In this chapter, I sketch out in some fairly rough terms the multifaceted relationship between sport and media in Canada. In one sense, there are the links we make among media, sport, and national identity: the airing of *Hockey Night in Canada* on the CBC, for example, or a certain goal against the USSR in 1972, or the coverage of athletic accomplishments during the Olympics. Of course, there is more than this. The transition of sport itself from amateur pursuit to professional activity is accompanied by expanded media coverage of local sports teams, players, and other minutiae in newspapers and specialized magazines and on radio, television, and the Internet. It should come as no surprise, then, that over the last forty years, sports has come to occupy a considerable amount of time and space on television and in the mainstream media. Nor should it come as a surprise that media organizations are now central to the economic viability of many professional sports franchises, such as the ownership of the Toronto Blue Jays by Rogers Communications or the various teams now under the banner of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, a company majority owned by Rogers and BCE.

Sport historian Bruce Kidd notes that “the interest in sports has served as a tremendous stimulus to the transportation and communication industries, and these in turn have furthered the popularity of sports.” It is through those transportation
and communication networks that sport has evolved from a local to a global activity. The presence of baseball teams in Toronto and Montréal in the 1960s and 1970s may well be seen as an early stage in the process of globalizing "America's game" by adapting it for different markets. The presence of satellite dishes and broadband connections make it possible to gain access to live events being held far from one's home, giving new meaning to the out-of-town scoreboard. Cable packages in Canada now provide viewers with the opportunity to watch soccer, football, hockey, basketball, and baseball games "out of market": that is, games not covered by the mainstream Canadian TV stations or specialty networks. The increase in the exposure of sports, along with the expansiveness of the reach of sports, has resulted in the growth of various kinds of sport merchandise, with team names and logos on products as diverse as beer mugs, T-shirts, and bumper stickers.

In a recent attempt to make sense of the impact of globalization on national media systems, the Italian television theorist Milly Buonanno suggested that despite the tendency to focus on the production side of foreign materials, “we should rather uphold the structural nature of the gap between supply and demand for the foreign product, which has not come about by chance.” In other words, we tend to emphasize the fact that a product like a TV show comes "from elsewhere" rather than trying to understand the various forces that bring that product to different places. To say that sport in Canada is “glocal,” then, is not particularly revolutionary. However, we remain largely uninformed about the specific ways in which sports are characterized by various interactions between the local and the global, the various meanings those interactions tend to produce, and the influential role that media technologies play in defining that experience.

In what follows, I wish to demonstrate that a series of economic measures—tariffs, import protections, and regional licensing opportunities—represent an important, if largely ignored, aspect of what we might call the sporting experience in Canada, both for professional athletes and for spectators. Such measures apply across many areas of Canadian life—most notably in the cultural sector, where various means of local protection have been implemented in an attempt to limit or manage flows of people, products, and texts and to encourage the production of local or national adaptations of works from elsewhere. This has historically served to compensate for the obvious elements of Canada’s political economy: its small population, its large land mass, its officially bilingual population, and its proximity to a larger and more powerful neighbour. Can we think of sport in the same way we think of other cultural activities in Canada? In this chapter, I provide a sketch of the kinds of analytical dividends that can be achieved by thinking of sport in this way.
A brief overview of the history and effects of economic protection measures provides the context for the discussion of three case studies that follow: the implications of import quotas for players in the Canadian Football League, elements of substitution in the simulcasting of live televised sporting events, and the historical licensing of American sports cards by the Canadian candy company O-Pee-Chee. Each of these examples highlights the peculiar patterns of labour created by protective economic measures, the “work-around strategies” produced by such measures, and the discourses of value they encourage that are part of a broader culture of sport in Canada. What will become apparent is that in sport, the ability to Canadianize remains one of the most potent expressions of national sovereignty in the global age.

THE HOME TEAM ADVANTAGE: TARIFF CULTURE IN CANADA

The 2013 federal budget announced a plan to lower the tariffs on imported sporting goods, including hockey equipment. The details of the proposed “tariff relief,” found in the budget papers, stated the obvious in noting that Canadians pay higher prices than Americans for identical products despite the Canadian dollar being roughly at par. The high price paid for sports equipment was an excellent case in point, made even stronger when a New York Times writer observed that most hockey gear is produced abroad, with the exception of the puck.4

An announcement of reduced prices for hockey equipment is a profound reminder of the powerful place of tariffs as economic instruments and as cultural symbols in the Canadian imagination. For communication scholars, this relationship is articulated most powerfully through the work of Harold Innis. Many are aware of Innis’s concern with the biases of different forms of communication in space and in time and of his work on the importance of the control of and over-reliance on the export of key natural resources, or “staples,” in Canada’s economic development, a relationship often expressed in terms of centres and margins. As Ian Angus puts it in his own interpretation of Innis, we can think of that relationship in this way: “The settler population depends on the products of the imperial centre such that there is an early interchange of finished goods for staple resources. . . . Institutions and cultural development . . . are built on this foundation.”5

If industrialization created a situation in which Canada, in Innis’s terms, enjoyed “an abundance of goods but not the first luxury of security,” then measures needed to be put in place as a counterweight to market imbalances that occur beyond the country’s borders.6 Perhaps this is how we can understand trade policy specialist Michael Hart’s note that in Canada, there has long been a conflict between attempts
to balance “those policies that encouraged resource exploitation for export and those that encouraged import-substitution manufacturing.” Various kinds of trade policy instruments, such as tariffs or quotas, have been used in Canada in an attempt to mediate between those twin tensions in the history of Canada’s economic development.

According to Hart, Canada’s trade policies have often worked by largely ignoring the realities of the Canadian economic system and seeking to “insulate the economy from outside influences and encourage the development of industries capable of replacing imported products.” Historian Michael Bliss refers to the fact that much protectionism in the country has resulted in “branch plant” forms of production: that is, companies setting up operation in Canada to avoid tariffs or to access international markets. Various forms of what political scientist Glen Williams calls “import-substitution-industrialization” have actually resulted in the underdevelopment of the Canadian economy, despite claims to the opposite, by linking the success of domestic firms to the actions of those outside the country.

Regardless of where one sits on questions of dependency theory, what has resulted, historically speaking, is that instruments such as quotas and import protection through tariffs have become deeply politicized issues as those jockeying for protection wrap their industry or product as a cultural phenomenon in need of protecting. More importantly for our purposes, however, they are part of the continued existence of what the British communication scholar Richard Collins calls “an administered national market” in Canada. That market, as Collins explains, comes with an important trade-off: inefficient national markets in exchange for a form of economic security and the “retention of wealth and jobs created by economic activity within Canadian frontiers.” What results from these kinds of arrangements is a range of institutions, actors, professionals, and cultural forms, all of which could be called “cultural intermediaries,” in the sense used by cultural theorist Keith Negus as “those workers who come between artists and consumers.” While Negus is writing in relation to the music industry, we can easily apply the concept of “cultural intermediaries” to the discussion here about figures in the world of sports who perform very similar roles, negotiating flows of imported and exported materials and selecting those that would be most appropriate for the Canadian situation.

IMPORT QUOTAS AND CANADIAN FOOTBALL

Is there anything more illustrative of the dynamic between the domestic and the imported than what occurs on the playing fields of Hamilton’s Ivor Wynne Stadium
or Mosaic Stadium at Taylor Field in Regina? Canadian football differs in many respects from the American game. In addition to the longer and wider field and the three-down rather than four-down system in the NFL, differences exist in the rules of play and in the system used to award points. For example, in Canadian football, if a ball is kicked into the end zone but no field goal is scored, the ball is still live (unless it struck a goal post in flight). If the defensive team catches the ball but fails to return it out of the end zone, or if the ball has been kicked all the way through the end zone, the team in possession of the ball is awarded a single point, known as a rouge point. In contrast, American football does not generally recognize “singles.” Various innovations in the Canadian game emerged over time as football became a sport distinct from similar sports such as soccer and rugby. The three-down system did not emerge until 1907, with the “American” snap to the quarterback coming into play by the 1920s.13

For our purposes, the most important innovation in the game is the import quota: every CFL team can only carry a certain number of players who were born outside Canada. This is a surprisingly elaborate system, explained in some detail on the league’s website. A Canadian player is someone who has been “physically resident in Canada for an aggregate period of five (5) years prior to attaining the age of eighteen (18) years.”14 According to the current rules, no team can carry more than twenty “imports.” Of those twenty imports, four are “designated imports”—players who cannot start but are eligible to play on special teams or replace an import player who is in the starting lineup. Similar rules exist in other North American sports affected by globalization. Major League Soccer, for example divides 152 “international slots” among the nineteen teams that make up the league. Teams can trade those slots among themselves, but the remaining spots on the roster must “belong to domestic players.” If the team is based in the United States, the player must be a US citizen. The three Canadian teams—Montreal Impact, Toronto FC, and Vancouver Whitecaps—must have “a minimum of three Canadian domestic players on their rosters.”15 The presence of import quotas in the leagues of other countries, like Russia’s KHL or the Swiss A-League, become apparent to Canadians only in isolated cases, such as when NHL players seek employment during work stoppages.16

An import quota in the CFL reminds many communication scholars of equivalent measures in film and television. Many countries, including France and Australia, have quotas that limit the number of “foreign imports” in terms of films shown on local screens. Then there is the long-standing practice of marketing Canadian locations for Hollywood films. Cities offer American producers sizable
tax breaks to bring their teams of actors and technical staff to Vancouver or Toronto. This creates a class of cultural workers who move from location to location, regardless of a concern for place, under what some call a “new international division of cultural labour.” The global trade in soccer players, regional athletic markets, new leagues, and the commodification of events like the Olympics create similar forms of global labour in the sporting marketplace.17

Canadian broadcasting does not have an import quota per se, but Canadian content regulations perform effectively the same function. Each broadcaster is required as a condition of licence to devote a specified percentage of programming to material that is deemed “Canadian.” The amount differs depending on the broadcasting undertaking; in other words, the rules for CTV are different from the rules for HGTV. This Canadian-content restriction is based on a series of calculations that assess the Canadian-ness of a piece of music or program based on the citizenship of the different members of the production team. Content quotas in broadcasting serve the same purpose as do import quotas in the CFL: to guarantee “shelf space” on the airwaves for Canadian creative talent. Such quotas are part of what has traditionally been the profoundly global orientation of Canadian broadcasters, who have long realized that they will never be able to produce enough domestic content on their own nor manage the demand by consumers to consume material from elsewhere. At the same time, content measures for broadcasting recognize that, at the very least, there should be some local content in a national system, not only for the ideological purpose of representing Canadian stories to Canadians but also for the economic purpose of sustaining domestic creative industries.

An import quota is clearly not an import ban. It simply adjusts or modifies the flow of “material” moving in and out of a given activity in such a way as to ensure greater participation in that activity without fully stopping it from taking place. Proponents of import quotas are more concerned with the variety of players on the field than with what those players actually do in the game. While everyone involved would like the system to produce star players, they also recognize that it may not. However, they are content to take that risk and are happy to have the quota play the role of referee with the goal creating industrial sectors that will be able to meet the manufactured demand. As a form of communication, then, an import quota represents an expression of moderation.

With that in mind, is it unfair or naive to say that to be the general manager of a CFL team is akin to acting as the producer for a Canadian film or TV show? In his assessment of the work of Canadian cultural producers, Will Straw notes that “the Canadian cultural artifact is assembled from a particular ratio of domestic to
imported raw materials.” That ratio, Straw explains, “will be shaped by a jumble of overlapping policy conditions: the state of tariffs, currency differentials, customs regulations, postal rates and restrictions and so on.” Of course, Straw is not referring to sport, and an elaborate web of funding mechanisms, tax breaks, and subsidies exists for cultural products that does not exist for football. Still, one can easily see how a general manager of a CFL team performs a very similar kind of labour—delicately managing the relationship of imported and domestic elements in order to satisfy content quotas and fielding a competitive squad within various budgetary restrictions and league rules.

Stretching the analogy even further, assessing a CFL team involves some of the same skills used to make sense of a Canadian television production. While plenty of Canadian programs are produced entirely by domestic cast and crew, plenty of others mix domestic talent with other talent flown in from the United States, France, or elsewhere. We might regard such programs as “nominally Canadian,” in the sense that they employ a sufficient number of Canadian personnel to satisfy the definition of “Canadian” imposed by the quotas that govern the industry. Yet we certainly wouldn’t consider a CFL team made up of players from both the US and Canada to be only nominally Canadian. The difference may reflect a realistic expectation that, to be successful, a CFL team must necessarily involve plenty of Americans, in contrast to the persistent belief—expressed in the voice of regulators, politicians, and cultural nationalists—that an all-Canadian broadcasting system is not only desirable but also entirely possible.

We can see the impact of this numerical definition of “Canadian” if we consider the composition of most CFL teams in the light of the import quota. As Robert Stebbins perceptively noted in 1993, the import players have typically occupied the skill positions on the field, those that are “presumed to require the most speed, agility and dexterity,” such as quarterback, wide receiver, linebacker, and running back, as well as the kick returner. Just as it has long been held that radio stations get around content quotas by playing the Canadian music near the end of the hour (the least lucrative part of the programming day), while television producers make “nominally Canadian” programs that feature Canadian actors in minor or supporting roles while casting American stars (like McGyver’s Richard Dean Anderson) in lead roles, CFL teams have historically developed their own work-around strategies by importing skill talent for positions such as quarterback, wide receiver, and linebacker, while filling the other positions, such as offensive lineman, with players who have graduated from undergraduate programs at Simon Fraser or St. Francis Xavier. Indeed, some argue that the league has become a
dumping ground for those who cannot make the grade in the more prestigious National Football League. Over time, the CFL acts as a kind of athletic Tangier, a place where players whose careers have in some way faltered attempt to rehabilitate their reputation in hopes of returning to the game in the south. Consider, for example, Andre Ware, who won the Heisman Trophy only to see his career subsequently fizzle, or Art Schlichter, a prized college quarterback whose career was tainted through allegations of illegal gambling activity, or players like Dexter Manley or Ricky Williams, likewise working to extend or rejuvenate their careers after brushes with the law.

One can easily see how a politics of numbers structures the composition of Canadian football teams and where the resentments can be found. When University of Regina quarterback Marc Mueller called for the CFL to drop the import quota exemption granted to quarterbacks in order to create more opportunities for Canadians, he was echoing the sentiments of others who perform jobs that are frequently taken by non-Canadians—like actors who say that while the system grants opportunities for many, it still creates significant tensions among those who do not benefit from those protections. Perhaps, then, it should come as no surprise that many of the players who have served as president of the Canadian Football Players Association, an organization generally in favour of maintaining or even strengthening import quotas, have been among those most affected by import quotas—namely, linebackers and offensive linemen, As in the case of nominally Canadian television productions, this may well be why both the quarterback and the lead actor have been so elusive in the Canadian cultural imagination, even if both systems have produced careers for plenty of other players in other positions throughout the field.

At the same time, though, it is interesting to note that the CFL has, at least in recent times, operated under a parallel rhetoric that it, too, is a “quarterback’s league,” since it draws in the athletic quarterback who may be considered too small or may be schooled in running offences at US colleges but who can succeed under the different dimensions of the Canadian game. However, the history of those kinds of quarterbacks in the Canadian game, from Doug Flutie and Jeff Garcia to Warren Moon and Vince Ferragamo, has been one in which the CFL has functioned as a kind of finishing school for quarterbacks who can be “brought back” into the NFL.

As a cross-border sport, Canadian football is often seen as being provisionally close to certain Division I or II college football programs in the United States, particularly those schools that practice novel offensive formations such as the wishbone offence, where the quarterback is more of a “runner,” a thin and quick running back,
than a “thrower” in the “drop-back passer” model prized by the National Football League. While the NFL continues to have a romance with the “athletic quarterback”—from Randall Cunningham to Donovan McNabb, and from Vince Young to Robert Griffith III, with a stop at Michael Vick somewhere along the line—the league continues to prize the quarterbacks who may be mobile but are passers first and runners only by default, like Tom Brady or Payton Manning. It bears noting that this distinction carries with it an obvious racial taint, a fact witnessed by the long-standing tensions around the notion of the “black quarterback,” with all of its negative connotations within discourses of American professional sport.

From this discussion, one can see, perhaps not surprisingly, the mixed results of import quotas on Canadian football in much the same way that one can see the mixed results of import quotas in other areas of Canadian life, such as cultural production. To be competitive as a football team in the CFL depends on a particular skill set that fuses knowledge of the game with a bureaucratic knowledge of how to mix the citizenship of players in order to satisfy the requirements created by the quota: in other words, to understand how best to mix domestic and imported elements before the team takes the field.

**TIME OUT FOR A SUBSTITUTION**

Import quotas are only one form of the intervention that is part of the tariff culture of Canadian sports. Another concerns the coverage of live sporting events, particularly on television. Here, one finds strategic acts of substitution, moments in which programs simulcast by Canadian networks contain elements that are tailored for domestic audiences. Appreciation of acts of substitution draws our attention to sport as a mediated experience in Canada. As such, coverage of sport is not divorced from the aesthetic and technical factors that are part of the experience of watching other kinds of television in Canada: American commercials being replaced by Canadian ones, on-air promotions for other programs interrupting credit sequences, or “Canadian editions” of format television shows like Idol or Top Chef being part of the country’s television fare.

Writing about the mix between local and imported components in cultural forms such as the cinema, Will Straw asserts: “This interweaving of elements is the object of a labour of articulation that works between textual levels and materials to endow this ratio of materials with a sense of seamless intelligibility.” This provides Canadians with a kind of domestic skill set “to differentiate visual elements that are recognizably American and others that we read as Canadian.” Put a different way, this is one of
the ways in which Canadians consume popular media texts—by searching for the aspects that are Canadian even if they are not clearly identified as such.

Of course, the same kinds of skills are on display in other media forms, such as television or magazines, in which Canadians become exposed to programming from different places, as well as different versions of textual forms. The mediated experience of sports in this country is no different. Watching a station like TSN today is an elaborate exercise in deciphering the differences between the programs or talent that are local and those that are imported from the network’s minority owner, the American network ESPN.

The substitution of Canadian ads for American ones during the Super Bowl is something that attracts considerable attention, even if the issue is less acute in the digital age. As a testament to its continued place in the Canadian imagination, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) devotes a page on its website to the issue. The explanation for the continued repetition of a small number of commercials during the world’s biggest television spectacle involves “simultaneous substitution” (also known as signal substitution), in which an American signal is interrupted by a Canadian signal to protect the rights of broadcasters who have negotiated to carry signals simultaneously airing on American networks but to replace the commercials with ads aimed specifically at Canadians.

British media theorist John Ellis recently characterized interstitials such as on-air promotions as performing a larger function than simply interrupting the flow of television. The same sentiments apply when thinking about the role played by simultaneous substitution. The ability to simulcast allows Canadian networks to attract audiences that would have gone to American networks, and the ability to insert Canadian advertisements generates revenue to pay for the programming. The popular logic is that the extra revenues generated from this activity are eventually funnelled back into the systems that support the production of Canadian TV programming, but there is no real way of knowing whether that is the case. It is for that reason that Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan conclude in their analysis of Canadian television that simultaneous substitution constitutes “the very heart and soul of contemporary television.”

An equally interesting example of in-game substitutions, particularly for the broadcast of live sports events, is the role played by studio hosts during the airing of live sports events. In television studies, the host is seen as the figure that mediates between the audience and performers through a series of engagements: providing information, interviewing experts, assessing events that have transpired, contextualizing events in relation to other factors (like out-of-town scores or standings),
informing viewers of future events, or explaining references to things that are unfamiliar to viewers.26

The role of studio hosts is particularly important within cultures where substitutions take place for linguistic or economic reasons. For example, a broadcaster like RDS will simulcast a Major League Baseball game that is airing on the American network ESPN but will provide commentators Denis Casavant and Marc Griffin, who “cover” the game from the studio in Montréal. Obviously, the role here is linguistic: the hosts present the game in French for their audience but also act as translators of things like on-air graphics presenting statistical information. The material shown back to local audiences is also selective in the sense that a broadcast such as this typically maintains its audio feed to provide viewers with the aural experience of the sporting event. However, this occurs with a slight delay to allow the in-studio commentators to decide what to translate and what to leave aside. In the case of things like interviews with players, the in-studio hosts usually act as summarizers, pointing out the salient points from an interview rather than translating line by line.

Similar examples exist in the English-language market. A cable channel such as Sportsnet may negotiate the rights to carry the World Series, but it may also maintain Canadian hosts who introduce the game, presenting it to Canadians as something brought to you by Sportsnet. During the commercials, the viewer is returned to the studio, where hosts Jamie Campbell and ex-Toronto Blue Jay Gregg Zaun provide insight and analysis, promote upcoming games, and then return the viewer to the live action. This practice is common across the sporting spectrum, such as during the World Cup, the European Football championships, or March Madness, when the importer selectively “lifts out” or interrupts what may appear to be a flow of TV content to return to Canada to repatriate the program as being a mix of imported and domestic content.27

What is interesting about these cases, of course, is that the choices regarding what to translate or discuss is obviously selective. The RDS commentators may omit an on-air promotion for another program airing on ESPN for the obvious reason that it will not be available for its audiences. This is different from the experience of many English-language audiences who, even in the Internet age, frequently watch forms of cultural content—movies on HBO, college football games on ESPN—that are either not available to many Canadians or are restricted to the few who are interested in shelling out the large sums of money to buy sports cable packages or are skilled in the delicate arts of accessing the material through other offline means. For studio hosts on simulcast events, mediating between audience and performers
is also an act of filtering out which aspects are appropriate and which are best ignored or left for the viewer to seek out in other places, such as online.

But there is more to this. The ability for Casavant and Griffin to call a baseball game taking place in Minneapolis or Phoenix from Montréal reminds us that distance in space and slight delays in time create opportunities for a kind of cultural framing, which is necessary to ensure a more efficient and effective form of communication. This has long been the argument of those in Québec’s dubbing industry, who claim that films must be dubbed in Québec rather than France to ensure that they will be presented in a language appropriate to the French-Canadian market. But there is more to it than this. Practices such as dubbing and substitution represent the primary coping techniques of small nations in international mediascapes. Since it costs too much to send announcers to cover an international event, simulcasting allows them to “cover” it from Montréal, providing commentary from the studio in a cost-efficient manner. The argument is simple: to have access to the world’s media bounty is to accept that it comes with certain restrictions, even if much is left untranslated; some viewers will understand the English, while others will ignore it.

We can see, then, that the studio host is an essential part of the framing of something like a baseball game as a hybrid experience. Watching the Boston Red Sox and the New York Yankees play may have little to do with Canada, but viewers see it on a Canadian network and are subject both to the mediation of studio hosts who remind them of that network and to Canadian-specific commercials and talent. All of this is part of the Canadianizing of texts that come from abroad, a process that draws us away from more imperialistic notions of a country being “dominated” by American culture.

O-Pee-Chee Versus Topps: Hockey Cards and the Value of Canadian Editions

A brief discussion of hockey cards will round out our discussion. There is much to be said about hockey cards and the Canadian sporting imagination. First, hockey cards are part of the expansion of sports into a range of merchandising opportunities. Owning a sports franchise is like many creative operations in that the owner tries to leverage the revenue opportunities afforded by the exploitation of team logos, names, and other distinctive markers on a range of paraphernalia, from authentic uniforms to bumper stickers—and, of course, hockey cards. Athletes allowing their photos to appear on trading cards is a powerful expression of their right to publicity. Much has been made of hockey cards as collectibles: that is, the
transformation of a youthful pursuit into a commodities market characterized by ebbs and flows and by the indices of supply and demand. Finally, cards are a critical expression of sports fandom. Fans demonstrate their enthusiasm by spending on a range of products, including games, cards, clothes, and fantasy leagues: in this way, supporters of various ages extend their fandom beyond the field.28

One of the original purposes of trading cards was to market other products in order to distinguish them from similar products on the marketplace. In some cases, trading cards were associated with illicit products, such as baseball cards with cigarettes and hockey cards with bubble gum. Early pioneers of this marketing practice, such as the makers of Chesterfield cigarettes, would slip baseball cards into cigarette packages to motivate young boys to take up the practice, a variation on the Lorillard company in the United Kingdom placing paper money in random cigarette packages to encourage brand loyalty.29 Communication historian Daniel Robinson observes that marketing prowess is one of the more powerful features of chewing gum as a consumer product. In his discussion of Wrigley, Robinson details the powerful use of billboards and advertising campaigns through things like sponsorship as part of the attempts to legitimize chewing gum as a consumer product. This came at a time when some people considered the practice of chewing gum to be a base activity, one that was potentially addictive and unhygienic, although others believed that it had stress-relieving properties.30

These examples reveal the extent to which our understanding of hockey cards is tied to notions associated with value. Yet many of these discussions consider that notion of value at the individual level—that is, at the level of collectors or athletes. Might there be an additional layer of value we can uncover that is relevant to our discussion here? Let’s go back to the drawers or the attic and unearth the old cards and see. For many Canadians of a certain age (and not just collectors), the cards shown in figure 6.1—both depicting Scott Mellanby, of the Philadelphia Flyers—are a powerful, albeit subtle piece of visual imagery. The cards are not identical: one features the logo of the American Topps company, the other of the Canadian O-Pee-Chee candy company. Other differences between the two cards can be seen by looking at the back, where Mellanby’s position, statistics, and player summary are presented in both English and French on the O-Pee-Chee card. The O-Pee-Chee card is also printed on a lighter card stock than the Topps version.

Those differences were recently brought into relief. In May 2011, the Toronto Star reported that an anonymous bidder paid more than US$90,000 dollars for Wayne Gretzky’s 1979 O-Pee-Chee rookie card. This was reportedly the highest price ever paid for a hockey card, yet it pales in comparison with prices paid for
trading cards in other sports—most notably, baseball. The steep price for Gretzky’s card was based on a number of factors, including the difficulty of finding the card in mint condition, because of the weak quality of the card stock, and the relatively small print run of the Canadian O-Pee-Chee cards compared to the number of cards produced by Topps.


The O-Pee-Chee candy company, once based in London, Ontario, produced hockey cards throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Two decades later, the company negotiated a licensing agreement with Topps to distribute the cards with Topps products in Canada, beginning in the 1960s and continuing into the late 1990s. This practice was consistent with similar actions involving confectionary products. O-Pee-Chee gained the rights to distribute Bazooka gum and Ring Pops through licensing agreements with other companies and as a complement to its other candy products, such as Fun-Dip and SweeTarts. As a result, the card design, photographs, and player information were imported from the United States to be printed locally, with player information on the back communicated in both of Canada’s official languages. Such a practice was made easier in the case of O-Pee-Chee, as the company was located inside the Somerville paper box company, bringing the candy and the paper operations together. Somerville itself took advantage of its paper-making capacity to produce Canadian editions of other kinds of retail products. Under the
banner of Somerville Industries, the company licensed a number of board games with the manufacturer Milton Bradley to produce Canadian editions of the games, with instructions in both languages. As part of the expansion of licensing opportunities afforded to popular culture, the combined efforts of Somerville and O-Pee-Chee could be responsible for the production of the “Welcome Back, Kotter” board game, as well as trading cards for the Canadian market.

In the production of Canadian editions of cards and games, Somerville and O-Pee-Chee are to candy, cards, and games what many independent production companies are to Canadian television. They negotiate national licensing rights in global intellectual property markets. As I have written elsewhere, a company such as Insight Productions, based in Toronto, will license the rights to develop a Canadian version of a format TV show, such as Project Runway, which will then use domestic talent, production teams, and marketing. In each of these cases, the local agent’s ability to assess domestic demand and other distinguishing features of the domestic marketplace is essential. It is for this reason that only some forms of popular culture are given a Canadian edition, whereas others are left to circulate in the marketplace without adaptation.

Hockey cards are also a powerful way to appreciate the multiple sites at which fan engagement with sport occurs in Canada outside of the arena itself. Of course, the purchase and distribution of cards tie us to small-scale retail sites like convenience stores, collectibles shows held at churches and convention centres, supplementary publications, such as Beckett, that assess card value, and, of course, rummage and garage sales held throughout Canadian neighbourhoods. In recent years, online auction sites such as eBay have become popular places for the sale of all sorts of collectible items, including hockey cards.

Reflecting on the place of Pokémon cards in France, Gilles Brougère explains that “the problem of value is inescapable in the case of Pokémon cards because unlike most other objects of children’s play the cards are clearly marked with a hierarchy of value.”

Hockey cards are a perfect example of that hierarchy of value. They are like other kinds of memorabilia—such as ticket stubs, programs, or signed baseball bats or hockey sticks—in the sense that they serve both a nostalgic purpose, to commemorate an important event, and a commercial purpose. If a bat is signed by a prominent player and if that player becomes a Hall of Famer, the value thereby increases. Hockey cards work in much the same way—if a player becomes a major celebrity, considerable value is attached to his rookie card, which takes us back to the first time the player entered the league. Hockey cards and sports memorabilia accrue value over time and in response to other developments: the scarcity
of the product, the quality of its preservation, and, of course, consumer demand. In the case of O-Pee-Chee, however, we can identify an additional value, which we might call a “production value,” that inheres in the Canadian labour and raw materials used to produce the cards.

**Conclusion**

Robert McChesney argues that the relationship between sports and media “has been distinctly shaped by the emerging contours of American capitalism since the 1830s.” How have those “emerging contours” of American capitalism determined the sport-media relationship in Canada? This chapter has offered an opportunity to think about how a number of protective economic devices—tariffs, import quotas, and licensing agreements—are a fundamental part of sport as a cultural form of expression in this country. To be sure, such measures are about the protection of specific interests within Canada, which is a powerful feature of Canada’s economic character. However, this is about more than protectionism. Such measures also contribute to the management of the flows of materials, people, and ideas in and out of the country.

Four conclusions emerge from the examples explored in this chapter. First, such cases are reminders of the fact that much of the cultural production in this country is compensatory in nature. Import quotas, simultaneous substitution, and local editions represent cultural instruments and methods intended to manage the flow of culture from place to place. However, they are also used to compensate for a range of weaknesses in the Canadian condition: the need to make goods available on a national basis and to overcome the relatively small and dispersed population spread across a large land mass, a small domestic marketplace, a concern with creating opportunities for citizens to do what they want to do, and opportunities for Canadians to express themselves to others. Second, these examples show us that in countries such as Canada, there is a heavy emphasis on gatekeeping. The issue has always been about the extent and scope of the ratio between imported and domestic materials. Third, we can see from each of these examples that quotas and substitutions create particular forms of labour, drawing on skill sets that call on individuals to mediate between international and local pressures. Finally, questions involving local or imported elements serve as occasions for varying discussions of value—about differences in the quality of play, about the effect of imported elements on a domestic experience, or about the benefits of working with “foreign materials.”
The tension between imported and domestic elements, then, is a natural consequence for a country such as Canada, born from empire but now a middle power, a small country next to a big neighbour. From this perspective, one might say that while efforts to mediate this tension are of course performed in the manner of business, they also serve an important function in terms of delivering a Canadian experience at least as efficiently and inexpensively as the alternative, which might be producing something from scratch. At the same time, though, those realities also render the question of the “Canadian-ness” of activities like sports to be problematic. When someone like Don Cherry intones about “good Canadian boys” and a particular style of hockey, he either reveals the limits of his own knowledge or else performs a role that many Canadians would like him to play—that of someone speaking for a unified nation where one does not exist. Many of the league’s marquee players were born in places like Moscow, Buffalo, or Örnsköldsvik before moving to Swift Current for professional finishing or being drafted by Vancouver to play right wing on the checking line.

As I have begun to sketch out here, what may be the most Canadian of sporting experiences may be not only the simultaneous sharing of collective events but also various acts of near-simultaneous substitutions, of cheering for teams with few Canadians on them, of watching TV programs with Canadian commentators, or of consuming Canadian editions of a range of media texts, from magazines to hockey cards. This leaves us with the task of appreciating the extent, scope, cost, and ratio of the intermingling between various elements and of understanding the structural components that give sports its distinctive character in Canada on the field, on the screen, or at the local card store.

NOTES

2 Milly Buonanno, The Age of Television: Experiences and Theories (Bristol: Intellect, 2008), 94.


8 Ibid.


18 Will Straw, “Pathways of Cultural Movement,” in *Accounting for Culture*, ed. Caroline Andrew, Monica Gattinger, Sharon Jeannote, and Will Straw (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), 188.


23 Ibid., 36.


27 Similar practices were in place when Canadians were first exposed to American football. As Paul Rutherford notes, when the CBC first aired American football in the 1960s, “the broadcast had to include elaborate explanation by an American of the rules and the plays so that viewers versed in the Canadian game weren’t confused by what was happening on the screen.” Paul Rutherford, *When Television Was Young* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 74.


