-making, and stores were flush with sticks sporting the names of those who had made them (Dowbiggin 2001:27-33).

In the 1930s, like many companies battered by the Depression, Starr Manufacturing got out of the stick business, selling its interest to Hespeler. NHL living legend Bobby Hull remembers starting his famous career with Hespeler-made Mic-Mac sticks in the 1940s and 1950s. As for stick construction, elm trees replaced the yellow birch, and white ash eventually replaced elm, as it was more plentiful and more flexible. The majority of the sticks made during the famous Original Six era (1942-1967) were made of white ash. This golden age of hockey

⁹ I have seen a preserved grove of yellow birch, still standing outside the old Starr Manufacturing building in Dartmouth, which is now owned by CCM.

also meant a golden age of commercial success for stick makers, who began to specialize in producing only sticks, and no longer making the automobile parts and implement handles that were their original bread and butter. As minor and junior hockey began to expand in popularity and registration numbers, the older companies' domination of the market was lessened somewhat by the distribution of companies like CCM, Sherwood (now Sher-Wood), and Victoriaville, among others, in the junior hockey market in Québec. Hespeler, however, remained big in Ontario, and Eaton's and the Hudson's Bay Company provided the distribution of all these brands of sticks to those areas of Canada too far away to receive them otherwise. However, Hespeler and its famous Mic-Mac brand passed out of circulation when Seagram's the company that owned Hespeler at the time, sold its rights to Cooper in 1972. Cooper represented the Canadian division of an international stick-making partnership with companies across Canada, the United States, and Europe. In 1993, Cooper was acquired by Bauer, the company famous for its well-made skates, and, in 1999, Bauer was incorporated by Nike Hockey Inc., an international company that still keeps its head offices in Montréal. Traditional all-wood sticks are still made in the same location as the old Hespeler factory, which is now in a suburb of Cambridge, Ontario (Dowbiggin 2001:34-43).

In 1972, with the inception of the World Hockey Association, the existence of two professional leagues made competition for professional player sponsorship of stick brands very fierce. People were more likely to buy a stick that they knew their favourite player used than one which had no such association. This led to the beginnings of the



Figure 8

flashy logos and graphics that exist on modern sticks, advertising the company they came from. Ken Dryden, a notable Canadian politician and former notable goaltender for the Montréal Canadiens, was the unwitting inspiration behind the super-sizing of company logos on goaltender's sticks. His habit of leaning on his stick during lulls in play was caught on television, and the company who made his stick, Sher-Wood, decided that if he was going to give them a billboard, they were going to use it.

Other famous players, like Guy Lafleur, have become poster boys for one product or another, after having success with a certain brand. It became even hard to compete for player sponsorship, however, with the new influx of sticks from Europe, from companies such as KOHO, Jofa, and Titan. It was the Finns and their company, KOHO, that revolutionized the art of stick making, however. In the Original Six era, an average stick could weigh as much as a kilogram, and players believed that they would be able to shoot harder and faster if their sticks were significantly lighter. But how to make a wooden stick lighter without causing it to snap like a twig? The composite stick was born in the 1970s. A company out of Drummondville, Québec began making fiberglass stick shafts with wooden cores. The Finns then modified this by taking lightweight North American wood and laminating as many as five thin pieces of it together to form a flexible and feather-light shaft (Dowbiggin 2001:54-64).

Fibreglass technology may have been popular at this time, but consumers who had originally judged the quality of a stick by looking at the grain of the wood were not impressed with the jaundiced yellow colour of the new sticks. Canadien, a Québec-based company, began painting their sticks white to hide the colour, and they were soon all the rage. This meant that no grain at all could be seen, and Titan soon took advantage of this. Down to poor-quality wood after running out of knot-free timber, Titan was forced to make second-class sticks. To hide the

deficiencies, Titan painted one shipment white with red lettering, and another red with white lettering. This made its players – especially Wayne Gretzky – stand out on the ice with their flashy new sticks. No one noticed the sub-par quality of the wood – they only noticed the colours, and soon sticks were appearing on store shelves in every colour of the rainbow. In 1980, Easton, an American manufacturer of baseball bats, decided to carry its new aluminum-bauxite technology to hockey stick shafts. While these new shafts were lightweight and relatively indestructible, the cold-to-the-touch sticks were too stiff and often left players with a buzzing or ringing sensation in their hands after taking slapshots. In 1982, this problem was solved by making the sticks of graphite compounds, which combined both the best qualities of wood, for its flexibility, with aluminum, for its strength and light weight. Today, the majority of players in the NHL are using these composite sticks. They are lighter and more flexible than traditional all-wood sticks, but many players complain that they break easily on hard slapshots, and that the vibration of the puck doesn't travel as well through the shaft, so there is a move by some players in the NHL to bring back the old-fashioned wooden sticks (Dowbiggin 2001:72-76).

There are now regulations surrounding what is acceptable for a hockey stick in terms of blade size, curvature, length, and shaft length. Players are permitted, however, to apply different colours of what is known as stick tape, a stretchy adhesive ribbon designed to increase friction on the blade and shaft of the stick, to any part of the stick that they see fit. Aside from a mandatory knob of white tape at the tops of their sticks, goaltenders are allowed to do the same (Harari and Ominsky 2002:8-9; NHL 2005: Rule 19). The way in which players tape their sticks and care for them varies as much as each individual player's physiognomy and playing style.

Many players alter their sticks through planing the blades, bending them, sanding them, and shaving off miniscule amounts from the top of the shaft in order to get the exact size, shape, and angle of curvature that they want – all within the rules, of course. Each player’s stick is as individual as his success. Many stick companies will create moulds for sticks adhering to star players exact specifications. Some prominent players are also known for their unorthodox treatment of their sticks. Some will talk to their sticks, kiss them, tape them artistically, sleep with them if they are serving their owners well, or leave them in the toilet if they are not (Dowbiggin 2001: *passim*; Wakefield 2005). Ken Dryden, the man responsible for some of the success of stick marketing, used to use his stick as a silent way of communicating with his opponents and the audience about his performance:

I’m not sure when I began leaning on my stick. Perhaps at Cornell, perhaps sooner; it was a resting position at first, a habit, in time a personal trademark of sorts, and though I’m never conscious of doing it, after a good save or a bad goal I always hold the pose a little longer, as if wanting to deliver a message. Wishing to appear crushingly within myself – “A great save?” it says, with curious indifference, “Not even a test. You might as well give up.” A bad goal? In a quietly defiant way it reminds fans and opponents, “You’ll never get to me.” (Dryden 2003:220)

One does not have to be a professional player to be particular about a hockey stick. In my research with university-level hockey players, each player was adamant about his specific preparation of the stick. Even a player who constantly broke sticks was still particular about the way he taped them – “white on the knob, black on the blade” – and the supposedly different physical qualities of different colours of stick tape (LeBlanc 2005). Some players remarked that, should they use a different colour of tape on their stick than that to which they were accustomed, it might, in fact, throw them off their own game (Bliss 2005; Hérard 2005). Others were particular about what sections of their sticks warranted taping, and even gave precise measurements and directions as to where the tape should begin and end (McLeod 2005; Smith

2005). Still others applied other substances to their sticks in order to either increase or decrease friction, both on the shaft, against their gloves, or on the blade, against the ice or the puck (Bliss 2005; McLeod 2005). For most players, taping their sticks is part of their pre-game ritual (Wakefield 2005), and each player has his own method of doing so. One player I interviewed described to me in detail how he went to the sixth row in the stands (because he wore jersey number 6) and taped his stick, whereupon he would hold it in his hands and look at the empty rink and visualize his success in the upcoming game (Hérard 2005). The stick, as a main focus of a player's mental and physical energy in pre-game preparations, is his main target of praise or blame, depending on his success. Phil Esposito's reference to the stick as a third leg comes to mind here. A hockey stick seems, to me, to be as important to a hockey player as a Nuer man's spear is to his identification of himself as a Nuer man.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to show the complex and multi-dimensional aspect of hockey by examining the masculinized ideology that surrounds the game, as it does with most sports. I have illustrated that hockey, with its rules, strategy, language, and tools of the trade, bears a remarkable resemblance to traditional hand-to-hand combat, and that, perhaps, it is from this that the ideology stems.

I have not tried to *prove* that, subconsciously, every hockey player hefts his treasured weapon and marches off to war with every game he plays. In that context, my arguments come across as rather preposterous, as sometimes, a stick is, indeed, just a stick. However, these arguments are intended to show, in only one aspect, that the game of hockey is far more complex and has many more levels than most people care to think about.

Certainly, on some level, professional hockey is a throwback to the days when people would gather to watch armed knights attempt to dismember each other, and I will elaborate upon this further in the next chapter. On another, watching it is a harmless way in which to unwind after enduring the worries of the workaday world. Hockey is far too complex to be dismissed as savage and barbarous after no more than a second glance. It will take many, many gazes into the fishbowl to arrive at any sort of conclusion at all.

CHAPTER SIX

FISHBOWL BATTLES: NOTIONS OF MASCULINITY AND AGGRESSION IN MALE SPORTS

“Play:” That is the word. We come back to that. The “play” of a culture is a condition of its adequacy, of permission of access granted to, and taken for granted by, all the members of a history. So a common and equal culture will be a playful one, one which expresses, defines, and symbolizes glee, delight, gaiety. If it must be playful, it must be severe as well. For his cultural life symbolizes a man’s striving, his restless dissatisfactions with his condition, his strenuous, uncertain labour to attain the best. Driven by his contradictions, by desire and its frustration, he struggles into articulation, into language, or into the language of gesture. (Inglis 1977:43)

There is a marked difference between play and professional sports these days. There is much in professional sport that contradicts the above statement, and which will be discussed in later chapters. For example, feminism has only very recently begun to enter the gender-imbalanced and unequal world of sports. So far, its impact has been minimal. Modern sports, especially professional team sports, remain a holdout against the perceived encroachment of femininity into a closed masculine community. Outwardly, the sporting community embraces gender equality, while the inner sanctum of professional sports is still as misogynistic as it ever was. I will illustrate this further in the next two chapters.

Males in sports are socialized at a young age to believe that masculinity is paramount, and they are instructed, in closed-off areas of the community, about the “inherent” characteristics of manliness. In sports, the pressure to maintain this image is very intense, and young athletes are trained to exhibit these characteristics via a method very similar to that used in the military. Much of professional sports’ attitudes and practices can be likened to the process of militarization, especially where it concerns violence, and these practices and attitudes have not changed much over the centuries.

This chapter will address these issues by illuminating the male socialization process, with an emphasis on the male-only atmosphere in which athletes find themselves. I will also illustrate herein how this socialization process affects those who are not perceived as masculine (i.e., females and homosexuals¹). I will close the chapter by analyzing (with historical background) how this process has turned today's male professional athletes into modern warriors.

Social Masculinity and Male Identity Crisis

“Sport is an embodied practice in which meanings are generated, and whose representation and interpretation are open to negotiation and context” (MacClancy 1996:4). Certain sports, like the rituals from which they derive, are not intrinsically associated with a set of values and meanings – they simply encompass and magnify those values and meanings which are espoused in the community at large (Schechner 2003:109). Like other forms of ritual, sports can fulfill a number of functions, but, like most formalized rituals, sports tend to emphasize already established boundaries of moral and political communities, and provide a physical expression to certain social values (Bairner 2001:1). In doing this, and in reflecting these values, sports also “assist in the creation of new social identities” (MacClancy 1996:7). One of these social identities is that of the male athlete.

Researchers generally agree that parents act as “reference others” for their children, meaning that children learn much about what is and is not appropriate behaviour from their parents. This referencing also includes attitudes about physical violence: studies have shown that children who come from homes where they are abused or they witness abuse on a regular basis are more likely to be more aggressive, as they see physical violence as normative: “such

¹ I will not address lesbianism in this paper, as this paper deals with men. However, many women who excel as athletes are often targeted as lacking in certain aspects of femininity, and are therefore labeled lesbians (See Messner 2002).

parent-child interaction may be categorized as indirect or direct training in violence” (Smith 1983:75). Other authority figures, such as coaches, have a similar effect in the socialization of young athletes (Vaz 1982:135), and many coaches encourage athletes to play aggressively, which includes fighting and other “assaultive acts,” “both for what it symbolizes (gameness and strong character) and for its utility in winning games and enhancing players’ occupational careers” (Smith 1983:84). Even for nonathletes, the effects of this so-called “varsity syndrome”² are felt pervasively, from early childhood through to old age (Lipsyte 1985:112). Players are also socialized to the effect that the rules that govern them are not necessarily as set in stone as they may at first appear: due to their training, many athletes will “very likely infer normative game rules while being taught to perform illegitimate acts in the most efficient manner – for example, how to avoid being detected” (Vaz 1982:79). This normalization of deviance is not a new phenomenon.

The ideal of intensified manly behaviour has been labeled by many researchers as “hypermasculinity,” and it apparently made its appearance in the sporting community in the late nineteenth century, with the professionalization of sports teams (Burstyn 1999:103). With the emergence of professional teams, the importance of such institutions grew in the eyes of the general public; general anomie that arose with the Industrial Revolution facilitated this sporting fraternity that sought to maintain a traditional way of life and promote a new moral code of cleanliness and masculinity in a time of great socioeconomic change (Burstyn 1999:107, 110; Reiss 1989:14). A growing concern with lack of physical fitness due to a more sedentary lifestyle, combined with a fear of over-feminization due to the civilizing nature of genteel

² “the effects of a perverse pattern of emphasis and expectations which keeps us from realizing the intensive pleasures of sport,” i.e., the organizational aspects of sport that value winning by any means over having fun (Lipsyte 1985:112).

society, meant that young men turned to sport as a sexual substitute and a way to measure up to their fathers, uncles, and older brothers, who had experienced the trials and tribulations of *real* battle³ (Reiss 1989:29, 56). The rising middle-class took to sport as a way for workers in now-sedentary occupations to demonstrate their physical prowess and gain the recognition that their bureaucratic positions did not always allow (Reiss 1989:61, 92).

Sport began to transform from a Christian Gentleman's pastime to one espoused by a rougher, more sexually aggressive ideal as the nineteenth century progressed. The shift accompanied a changing emphasis in male attributes, one from "character" to "sex appeal" (Burstyn 1989:121; Reiss 1989:29). The metamorphosis of sport from pastime to growing spectacle did not involve a change in the rules of fair play, the code of manly self-conduct that had followed sport from its beginnings. This code stressed, as it still does to this day, the virtues of "unwavering loyalty, extreme self-discipline, great simplicity, discretion, modesty, acceptance of hierarchy, unquestioning obedience, and subjection of oneself for the sake of harmony among the team" (MacClancy 1996:10). The growing hypermasculine influence of sports did, however, affect the image of men's bodies as erotically important in other forms of media, such as literature and pornography. In these venues, sexually appealing men were portrayed as hard-working, physically aggressive, even violent, and constantly willing to fight, attributes which implied the men's potency, and at the same time reflected male preoccupations with "physical size, staying power, and ejaculatory strength" (Burstyn 1999:37). This attitude of manly aggression has carried through to the modern sports arena, and is exemplified in the idea among professional hockey players that a skater has to be willing to "grapple with a man in a melee, to

³ These "real" battles include the American Civil War, the Boer War, and up to and including the First World War.

prevent ganging-up, and tough enough to withstand opponents' attempts at coercion," even if he is not considered as a "fighter" *per se* (Smith 1983:94).

This masculine nature of identity construction, the one which degrades personal identity in favour of athletic identity, in professional athletes is evident in any biography or autobiography of sports' big stars. Here is an example of this attitude in the biography of Maurice "Rocket" Richard:

On the ice, no one is automatically condemned to lose. Anyone who tries hard, who works, who is fast and clever, can win. Every time he gets hold of the puck, Maurice starts a new life. The one he was given is of no importance. He grabs the puck and invents his life. Manoeuvring the puck he traces a movement that depends only on his heartbeats, on the strength in his legs and the agility of his arms. No obstacle is impossible. That's what Maurice learns when, with frozen feet, he strives to become a little man on the ice. The world is a place where you're alone. Even if there are others around you, you're alone when you face up to your challenges. If you're beaten, you are even more alone. The moral of the story: become strong, fight, win. In victory you're not so alone. (Carrier 2001:28)

The above passage also reflects the isolationist perception of many athletes, a concept which will be explored a following section, which examines sports as male-only enclaves. The symbolic nature of the spectacle of sports (really nothing more than a performance) means that, despite the victories and defeats, the winning and losing of honor, the changing statistics in the media, and the dislocation of men from normal social interaction, they serve no real purpose in general society: "*no one's status really changes*" (Geertz 2002:93, original emphasis). These elitist enclaves of performers serve to further socialize young males and to separate both the men from the boys, and the men from the women. Varda Burstyn's passage on this subject deserves to be quoted at length:

Sport mounts as spectacle a symbolic representation of the *masculinist system* and its fundamental principles. Indeed, masculinism must be understood as the primary ideological core of sport and its culture. Where sport is concerned, masculinism and gender-class are not "add-on" categories to capitalism, economic

class, or race. Rather, masculinism – the gender dominance of men – is organized and achieved by sport. The masculinist ideological reflects sport nurtures in its narrative of masculine heroics energize and inform other political identifications such as locality, ethnicity, and nationality. Thus, we speak of a “virile patriotism” – a political position driven by a masculine, gendered impulse – or a “wimpy foreign policy.” The political position is framed in gendered and masculinist terms, often through sport tropes, in the rhetoric of politics and war. Sport is in this sense a unified men’s culture – constituted by men for each other – as much as it is a variegated class and race culture in which its participants live out traditional divisions and competitions. (Burstyn 1999:28)

This masculine ideology and the environments that encourage it are what Sage (1990:98) calls “the cult of masculinity.”

The Cult of Masculinity

There has always been a connection between men and violence, and violence and honour, at least in Western culture (Spierenburg 1998:3). Many take it for granted. What is not clear about this connection is how exactly aggressive behaviour and violence, or the abstention from the same, contribute to the construction of male honour and masculinity (Spierenburg 1998:1). As Spierenburg states, by way of explanation, is that “honour has at least three layers: a person’s own feeling of self-worth, this person’s assessment of his or her worth in the eyes of others, and the active opinion of others about her or him” (1998:2). How this honor is judged depends on the sociocultural context – in Western societies, this often means one’s capacity for violence. In other cultures, such as the Bali of Geertz’s day, honour among men was maintained through the violence of their fighting cocks – aggression was seen as too animal an impulse to be acted out among the men themselves (Brownell 2000:44; Geertz 2002:94). The Balinese use their cocks (and accompanying deliberate double entendre) to fight for them, as much as men in Western societies use athletes to do the same in ball parks, race tracks, and hockey rinks (Geertz 2002:80). In Western culture, violence between men is seen as “routine,” and the line between

aggression in “the real world” and aggression within the sporting world is often blurred (Messner 2002:48). Core men’s sports reinforce the condition of the gendered social order and its hegemony in the society at large; “the rites of men condition the rights of men,” and the sphere of influence of men’s sport grows ever larger (Burstyn 1999:22). These rites and the sport culture to which they are related espouse a “coded symbolic system” that embodies this set of “manly values,” which cut across all sorts of differences and similarities in “social station and conscious political ideology” (Burstyn 1999:22).

As I mentioned above, male athletes in team sports (especially combative ones, like gridiron football, rugby, hockey, and, to a lesser extent, soccer and basketball) are socialized to act in an aggressive manner, and this aggression more often than not spills off the field and into the athletes’ daily lives. Male athletes in college have often described their lives as lived at the campus bar, where their time is spent “drinking, picking up women, and getting into fights” (Messner 2002:53). An athletic therapist of a university men’s varsity hockey team once confirmed this for me when he complained that the injuries players came to him to treat – bruises, lacerations, sprained wrists and fingers, for example – resulted more from the fights the players engaged in the night before at the campus bar than from their antics on the ice (Vibert 2005).

This casual disregard for their bodies goes further than a few supposedly harmless cuts and scrapes, however. Athletes have long been taught to regard their bodies as tools for completing a job (see Messner and Sabo 1994), but at the same time they develop a strong disconnect between their bodies and their personal identity (Geertz 2002:81). In the past thirty or so years, the ideal male body that has developed, in accordance with the growing sexualization of athletics, has been that of massive muscularity and physical strength (Burstyn

1999:149). This does not come without its price, and this will be discussed in chapter six. Despite their obsession with good health, a sexually appealing physique, and optimal performance, players routinely “play hurt” in order to win games, even though they know that they are risking a shortened playing career, permanent disability, and even a shortened lifespan by doing so (Messner 2002:57). The obsession with a physical appearance of virility is similar to that in the body-building world: the desire is for “beefcake” – the celebration of the huge male body – and men will go to great lengths to achieve that ideal, including the use of steroids and other drugs⁴ (Burstyn 1999:151). The irony is that it is a widely-recognized fact that steroid use can cause liver damage, withered testicles, and impotence (Messner and Sabo 1994:95). As well, those who are willing to both inflict and tolerate pain are overt examples of the fact that anything less (i.e., those unable or unwilling to undergo the same treatment) is perceived as less than masculine (Brackenridge 2001:87). The cult of masculinity, in effect, breeds a culture of silence.

These massive men constitute the leading “masculine icons of our age” (Burstyn 1999:151). This draws on the historical idea of men’s culture and men as strong and powerful warriors, a topic that will be addressed later: but the hyper-large, hypermasculine ideals “are also attempts to assert and symbolize masculinity in circumstances – economic, social, and sexual – that seem to diminish and undermine its achievement” (Burstyn 1999:151). This is exemplified in that bastion of hypersexual male-only activities: the locker room. The public may joke about locker room talk, but the reality is that much of what is rumoured to happen in the locker room does, in fact, go on: “there is abundant sex talk amongst many male athletes, talk filled with descriptions of whom they had sex with, how many times, and their sexual fantasies and plans (individually and collectively) for their next sexual conquest” (Kirby et al 2000:114). This talk

⁴ Female athletes also employ steroids to sculpt their bodies, but the popular feminine physique is not that of the body builder.

sanctions the behaviour of athletes outside the locker room, and is reinforced through “the organized sponsorship of initiation rituals filled with sexual hazing and danger for new players to a team” (Kirby et al 2000:114). The locker room, and, through its male-only cocoon, sports, is the only environment in which many players, who previously felt alone and unconnected with family and the larger society, find acceptance (Messner 2002:50; Sage 1990:98).

Sports as Male-Only Enclaves

Locker room talk is characterized by its high volume and its geographical centrality in the centre of the room, not to mention its overtly sexist tones – clearly intended as a performance for competition and dominance purposes – and it is only on the margins where quieter conversations centering around relationships, feelings, and vulnerabilities, can be had, out of earshot. Any players caught speaking of such things openly can be targeted and derided as feminine – called “pussies,” “women,” or worse, “faggots” (Brackenridge 2001:87; Messner 2002:35). Donald Sabo recalls his own reaction to the college football locker room environment: “the tenderness and sensitivity that lay scrunched inside me were carefully hidden. I felt like I was living inside a tank. The structure was formidably protective, but oppressively rigid” (Messner and Sabo 1994:14). He continues,

I now see the tragic irony in this: we could talk about casual sex and about using, trivializing, or debasing women, but frank discussions about sexuality that unfolded within a loving relationship were taboo. Within the locker room subculture, sex and love were seldom allowed to mix. There was a terrible split between our inner needs and outer appearances, between our desire for love from women and our feigned indifference toward them. (Messner and Sabo 1994:38)

Such talk also reinforces such men-related ideals as national character, divisions of labour, family, kinship, and friendship, the body, and, most evident, contests over power (Gutmann 1997:387).

Young men are able to express their pent-up frustrations in the liminal environment of sports and the locker room, in ways that would normally be taboo according to the cultural standards of their society (Collings and Condon 1996:256). There is a high tolerance in sport for such hypermasculine behaviour, such talk of sexual conquest and power, because the players have been socialized to it through various initiation and hazing rituals they endure to prove that they deserve to be a part of this elite group (Brackenridge 2001:61, 87; Messner and Sabo 1994:11). This treatment teaches the players that such behaviour is not only appropriate, but encouraged, and the underground nature of the acts leads players to be less open about such activities: they are first taught that what goes on in the locker room stays in the locker room, and, second, that to disclose things like sexual abuse or sexual predation would result in he who speaks out being labeled as a homosexual (Brackenridge 2001:67). This “culture of silence is built into the dynamics of the group’s spoken and unspoken codes and rituals” (Messner 2002:47). Everyone else, nonathletes, girls, and so on, is an outsider. The locker room and sport team environment results from an “eroticized dominance bond” where “the boys” or “the guys” are part of a high-status and privileged in-group, and maintaining the code of silence that exists therein prevents them from being exposed and ostracized from the group in which they and their behaviour is accepted (Kirby et al 2000:73; Messner 2002:47).

Sport is a sex-segregated institution, where the separation of sports into male and female groups based on biology is reinforced by the very powerful ideologies that men have emphasized since organized sports were recognized in Western societies – heterosexuality here is an “organizing principle” (Brackenridge 2001:67, 85). The male-only space of the locker room and the self-segregation of males from females is what Sedgwick (1985) calls “homosociality” (Gutmann 1997:393). The patriarchal authority structure (where the coach or a senior peer has

the ultimate power in the group) encourages players to adopt the team as a second family. Because players are often geographically isolated, not only from women, but from their own natural families, the dependency on such people is minimized, and players identify more strongly with the masculinist ideals of the male-only group (Brackenridge 2001:95). The practices that occur in these undemocratic and possibly “feudal” environments are normalized due to their correlation with other social institutions that reflect male hierarchies, such as churches and the military (Robinson 1998:2). In these “total institutions,” which include monasteries, mental institutions, and cults, men are cut off from the rest of society, and so athletes become less able to identify with nonathletes and often have difficulty relating to women. Women are hence denigrated and objectified, because that is the dominant ideology in the locker room – to discuss women in any other context would be abnormal and unacceptable (Robinson 1998:57).

Thus, the locker room environment becomes one supportive of “rape culture,” an attitude of the masculine subculture that revolves around “an intense, phallic masculinity” and results in a high incidence of sexual violence, especially against women (Gutmann 1997:386; Robinson 1998:5). Because male support for each other in this male-only group is high, behaviors that involve sexual assault and rape are encouraged and praised, as players in this fraternity “police their own heterosexuality by ridiculing and repelling all things feminine (whether this be women, gay men, or their own feminine tendencies). At the same time they over-emphasize their sexual aggression towards women as a means of enhancing their own relative standing” (Brackenridge 2001:87, 94).

Depreciation of Femininity

Women have been courted as patrons of organized sports since the origins of professional baseball so long ago – but they have not been courted as equal participants (Redhead 1997:100-101; Thorn 1995:30). Even in women’s competitive sports (which have only really emerged as legitimate enterprises in the past thirty years), the dominant ideology is still male, especially when it comes to hockey, and women’s hockey is often dismissed because it does not contain the same aggression and physicality that men’s hockey does (Richards 1996:44; Theberge 1997). The presence of women in hockey today is the result of generations of feminists fighting for equal rights, but it was not always the case. In fact, records show that Canadian women played organized team hockey in leagues at around the same time that hockey first became an organized sport in the early 1800s. This was not without its problems, however, as women were strongly restricted in the type of clothing they could wear while playing, and they were not allowed to compete against men’s teams, even if they had more skill. It was only in the decades that followed that hockey was designated as a “male” sport due to its physicality (Hall 1981:5; McKinley 2000:29; Vaz 1982:98, 103).

It seems that many men go into sports with a need to “prove their maleness” (Messner and Sabo 1994:115). Because sports are used to underline current gender divisions, it has been established that sports are a contested area for women: not only are women’s sports deemed illegitimate and, certainly, less than manly, the locker room culture of men’s sports excludes women to a degree that is harmful to women’s health and safety – and the same goes for homosexuals, as well, and any practices seen by the dominant male hegemony as being less than wholly masculine – despite the fact that locker rooms and the showers therein are obvious scenes of homoeroticism (Burstyn 1999:173, 215; MacClancy 1996:14-15; Messner and Sabo 1994:102-104). The discouragement of homosexuality among athletes even serves to “distract

public awareness form heterosexual misconduct in sports,” and this includes athletes’ sexual mistreatment of both nonathletes, and of themselves (Messner and Sabo 1994:110).

A direct contrast to this is the unusual spectacle of David Beckham, a star British soccer player now playing for the United States: “he is the embodiment of the polysemic self who transcends the conventional demarcations of gender, sexuality, social class, ‘race’ and, indeed, sports celebrity,” by painting his fingernails, wearing his hair long, and otherwise getting in touch with his feminine side by wearing his wife’s underwear, while still maintaining the strong masculine star qualities that make him such a good player (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:128). To be fair, Beckham’s star attraction and erotic sex appeal is targeted mostly at women and gay men (he has been recognized as a gay icon), rather than men, who sometimes fail to see beyond his image to his skill as a player (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:128).

Beckham is, however, a strong example of the commodification of athlete’s bodies in professional sport. The male athletic body is seen as a performance machine, and appreciated for the aesthetics of masculinity that it projects, while the ideal female athletic bodies, like those of gymnasts and ballet dancers, are waiflike and androgynous, the antithesis of physical power (Burstyn 1999:161). Professional male athletes are used to the objectification of their bodies: part of the NFL draft involves a ritual called the “Meat Market,” where eligible players stand on a platform in their underwear while males in positions of authority (trainers, coaches, agents, and scouts) prod them and take measurements of every aspect of their bodies (Burstyn 1999:137; Kirby et al 2000:5). If male athletes are socialized to think that the objectification of their bodies

is normal, then it is understandable (although far from forgivable) that male athletes, in turn, tend to objectify women's bodies.⁵

There is evidence that sport culture encourages direct expressions of physical and sexual violence against women (Burstyn 1999:169). Male groups tend to use women's bodies to erotically bond with each other, and this occurs at a point when heterosexual boys and young men "go through a period of intense insecurity and even discomfort in learning to establish sexual relations with girls and women" (Messner 2002:40). Then the damage is done. There exists a communication gap between the sexes, due, in part, to women's historical exclusion from sports, and due to the coaching practices that isolate men from the contaminating influence of women and femininity. Many coaches, such as Punch Imlach and Dick Irvin, would often blame their players' poor behaviour on the amount of sex they were having with their wives. Players were not encouraged to marry, and, if they did, they were to do so during the off-season (Cruise and Griffiths 1991:73; Imlach 1969:162; MacSkimming 1994:66, 118-119). Male athletes have trouble rationalizing sex as an equal process: intercourse becomes the chief goal, and so maintaining an erection in order to engage in coitus is paramount. Pressure to maintain an erection is strong, and failure to do so negatively affects men's self-esteem as lovers. Instead of looking to themselves and their perceptions of sex as the issue, many men blame the problem on women, and the vicious cycle begins again (Messner and Sabo 1994:39). Influenced by the locker room subculture (and the fact that women are in general excluded from even entering the premises), men maintain a state of "sexual schizophrenia:" keeping their emotional attachment to women a secret while participating in the objectification and sexual aggression of their male

⁵ Note also that women can objectify their own bodies. Models, for instance, make a living from turning their bodies into objects for manipulation.

peers (Messner and Sabo 1994:43, 48). Those who object to this situation face censure and possible ostracism or loss of career; consequently, they are rare (Messner and Sabo 1994:43).

Sexual inequality and insecurity about sexuality are the main contributors to men's anger and violence against women, and male isolation and socialization does nothing but reinforce this pattern of male dominance – violence and anger are demonstrated as key attributes of manhood (Lipsyte 1995:114; Messner and Sabo 1994:71; Smith 1983:51). The decades around the turn of the twentieth century brought a redefinition of masculinity and masculine sexuality as dominance over women and anything seen as feminine, and this centered around the idea of aggression and violence, which is seen as a loud disclaimer of homosexuality and femininity (Burstyn 1999:213, 217; Vaz 1982:89). Guts and courage are exemplified by physical aggression and confrontation (Vaz 1982:102). Historically, men's exclusion of women from participating in courageous combat for their own protection is highly ironic in consideration of the fact that, according to Hall, "when man fights woman, he often uses his genital 'weapon of terror' to subdue and oppress:" for a woman to fight back, but this time against another woman, would deprive the man of his supposedly natural advantage (Hall 1981:8). Males, therefore, through their own physical dominance, engage in more violence than females, and much of this is directed at females (Smith 1983:73).

There is no one aspect of masculinity embedded in the socialization of men that leads them to rape or abuse women. There is also nothing in sports that makes athletes more likely to rape women: "it is the way sports are organized to influence developing masculine identities and male peer groups that leads many male athletes to rape" (Messner and Sabo 1994:34). Males, especially young boys (and when male athletes are segregated from the rest of the community at puberty, they have rarely been shown to change, emotionally and mentally, from this point), have

a problem identifying with women and nonathletes due to their socialization process. Their tendencies toward aggression as a result of this frustration are channeled and encouraged into a form of “compulsive masculinity,” and they cling to this violence as a way of reaffirming their concept of what constitutes manliness, in a manner reflective of their adolescent inability to attain a form of male status in an environment where, regardless of their age, the coach still maintains absolute power (Smith 1983:47-49, 70).

This tendency to violence is an example of the socialization practices that sports have in common with the military, and the similarities of combative sports to war.

War Games

Because human beings are naturally disposed to conflict, according to conflict theorists, war, and games that mimic war (i.e., combative team sports) are essential to proper social function (Barclay 1911: 305; Hill 2001; Huizinga 1950:89). Much of our daily interaction involves communication, such as arguments, that mimic the processes of war and conflict, and our language is built around the language of conflict (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; OED 1989a-g). “For many athletes the deployment of injury, pain, and organized mayhem is a valuable part of what they do, and they are usually rewarded for it” (Burstyn 1999:164). The aggression that is encouraged and praised in sports only serves to make the athlete who displays aggression more aggressive (Bryan and Horton 1976:4). The initiation into manhood through violence of males has been linked to the cult of the warrior, and “the template of this ideology has been actively constructed in the ritual formations of men’s culture as well as in military and paramilitary structures, above all in the bastions of men’s professional sports” (Burstyn 1999:164). There is a shared culture of combat between sport and war, a competitive deployment of war and violence, the conflicts between varying institutions and the diplomacy involved between them, and the

similarities of their origin in tournaments and and-to-hand combat (Burstyn 1999:165; Douglas 1986:126; Guttman 1986:36). More and more women are entering the military, but they still face the same problems associated with women who enter sport.

The shared elements of danger and violence that are actually represented in war and symbolically represented in combative sport, and their celebration of this ritualized and cooperative violence constitutes the heroicized nature of professional athletes and warriors alike (Burstyn 1999:xi, 166, 175; Goldstein 1985:161; Guttman 1986:88; Lüschen 1970). Injuries are valorized both in war and sports: war wounds are seen as badges of honour that consistently re-prove their bearer's masculinity – as long as they were obtained under the code of honor that governs fair play/fighting, and upheld the moral values present at the time (Burstyn 1999: 181; Collings and Condon 1996; Guttman 1986:24, 88; Keen 1984:1). From earlier centuries until now, battles, both symbolic and actual, have been fought on moral grounds, based on values reflected in the society at large, and yet nothing has ever been fundamentally altered by this clashes (Geertz 2002:93; Halliday 1999:vii, 1, 3). In addition, despite its sometimes lethal nature, this sort of violence remains legal in the justice system (Smith 1983:9).

Combative team sports, like war, have the same nation- and character-building capabilities. Patriotism, nationalism, and militarism “are characteristics of sport participants’ loyalty to their team and to the community or nation they represent” (Kirby et al 2000:105). Sports share the sacred and ritual nature of war, honoring commitment, devotion, dedication, sacrifice, suffering, and victory (MacAloon 1984:250; Wann et al 2001:198). It is a logical conclusion to liken the similarities of military preparation and training in sport to the militarism that dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Western societies – this period of conflict coincided directly with the development of organized sport (Kirby et al 2000:105).

What is interesting to note is that this sort of violence is not viewed as normative globally. Richard Sipes (1973) conducted a study of warlike cultures and their games cross-culturally. He found that societies that were peaceful played peaceful games, where the objective was very rarely that of winning. Warlike games, combative rituals that employed an element of risk and danger, symbolic or actual, were found only among those societies that were once warlike, throwback anachronisms that had lost most of their original meaning, or among societies where war was still a presence, and his example of this was the United States between 1920 and 1970, a period that coincided with the increasing incidence of violence in professional sports like football and hockey (Smith 1983:36-37). Ritualized battles in other societies are much tamer than they used to be. For example, the traditional *tinku* ritual battle fought in northern Potosí, Bolivia, is more often now played out as a friendly soccer match between communities (Zorn 2002:120).

Hockey, as a combative team sport, exemplifies all of these warlike and authoritarian practices: in terms of unquestioning authority, the team sporting organization, like that of the platoon, “is critically weakened if the rank and file feels free to question what they are called upon to do” (Robinson 1998:91). Violence and aggression in hockey is a long-standing tradition, and goes back further than violence in baseball (although not as far back as violence in soccer) (Haché 2002:101). A good hockey player is one who is willing to combat his opponent as a team, and, if called for, to battle an enemy hand-to-hand (Haché 2002:101; Imlach 1969:17, 21, 161). Hockey is even discussed in warlike terms, and described as a battle in itself (Haché 2002:103; Imlach 1969:10).

Unlike dueling, baseball, and soccer, which emerged as pursuits of the upper classes and worked their way down through the bourgeoisie, hockey has always been the sport of the middle

and lower class. Two similar ideas were combined – that of *hurley* from the European immigrants, mostly the Irish, and that of *hoghee*, from the Iroquois – to make hockey what it is today (Halliday 1999:2; McKinley 2000:13). Thus, hockey was never used as a form of class conflict between the working class and the elite. It did, however, work against different ethnicities (like slave escapees from the United States to Canada), and genders (only eventually). Essentially, hockey was (and is) a brutalizing sport – but one fought among equals, which is the way such symbolic and entertaining battles should be fought (Guttman 1986; Smith 1983:45; Vaz 1982:35, 153).

Conclusion

If sports are construed as overwhelmingly violent and sexist, it is only because they reflect the values of society at large, and those involved in the sporting world have been socialized to act in this way.

Burstyn suggests a paradigm shift to inclusive cooperation in sports, as opposed to the selective brutalization of vulnerable persons in the sport community (1999:275). Unless one can change the fundamental basis and history upon which a society is built, I do not see how this can happen any time in the near future. There is too long a history of such behaviour to simply turn it off with the implementation of new rules for equality. I think that doing such a thing would simply give those who belong to the cult of masculinity easier access to those they wish to dominate.

Although this may seem redundant, male sports encourage sexism mostly because they exclude women. Both war organizations and sport create “a *mother-absent* family of patriarchs, brothers, and sons, and though both war and many sports put men at risk of serious injury and death, they give men social and symbolic fathers and a sense of security and belonging” which is

more important, ultimately, than the physical risks they are required to take (Burstyn 1999: 13, my emphasis). I will explore this more in the final section of this work, chapter eight.

CHAPTER SEVEN

NOT PART OF THE GAME: POWER AND EXPLOITATION IN PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY

Children's sport: what could be simpler, safe and of less consequence to anyone but the participants themselves? On the face of it, children's play seems prosaic and juvenile stuff that hardly warrants much in the way of adult concern, let alone ethnographic analysis. Indeed, in Canada a nostalgic and oft-invoked national representation of both sport and childhood is that of 'pond' or 'river' hockey. In this scenario children are envisioned as clearing snow from naturally occurring ice surfaces and entering into spontaneous and free-flowing games that incorporate any number of players and feature whimsical and inventive forms of play. Scores, if kept at all, tend toward ties, for the initiation and continuation of this type of fluid, informal contest depends solely upon the inclination of players to brave the cold and to keep the 'game on.' In this romanticized rendering of 'old-time' hockey as the quintessential Canadian pastime, skaters glide freely, enthusiastically and creatively into a zone of playful exuberance and delight that stands well apart from and in marked contrast to the workaday world of adults and the tutelary realm of the schoolroom. 'Pond' hockey cannot be readily envisaged without at least an implicit sketching in of attendant qualities of freedom, fun and innocence. Thus, adults *qua* adults rarely figure in public imaginings of this confluence of sport, childhood and nature that resurfaces rhetorically and intermittently from one sport setting to another. (Dyck 2003:55)

Anthropologists have only in the past three decades begun to study the importance of sports and games to the world's population. Sports anthropologists have long seen what others refuse to see: that the sporting world is far more complex than it appears on the surface, and that it maintains some underlying and, sometimes, underground, traditions that are inconsistent with many of the values that sports profess to espouse (Brownell 2000: 43; Dyck 2000a:1).

In 1975, when Renate Wilson published her guide for sports parents, she was concerned that amateur hockey was developing many of the same characteristics of professional hockey, in its spectacle-like qualities and emphasis on violence (179). This put pressure on the young athletes to succeed, she said, and could cause emotional or physical blockage known as choking, which could wipe out all previous training and discipline, either temporarily, or for good (Wilson

1975:41). Wilson's main concern, however, was that parents of young athletes be prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for their children to succeed in sports (1975:1).

Much has changed in the thirty years since that guide was published. The sports world, both professional and amateur, has been rocked with scandal, the majority of it centering on the abuse and exploitation of the athletes in the system. Parents of young athletes should no longer question the sacrifices they are willing to make: they should now consider the sacrifices of their children, and what they have to lose in becoming athletes.

The ritual nature of games and sports, combined with the professionalization that came with the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, has changed sport from its original form into a highly commercialized spectacle. These spectacles are games that are no longer played for the players' sake, but for the entertainment of spectators (Bale 1993:6; Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:77). The commercial nature of modern professional sports has turned players into products groomed for the appetites of the masses, and this has led to a great deal of exploitation and abuse of players, both young and old, that is explained away as being "all part of the game" (Vaz 1982: *passim*).

This chapter will examine some characteristics of modern sports and the problems that result from it. I will first examine the aspects of sport that have contributed to the current attitudes in sport, namely the increasing emphasis on violence and aggressive behaviour, and the resultant closed-off and autonomous status of sporting communities. I will then detail the consequences of the professionalization of sport as it relates to these attitudes and those of masculinity, followed by an examination of the way that the media and those in power project this professionalization. I will finish my examination of this subject by looking at the ways in which players have been exploited in order to meet the needs of the demanding public and the desires of those in positions of authority.

My emphasis in this chapter is on the structure of ice hockey, due mainly to its enormous popularity in the Canadian entertainment industry, and due in part to the recent revelations that hockey is not the idyllic and pure Canadian sport that many people think.¹ Much of the information I will present, however, can be correlated to almost any other sport, and especially so to the combative team sports that emphasize aggressiveness, like gridiron football, rugby, lacrosse, soccer, and, to a lesser extent, basketball, and baseball.

The Underlying Nature of Modern Sports

Sports, according to MacClancy, can be used to fulfill a number of functions in society: “to define more sharply the already established boundaries of moral and political communities; to assist in the creation of new social identities; to give physical expression to certain social values and to act as a means of reflecting on those values; to serve as potentially contested space by opposed groups” (1996:7). The most obvious reason why many play and watch sports is because it provides a diversion – a period of time where one can forget about every day cares and become completely immersed in the game (Bourdieu 1980:66-67). Thousands seek this alternate state of consciousness, and thrive on the “flow” experience of forgetting oneself in the thrill of play. This is why many anthropologists have turned to sports in order to study the ways in which people value their time, space, and ways of communicating such things (Dyck 2000b:14, 28). The liminal nature of sports allows many who are involved in it to express themselves in different ways, ways not normally acceptable in the wider social structure in which they live (Collings and Condon 1996:256). In many cases, this mode of expression is through violence,

¹ I speak here of the recent (in the past ten years) allegations of sexual abuse of players by coaches and agents (i.e. player Sheldon Kennedy and coach Graham James, and player Mike [Jefferson] Danton and agent David Frost), and the subsequent scandal that has accompanied them.

and sports seem to be the models for how a culture regulates its violence (Collings and Condon 1996:257). Games can therefore teach violence (Theberge 1997, 2000). Games and sports, however, can also teach cooperation, build character, assuage conflict, and carry out all and many more of the functions I mentioned above (Collings and Condon 1996:261).

Sports can also help to teach qualities of leadership, and can build and sustain whole nations. Anthropological studies of play in many cases serve as analogies to the working foundations of the society in which the game or sport exists (Dyck 200b:14). Both sport and the development of cultures are closely related:

Both contain elements of a higher calling, one beyond the mundane realities of the everyday. For those in sport, patriotism/nationalism and militarism can be considered overlapping terms. The love for and devotion one feels to one's country is called patriotism and nationalism is the specific devotion one has to the well-being of a nation through support for its culture and collective interests. One's country and nation can be synonymous, though they are not always so. Militarism is an identification with the ideals of the professional military. Closely related, patriotism/nationalism and militarism are characteristics of sport participants' loyalty to their team and to the community or nation they represent. (Kirby et al 2000:105)

This idea ties closely in to the celebratory qualities of play, and the embodied activities that lead to the experience of "flow" and total involvement in the sport. It is from this that "the love of the game" stems (Dyck 2000b:28). The seemingly simple rules, rituals, and ideals of sport and the sporting culture that has grown around them (Inglis 1977:52), "draw on the sensual glory and unrivalled symbolic power of the body, they also deliver a series of 'anti-benefits' to society, they exact a series of tolls from us, and they do us some considerable damage" (Burstyn 1999:13).

It does not do any good to blame the nature of sports for the failings of society, however (Collings and Condon 1996:262). Society's failings are merely amplified through the nature of sports (Dyck 200b:31; Kirby et al 2000:106). Sports' failings, on the other hand, can be partly

blamed on those in power, for “sports and sporting events cannot be comprehended without reference to relations of power: who attempt to control how a sport is to be organized and played, and by whom; how it is represented; how it is to be interpreted” (MacClancy 1996:5). It is those in power who are mostly responsible for the problems resulting from the professionalization of sports.

The Professionalization of Sports

To speak of the “consumption” as opposed to the “playing” and “watching” of sport involves a recognition of the relationships between sport and “the economy.” To use such “economic” language also presupposes that sport is currently undergoing a process of commodification and coming to be more entangled in the contradictions, pressures, opportunities and balances between conflict and consensus characteristic of what it is fashionable to call “consumer” or “post-modern” societies. (Dunning 1999:106)

Modern professional sport is no longer just a game – it is big business (Schechner 2003:13). “Professional sport” can really refer to any kind of game playing or “ludic activity from which people obtain financial gain” (Dunning 1999:114). The sporting world today is a massive financial institution, as well as a socializer of dominant values. It creates its own autonomous reality, separate and apart from the more mundane aspects of daily, everyday, “real” life. The sporting world is a highly lucrative and multi-dimensional global economy with enormous influence, and the nexus of the sporting world consists of multitudinous interactions between the sporting world and the mass media, corporate sponsors, medicine, biotechnology, and the government (Burstyn 1999:17; Lasch 1985:61; Lipsky 1985:73). Because the financial goals more often than not outweigh the ludic ones, it seems now that professional sports are a kind of “false play,” where “it becomes increasingly difficult to tell where play ends and non-play begins” (Huizinga 1950:206).

Contemporary professional athletes have also had to relinquish their enjoyment of their sport in order to adapt their game to suit the tastes of their massive global consumer audience. As mentioned in chapter three, spectators see through sports their own fragile connection to society, and use their awareness of the psychology of the coach, the athlete, and the team to look vicariously inward (Bryan and Horton 1976:3). The spectators, then pay for and consume the aspects of sport that they want to see in themselves, or the aspects that they *think* they want to see in themselves, but which are in reality perpetuated by the hegemonics of the power elite (Bryan and Horton 1976:3). This is why athletes who display aggressiveness in sports are rewarded, praised, and receive positive reinforcement for their aggression. The reinforcement is intended to make them more violent, and, in turn, increases the desire in the spectator to consume more aggression (Bryan and Horton 1976:4).

Styles of masculinity shifted in the early decades of the twentieth century, from emphasis on “character” to that of “rough sex appeal”, and this coincided with both the rise of the Industrial Revolution and the first great surge in consumerism: three factors that contributed to the rising popularity and subsequent professionalization of sports (Burstyn 1999:22-23, 121). It should be noted here that from their inception, professional sports leagues have been associated with the more negative aspects of society, such as gambling and alcohol abuse – this is not a new phenomenon (Thorn 1995:13). These new sports professionals are idolized for their physical aggressiveness, their supposed narcissism, their enormous paycheques, and, of course, for their manly sex appeal – women want them, and men want to be them – because sex sells (Collings and Condon 1996:261; Lipsyte 1985:112).

The other aspect of professional sports that sells – and what most spectators clamor for – is violence (Imlach 1969:10-12). Those who have the potential to create the violence that the

crowds want are separated from the rest of the pack at an early age in what George Sauer, a former wide receiver for the New York Jets, has called a “form of social Darwinism” (Lipsyte 1984:114). As I will mention in a later section, violence has a strong impact, not only on those at whom it is directed, but on those who commit it. However damaging violence is in every day life, sports violence has never really been seen as “real” violence. Violence in sports is seen more as a vent for external frustrations, and the idea is that no one ever really gets hurt in incidents of sports violence – save for a few isolated incidents, the Courts stay out of issues of sport violence (Smith 1983:9-13). A quality of a star player is his ability to stoically carry on if he should be injured: those who draw attention to their injuries and/or refuse to “play hurt” are not seen as conforming to that sexy and masculine ideal that sells so well (Burstyn 1999: 164; Vaz 1982:33). Even if violence isn’t necessarily *required*, players have to be prepared for the *potential* of violence – that is, standing up for their teammates if situations of regulated violence (such as fistfights in hockey) get out of hand (Smith 1983:94).

The increasing incidence of violence in hockey today has led critics to question whether or not it has resulted in a slow erosion of skill and ability – goals are scored more as cannons through a screen of players’ legs than as a result of skillful stickhandling (Vaz 1982:6). Current rule changes at the NHL level have been redesigned to decrease physicality, and to increase scoring and excitement for spectators – this has mostly involved stricter penalties for those who break the rules and prevent those with less size than skill from doing their jobs. Whether this will also involve a decrease in actual violence will remain to be seen in the next few years. Either way, players will play the game in the way to which they have been appropriately socialized. Vaz’s arguments to this effect summarize this well (as well as providing a strong lead-in to a later section), and deserve to be quoted at length:

Hockey stars are made, not born, and the minor hockey leagues are where it begins. . . . The training and professionalization of young hockey players is a relatively systematic process of technical development and personality grooming – gradually making the youngster into a commodity. This means that his behaviour on the ice, and his values and attitudes, are increasingly honed to meet the role obligations of the hockey player. The longer a youngster remains in organized hockey, the more he is groomed by others, especially his coach, and the more he resembles his teammates. The finished product (at the junior level) is a relatively specialized young player with technical poise on the ice and a well-established conception of what the game is about and how it should be played. There is little room for doubt in this conception.

It has been suggested that the transformation of play into work is the beginning of the professionalization of sport. So it is with the development of the young hockey player. (Vaz 1982:15-16)

Manipulation by the Media and by Management

Perhaps sex and violence wouldn't sell as well if the media and those in charge of the sporting world did not emphasize it as much. But this is a chicken-or-the-egg argument.

It can be established, however, that the media is partly responsible for the increasing demand for violence in sports, especially in hockey. "North American media are awash with images of violence. Movies, television, and even evening news stories prioritized by a 'if it bleeds, it leads' criterion provide the public with a steady diet of mayhem" (Wann et al 2001:114). This higher emphasis on violence, in every day life, and in sports, has actually been credited with hockey's spread to other climates where hockey would not naturally flourish (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:57; Burstyn 1999:136). It seems that violence perpetrated by athletes also tends to gain precedence over everyday violence: "had O.J. Simpson been a famous heart surgeon or even a politician, the coverage of his trial would not have commanded nearly the degree of attention it did" (Burstyn 1999:165). We accept athletes' violence when it is on the court or the field or the ice – but not outside of the arena or stadium (Burstyn 1999:165).

The problem with the "media-ization" of large scale sports, which are really more spectacles than anything else, is that all the by-proxy spectator can experience is merely a slice

of what is really going on. If the spectator listens to the game on the radio, he or she misses seeing the crowds and the action. If the spectator relies on the photographs and coverage in print media, then he or she is relying on second-hand information. And television, although it combines sight and sound and all the news that's fit to print, it is still detached from the real event, and all that can be experienced is what will fit in a small light-up box, and what exact slice of the action that will be is determined by forces outside the spectator's power – he or she loses all agency in this respect (Bourdieu 1996:79-81; Cole et al 2004:211-212). In the same way, so does the athlete. The images that are projected of him are not of his choosing, and the media may choose to emphasize and objectify certain aspects of him for entertainment and monetary value. This, in a way, is how athletes become sexually objectified (Silby and Smith 2000:239-278).

By its objectification of the sexuality of athletes, the media tends to reflect the same values of aesthetics represented in the fashion world, and in this way reinforce the dominant ideals of health and beauty. Men are sculptures of muscle and exude physical power (like hockey and football players, while women are stripped of the only power they seem to have these days, that of their sexuality, and are portrayed as wilting flowers, anorexically thin and lacking in adult physical attributes (like gymnasts and figure skaters) (Burstyn 1999:151-160; MacClancy 1996:10).

In current fashion trends, that which is edgy is also attractive. Because of this, star soccer player I mentioned in the previous chapter, David Beckham, has become the sex symbol of the age. Openly in touch with his feminine side, his appeal, like his attitude and fashion sense, crosses sexual boundaries, and he is adored by men and women alike of all sexual persuasions. His appeal is even strong enough to cross ethnic boundaries, as he has often been labeled as a

black man living in a white man's body. Beckham is the quintessential modern "metrosexual:" edgy and sexy, well-dressed and sophisticated, and still as raw and powerfully manly as an athlete needs to be in this world (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:128-130).

Beckham's body serves as a blank canvas upon which consumers can paint anything they desire (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:129). In the wider sporting world, other athletes' bodies serve the same purpose: these are not people – they are products, and the media will promote any aspect of these products that sells, whether that be their physical capabilities or merely their aesthetic qualities (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:31; Burstyn 1999:151; Kirby et al 2000:111). These aesthetic qualities are those to which the masses aspire. If they cannot achieve a chiseled physique themselves, they will live vicariously through the images of their favourite athlete (Kirby et al 2000:111; Burstyn 1999:37). Those in the sporting world who cannot actually live the life of the athlete himself (like coaches and management) will also live vicariously through the athlete's body, and this is where issues of sexual abuse and exploitation come into play (MacClancy 1996:11; Burstyn 1999:161).

Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in Sports

As sports are an intrinsic element to our society, and as our society is full of its own conflicts and hazards, such as sexual assault, abuse, and gender inequalities, it follows that these negatives are also intrinsically associated with the sporting world as a reflection of our culture:

Most sports have been rocked by scandal at some point in their history. Promoters, managers, officials, and athletes alike have all stained the image of their sport at one time or another. Antisocial behaviors by high-profile athletes in particular seem to inflict the greatest damage on the reputation of a sport. Regardless of whether their notoriety stems from social excesses, criminal conduct, or behaviors that violate traditional norms, the media are generally quick to condemn them. Unfortunately, the athlete's sport often suffers collateral damage. (Wann et al 2001:86)

Participating in competitive sports, becoming totally immersed in the game, and succeeding in reaching a goal is a heady feeling, and many seek that rush. Professional sports is full of thrill-seekers and adrenaline junkies. But such a quest for power and thrill can be dangerous, especially if one becomes “hooked on flow in its many manifestations” and has no regard for the consequences (Czikszenmihalyi 1975:139). In this section, I will discuss how this desire for power has many negative outlets that affect the success and image of the hockey community (and the rest of the sporting community, by extension and analogy). All of these outlets are related to the socialization process of young athletes. While in the previous chapter I illustrated these in the context of masculinity and war, in this chapter I will focus on their relevance to the social issues associated with professional male sports.

The first is the grooming and sexual abuse that coaches and other authority figures inflict on vulnerable players. The second is the physical and sexual violence that insecure and vulnerable players inflict upon each other and upon women. The third is the physical and mental toll that the sporting system exacts upon its participants, drastically shortening their life spans and diminishing their abilities to relate to nonathletes.

Publicly, the Canadian sport community has been renowned throughout the world for its commitment to fair play and ability to uphold worthy values in sport. When Ben Johnson lost his gold medal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics for testing positive on a drug test, Canadian sporting authorities reacted quickly to make sure that such an “ethical nightmare” would never happen again. In the mid-1990s, however, the Canadian sporting community was shocked yet again, when charges were laid against Graham James, celebrated hockey coach, by a respected and highly skilled NHL player, Sheldon Kennedy. He alleged that James had sexually and emotionally abused him on over 300 occasions from the time he was thirteen. Since then, others

have stepped forward to reveal long histories of abuse (Brackenridge 2001:17; Robinson 1998:*passim*). If Canada's "pure" national sport and the supposedly wholesome values it purported were so obviously false, what else was there about the sporting community about which society at large remained ignorant?

Because players are socialized to accept that masculinity is good and femininity is bad, sexually discriminatory and physically aggressive banter in the locker room is widely tolerated. In addition, the sporting system is such that it is commonplace for single adults to have exclusive access to large numbers of young people – ripe picking grounds for paedophiles (Blackshaw and Crabbe 2004:39; Brackenridge 2001:61; Messner 2002:47). While these abusers are generally coaches and agents, it should be noted that "such exploitation can be perpetrated by anyone in a position of authority, including medical staff, administrative staff, janitors and bus drivers or even senior peer athletes" (Brackenridge 2001:26). This does not preclude women from being the abusers; however, researchers have found that there is a consistent ratio of male to female abusers of about 30:1; other researchers have found that fully 99% of abusers in sports are male, and, although there is growing evidence of abuse by females, the prevalence rates are extremely low (Brackenridge 2001:26, 53). Perpetrators of abuse come from all age groups, genders, ethnic and religious backgrounds, economic classes, and sexual orientations, and abuse their positions of authority and trust when they abuse players, even if they say they were provoked (Brackenridge 2001:39, 69; Kirby et al 2000:34).

Such behaviour from a coach, the one who has the most authority in the locker room, sets a poor standard for the behaviour of the players. Such behaviour, like harassment and abuse, has a greater negative impact on the athletes than if it came from others in sport (Kirby et al 2000:85). Although other athletes may be aware of the way that coaches can and do misuse their

authority, the pressure to conform to the code of the locker room can be intense (Eitzen and Sage 1978:73), and so most abuse goes unreported, which allows two things to happen: “The coaches continue to abuse athletes with impunity. The damage done to the athletes and to their sport careers remains profound” (Kirby et al 2000:66). Young athletes, especially male athletes in hockey, are in a precarious position in this situation. The locker room is an undemocratic system, and models other traditional male models of hierarchy, like that in churches, the military, and gangs (Theberge 2000::101, 104). Added to this is the economic big business aspect of sports, that reduces these young prospects into commodities who are bought and sold, and more often than not taken away from their families at a young age. Torn by the drive to succeed, confusion about their own future, and the need to bond with some form of male authority figure, players turn to their coaches, who have the power to make them or break them (Robinson 1998:2-3, 13). Because players are often geographically dislocated from their natural families, they adopt the team and the coach as a replacement patriarchal family. It makes the player dependent on the coach and regard him (or her) as a surrogate family, so any abuse of the player can then be regarded as a sort of “virtual incest” (Brackenridge 2001:95). This dependence gives coaches a window opportunity to groom athletes for their own ends: “grooming is the process by which a perpetrator isolates and prepares an intended victim. Entrapment may take weeks, months, or years and usually moves steadily so that the abuser is able to maintain secrecy and avoid exposure” (Brackenridge 2001:35). Players who suffer from low self-esteem (not uncommon amongst young men who are going through the period of most confusion about their bodies and who have been separated from their families) are especially vulnerable to the grooming process (Brackenridge 2001:121-122; Kirby et al 2000:52).

Abuse and harassment (i.e. ridicule) have a higher prevalence in “masculine” and team sports (hockey, soccer, rugby, football), than in “feminine,” “neutral,” and individual sports (gymnastics, swimming, figure skating) (Brackenridge 2001:60). This prevalence makes it more surprising that sexual harassment and abuse of males is seen as more shocking than that of females. This has to do with widespread misogynistic and homophobic attitudes within society, and because “male-to-male abuse is falsely associated with predatory homosexuality” – boys are also less likely to reveal such abuse for fear of being labeled as homosexual (Brackenridge 2001:67).

Male athletes’ friendships are often constructed along the same lines to which they are socialized in the locker room, and are characterized by sexist and homophobic behaviour. These “brothers in sport,” who have been socialized to be insecure about their masculinity, “police their own heterosexual boundaries by ridiculing and repelling all things feminine (whether this be women, gay men, or their own feminine tendencies). At the same time they overemphasize their sexual aggression towards women as a means of enhancing their own relative standing” (Brackenridge 2001:94).

While aggression and abuse among players may not always be overtly sexual, players, in their initiation rites, are often asked to perform physical stunts that are often as humiliating as they are potentially harmful, and the relationship that results is psychologically and emotionally abusive (Messner and Sabo 1994:11; Robinson 1998:87). This sort of behaviour has been correlated with the practices of the military and other male-dominated institutions, like monasteries, where “the organization is critically weakened if the rank and file feel free to question what they are called upon to do” (Robinson 1998:91). The young men who participate in this sort of behaviour are following generations’ worth of tradition, and their untouchable

status as hockey players prevents any sort of outside policing of such behaviour (Robinson 1998:12). Just like in battle, or in prison, one's masculinity is tested constantly, usually with aggression. Masculinity must always be reproven, and wounds that result from violent scuffles are the badges of honor that certify the bearer as a true man (Burstyn 1999:175-181).

Locker room talk is characteristic of this constant battle ground of established masculinity. Many athletes confess feeling alone and unsure of themselves, cut off from others, and it is through sports, and the camaraderie of the locker room, that they feel they actually belong somewhere (Messner 2002:51). This camaraderie involves abundant sex talk among males as they seek to confirm themselves as manly among their peers. The sex talk is filled with "descriptions of who they had sex with, how many times, and their sexual fantasies and plans (individually and collectively) for their next sexual conquest" (Kirby et al 2000:114). "This dominant conversation is characterized by its high volume – it is clearly intended as a performance for the group – and by its geographic and cultural centrality in the locker room" (Messner 2002:35). The conversation is sexually aggressive and often violently homophobic – femininity and homosexuality seem to be equivalent in their opposition to masculinity (Burstyn 1999:217). Players caught on the margins of the locker room discussing such things as relationships with women or their own vulnerability are immediately targeted as symbolic "women," "pussies," or "faggots" and denigrated for the supposed femininity with which they are tainted (Brackenridge 2001:87; Messner 2002:35; Messner and Sabo 1994:38, 48; Robinson 1998:57).

There is a public image of a highly aggressive player who is a brute on the ice (or the field), but who is a gentle giant or "teddy bear" off it (Messner 2002:48). This may be true in some cases, but there is strong evidence that violence in sports leads to violence outside of

sports, and is especially characterized by physical and sexual violence against women (Messner 2002:27; Burstyn 1999:169).

Because sport is a sex-segregated social institution from early on in athletes' development, this division becomes a "heterosexual imperative that privileges particular expressions of masculinity above others, and above all types of femininity" in male sports (Brackenridge 2001:81). Because of this, and the idea that to be manly is to be sexually aggressive, inhibitions for sexual abuse, both by males to females (singly or collectively) and by males to other males, are often removed, especially if alcohol is involved: "very few of those men who force sex on someone in a social setting, such as at a party or on a date, regard their behaviour as rape. Many take pride in what they have done, rather than feeling guilt or shame" (Brackenridge 2001:87). It is theorized that male athletes sexually assault women, especially in group situations, in order to erotically bond with their teammates (Messner 2002:40). There is actually a large amount of peer support for sexual assault and rape, and this has a strong influence on the players' behaviour. The "high life," the social benefits of being an athlete, is a strong enough draw for many who enter the sporting world (Brackenridge 2001:87).

There is an attitude outside of sports that accompanies this, namely the one where "boys will be boys" (Kirby et al 2000:73), and when such events, due to the inability of the team to close ranks, do make the news are seen more as "an affront to the institution and traditions of sport than a prompt for change" (Brackenridge 2001:175). It is not that nonathletes do not also commit crimes of sexual assault – they do, but studies have shown that incidences of sexual assault and rape are higher among athletes than those disconnected with the sporting community, and the backlash from the sporting community against anti-rape activists often results in assault against the protesters themselves (Burstyn 1999:169-171). Although there is often a policy to

protect the health and rights of players in a sporting system (the CHL has the “Players First” policy; the NHL has the Players’ Union), there is no such support network for women affected by abuse in the hockey system: non-players simply don’t count (Robinson 1998:7).

Administrators outside sport (like school officials, etc.) are often unwilling to take a stand against such behaviour, citing it as isolated occurrences of deviance, and vowing in the future to “weed out the bad apples” so that it doesn’t happen again. The fact is, the sport system is socializing all its athletes to be bad apples (Messner 2002:27; Messner and Sabo 1994:34), and “a gender culture that requires men to disavow the feminine is dangerous not only for women but for men themselves” (Burstyn 1999:173). There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that male athletes are more likely than male nonathletes to rape acquaintances and to take part in gang rapes (Messner and Sabo 1994:33).

Further evidence indicates that rape rates “tend to be higher in societies with rigid divisions of labor and special separation between the sexes, especially where these divisions are marked by male dominance and female subordination” (Messner 2002:46). Consistent with this is the fact that male athletes who rape or who are susceptible to rape or abuse come from families with physically or emotionally absent women family members (i.e., no sisters, passive mother) that were headed by domineering male figures (Messner 2002:46). This is exemplified by the story of Sheldon Kennedy, who said in a statement that his relationship with his father was rocky and his mother was typically not involved in his daily life: he couldn’t leave home fast enough (Robinson 1998:5).

Messner and Sabo are known for their feminist approach to sports. Even so, in consideration of the above information (and much, much more), they have this to say:

Compelling as this evidence is, we want to emphasize two points. First, *nothing inherent in men leads them to rape women*. Peggy Sanday, an anthropologist, and

other researchers have found that there *are* rape-free societies in the world, and that they tend to be characterized by low levels of militarization, high levels of respect for women, high levels of participation by women in the economy and political system, and high levels of male involvement in child care. Second, *nothing inherent in sports makes athletes especially likely to rape women. Rather, it is the way sports are organized to influence developing masculine identities and male peer groups that leads many male athletes to rape.* (Messner and Sabo 1994:34, original emphasis)

It is simply a horrific consequence to the way in which our society deals with sports.

Athletes do not merely inflict damage on nonathletes (women) and each other; they also do lasting damage to their own bodies, and this affects them both physically and emotionally. Much of this damage has to do with the way the system works, with how they are socialized, and with the way in which players, their skills and their bodies, are treated as products for sale.

“Power is an unavoidable element of sporting endeavour” (Brackenridge 2001:82) – those who have it succeed. Those who don’t go home and cry like the women they are (Horne and Jary 2004:133). Professional athletes are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve their goals, even if it means giving up their bodies and their love of the game. At some point, the game ceases to be fun anymore, and it is now just another job, except that in this one the players are not allowed to express their feelings and dissatisfactions about how the job is treating them (Messner and Sabo 1994:14-15). In becoming professionals, players give up the right to withhold consent about what is done to them in their career (Robinson 1998:120).

The junior draft for young players of professional sports is an experience that many players would like to forget, but they go through with it in order to play at elite levels. The most extreme versions involve the draftee standing in a platform under harsh fluorescent light in his underwear, being measured, poked, prodded, and graded, similar to the way ranchers regard cattle at a meat market, before his body is deemed satisfactory and he is drafted to a specific team (Burstyn 1999:137):

The young men who come this day wear new suits in which they do not feel right, Italian weave at times clashing with determined acne, pleats and sharp creases drawing attention to walks they have not yet settled on, their step somewhere between adolescence and manhood. Some are beet red, some are sweating, some sit with their young fresh-shaven faces in hands with tortured fingernails. They feel, often correctly, that every eye in the hot, sticky Hartford Civic Centre is upon their every movement. They know that their lives are about to be determined by a number over which they have now lost all control. They know some will walk out early as multimillionaires, some will walk out late, in tears. (MacGregor 2002:7-8)

This process is mirrored in the sexual objectification of women, and children's beauty pageants are very closely related in style and purpose (Robinson 1998:11).

Players give up much to be part of the sporting elite (MacGregor 2002:122-123). Many players begin their professional career fresh out of high school, and are thus untrained, unqualified, and lacking in the experience they would need to find employment outside the sporting community when their short careers as sports stars are over (Burstyn 1999:141). Most players do not even earn enough to help them survive in life after hockey – it is only the star players who rake in millions of dollars a year, and, in comparison to the salaries of famous actors and singers (for, stripped of all the media hype and a few muscles, athletes are simply performers, too), these high salaries are not all that impressive. In consideration of the toll the rigors of play take on a player's body, this amount seems merely adequate compensation for giving up one's body (Burstyn 1999:141; Sage 1990:159).

Professional athletes may be popularly portrayed as models of good physical conditioning and health, but they also suffer from a high incidence of “permanent injuries, alcoholism, drug abuse, obesity, and heart problems” after their retirement from the glamour of professional sports (Messner and Sabo 1994:95). Athletes are taught to treat their bodies as tools to “get the job done,” often to do damage to their opponents, but this also involves them using violence against their own bodies, and this has lasting effects. For example, former professional

football players in the United States have an average life expectancy of fifty-six years, which is on average fifteen years shorter than the life expectancy of nonathlete males (Messner and Sabo 1994:95). Their careers last only four or five years, and then they spend the rest of their relatively short life suffering from the after-effects of various forms of permanent injury (Sack 1985:125). Hockey, one would imagine, would have a comparable situation: “the speed at which the game is played, the split-second stops and starts, the punishing body contact, the clashing of skates, high sticks, and flying pucks amount to an ever-present chance of physical injury” (Vaz 1982:103). From reading the obituaries in the sports section of the newspaper, hockey stars seem to die in their early sixties from strokes, heart attacks, liver damage, renal failure, or from some form of overdose. But injuries are part of the job, no matter how serious they become, with increasing concerns about violence in today’s sports. Higher and higher performance standards and longer seasons fatigue players and make them more prone to injury (Sage 1990:159). And because players are seen as products and not people, sports medicine practitioners have seemed to develop a manipulative solution for any problem encountered by an athlete, whether it be a behaviour modification program to force players to conform to the coaches’ goals, or a scientific human engineering project “whose objective is producing levels of performance with seemingly little understanding of – or even interest in – what the consequences may be for the personal and social development of the athlete” – not to mention his long-term health and safety (Sage 1990:112).

Conclusion: Pain for Pleasure

*Stiff cross-check – you fall
face down – Narcissus on ice.
Bloody reflection.*

Don’t let the pink ice

*fool you. This goon's lagoon ain't
for Barbies. That's blood.*

(Poch & Davidson 2006:30, 33)

So why is it that these players sacrifice so much to play what is, at the final buzzer, just a game? It could be the money, or the lure of celebrity (Sydnor 2000). It could stem from a desire to put a name up there with the legends of old, to become part of the mythology of the national sport. Or it could just be for the love of the game.

This thesis was designed to illustrate the many facets of modern professional sports, with an emphasis on hockey. In part one of this work, we focused on the surface aspects of play and games, first examining the importance of play itself, studying play, and the experiential aspects of studying play and games. While there are many elements of play that are serious, most people use play as a distraction, and becoming deeply involved in play at an experiential level is a way in which many forget the cares of the everyday world. My own experiences as a fledgling hockey player have shown me that what looks like a simple game from the comfort of the couch is far more difficult when standing on skates for the first time. With the idea of experience and using play as a distraction, we moved on to a discussion of sport spectators and their experiences of the game: what brought them together as a group and what tore them apart. Sports can be used as a way to maintain social control and to socialize groups to certain norms. They can also bring meaning to life, or take that life away completely. Sports can unite and divide countries, bring families together, and make strangers into friends. Hockey is one such sport, and has brought Canadians together over generations, keeping the memory of its origins and its legends alive. The heroes of this mythology, like those in mythologies around the world, have their own backgrounds, their own strengths and weaknesses, and their lives are passed on in stories from one age to another.

The second part of this work approached the history and mythology of hockey from a different angle, first examining those who played by way of the tools they used, and then looking at them in terms of their sexuality and identity and the impact that it has had on the sport. Hockey's emphasis on "masculine" qualities, aggression, and dominance, is just one of the ways in which many believe the game has deviated from its somewhat idealized beginnings. Hockey's journey from the simple game played on a backyard pond, to the highly commercialized spectacle of the professional leagues is one that has been fraught with difficulty. This, then, is the ideal time to step forward and attempt to turn the game around, to bring it full circle, back to the pond that Canadians have, if not in their backyards, then in the hearts and minds of a nation.

EPILOGUE

HOCKEY IS A BATTLE – BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE

When Punch Imlach, coach of the Toronto Maple Leafs, wrote his now infamous autobiography (1969, with Scott Young), his title, *Hockey is a Battle*, was meant to sum up his attitude towards professional hockey. To be successful in this elite world, you had to constantly fight to stay on top. As a coach, he fought with the press, with the fans, with other teams, with his own management, and even with his own players in his struggle for success. Imlach's battle was of words, threats of actions and insults, temper tantrums and rash declarations.

We saw in previous chapters that hockey can be a battle in many other ways, as well. It can be a metaphorical battle, a “mock” battle, where all that is damaged is the ego, and the only thing that really changes is the statistical standings.

Hockey can also be a political battle, a way in which conflicting nationalistic identities, such as Anglophone and Québécois, or Canadian and Russian, can square off against each other for national or international bragging rights. As a nation divided (Bairner 2001), there is nothing that unites Canadians faster than an international ice battle from which they emerge the victors.

But we have also seen that hockey is a personal battle, an internal struggle of one player against the world as he or she tries to establish dominance over the rest. Those who battle throughout their lives are those who continue to battle while playing hockey and are the ones who will make stars of themselves.

Many believe that there are too many battles in today's hockey game, however. There are too many corporations fighting for every cent they can suck out of the game, too many teams fighting with each other because violence is what sells for the corporations, and too many coaches fighting with their players so that they can better fight the pressure of competing in a corporate world. As we have seen, this conflict can have drastic effects on the development of a

young, professionalized hockey player. Too many players are getting lost in the melee, and some will emerge without their morals, their health, or worse.

There has to be some remedy for this constant tension and pressure to perform.

Somehow, players and those who take care of them must be protected from that which they are at risk to become. Varda Burstyn has the right idea when she states,

If men are to succeed in finding new heroic forms and myths of masculinity, then men's relationship to the tasks of generational reproduction, as well as to life in the public sphere, must change. Expecting these to change for the better in the context of a lengthening work week and scarcer dollars for the majority is wishful thinking. For this reason, facilitating better family and social gathering through social supports – including sport and its culture – is a necessary condition for diminishing the violent instrumentality that sustains the warrior as the dominant icon of heroic masculinity in our culture today. (1999:273)

She does not, however, provide any real solution for how to remedy the current situation. It will be very difficult to drastically alter the workings of an institution with two centuries of tradition behind it.

Many policies have been put in place to educate players on their rights and responsibilities within their communities. Many pamphlets and awareness videos have entered the locker rooms of this and other sports in an attempt to make some of this information stick (Robinson 1998:203-231), but daily news reports of game violence erupting out of control or another player facing charges on sexual assault or drug possession is pretty strong evidence that very few of these plans have worked.

Most analysts of sport attribute professional athletes' aberrant behaviour to the males being isolated from females at a very sensitive time in their development (puberty), when they are at the height of insecurity about themselves, their bodies, their identities, and their roles in relation to those around them (Snyder and Spreitzer 1989:92). Because of this segregation, which is intended to reinforce bonds of masculinity and fraternity, these young men never really

learn how to interact with those who are not a part of this sporting clique. In most cases, it means that these young men are not socialized to behave in a normative manner towards women, as women are excluded from this fraternity solely on the basis of a mere chromosomal difference.

The male locker room environment is one where hierarchies are reinforced through acts of dominance and subordination, and the “boys will be boys” attitude keeps the hegemony intact (Burstyn 1999:53; Snyder and Spreitzer 1989:94, 136). Burstyn (1999:13) calls this a “mother-absent” atmosphere. The simplest solution, therefore, would seem to be to eliminate the absence: make it a “mother-*present*” atmosphere. Surely, if women were around the environment in some respectable capacity from the beginning, then issues of segregation and its subsequent behaviour-associated problems would cease to be an issue – “girls and boys should play hockey together, because it is the most natural thing for them to do” (Robinson 1998:227). Athletes would, during their development as players, become accustomed to seeing women holding positions of authority and respect, and, with women enmeshed within the locker room system, the young athletes would learn to interact with them on a normative and daily basis (Burstyn 1999:156, 266).

The previous seven chapters of this thesis have illustrated that there are more to sports, and hockey specifically, than can be seen on the surface. It is my hope that future research on my part can help to clear up some of the issues that surround Canada’s national sport. For a game to be tied so closely to the development of a nation illustrates that it is more than just a simple game, and one that deserves to be preserved in its place in the Canadian psyche.

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