

HOW CANADIANS COMMUNICATE V

HOW CANADIANS COMMUNICATE V SPORTS

Edited by

David Taras and Christopher Waddell



AU PRESS

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Published by AU Press, Athabasca University
1200, 10011 – 109 Street, Edmonton, AB T5J 3S8

ISBN 978-1-77199-007-3 (pbk.) 978-1-77199-008-0 (PDF) 978-1-77199-009-7 (epub)
doi: 10.15215/aupress/9781771990073.01

Cover design by Natalie Olsen, Kisscut Design
Interior design by Sergiy Kozakov
Printed and bound in Canada by Marquis Book Printers

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication
Sports (2016)
Sports / edited by David Taras and Christopher Waddell.

(How Canadians communicate ; V)

This volume emerged from a conference that was part of the How Canadians Communicate series of conferences held in Banff in October 2012.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

1. Mass media and sports—Canada. 2. Sports—Social aspects—Canada.
I. Taras, David, 1950-, author, editor II. Waddell, Christopher Robb, author, editor
III. Title. IV. Series: How Canadians communicate (Series) ; 5

GV742.S66 2016 070.4'497960971 C2015-904359-X
C2015-904360-3

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Book Fund (CFB) for our publishing activities.



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Assistance provided by the Government of Alberta, Alberta Media Fund.



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HOW CANADIANS COMMUNICATE V **SPORTS**

POWER PLAYS

Communication and Control in Canadian Sports

David Taras

To borrow a phrase from Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, sports are “more than just games.”¹ Sports are about identity and belonging, about our place in the world and how we see ourselves. Over the past decade, the Canadian sports landscape has been dramatically transformed. We have seen the merger of “big media” and “big sports,” deepening globalization, a new wave of hyper-commercialism, the emergence of digital media as a mainstay of sports journalism, increased worries about concussions and brain injuries, and a fierce national debate about hitting and fighting in hockey. At the same time, active participation in sports is plummeting. For a variety of reasons, fewer young Canadians are lacing on skates, doing lengths at the pool, kicking a ball or swinging for the fences, or experiencing the thrill of competition. As the experience of playing sports grows increasingly remote, sports culture is more and more about our experience as fans—an experience that is largely shaped and defined by the media.

In this seismic shift, a great deal of the action is taking place far from the ice or the base paths. We are in the midst of a major battle by giant media conglomerates for control over sports entertainment. Worried that their cable empires will crumble under pressure from over-the-top broadcasters such as Netflix, Amazon, and YouTube, as well as from online piracy, companies such as Bell and Rogers believe that control over live content, specifically sports, will prevent the ravages of “cord cutting.” They also want to win the battle to broadcast games directly to phones and other mobile devices. Since sports programming draws the largest audiences, with viewers who are more likely to watch games to the very end as well as to watch ads, the stakes are enormous. As media conglomerates acquire ownership of sports teams, however, concerns have been raised about journalistic freedom, conflicts of interest,

as well as the creation of a self-perpetuating sports machine that endlessly promotes its own products. With so much at stake, the spin never stops.

But the battle over sports is also about governments and the degree to which taxpayers are willing to support elite athletes, pay for new arenas, stadiums, and recreation centres, and maintain a prominent role in sports for the public broadcaster, CBC/Radio-Canada. More critically, however, the battle is over the health of our population, the values that permeate our society, and the symbols that dominate Canadian life. In one way or another, each of the chapters in this book examines how contests for power and control play out in the domain of sports.

WHY SPORTS MATTERS

Sports are being altered by new developments that are changing the shape of play, the standards of athletic achievement, and the fan experience. Most fundamentally, the ways in which people communicate about sports and participate in the sports spectacle are being transformed. Inevitably, in Canada, hockey is the fulcrum of these changes. Fans attending a game fifty years ago would have had roughly the same experience inside the arena as fans do today—minus the jumbotrons, instant replays, rock music, and players clad in garb that makes them look like extras from *Road Warrior*. They would have been drawn to the game by the tribal loyalties of their city and region, including those based on religion and language—as, for example, when the legendary Montreal Canadiens faced off against their archrivals, the Toronto Maple Leafs. They would have gone to the game to see the great stars of their day—the Gordie Howes and Rocket Richards—and to watch a thrilling display of manhood, action, and fury. The following morning, they would have read about the game and viewed photos of the action in newspapers, heard the scores and descriptions of the game on radio, and watched film of the goals later that night on television.

And yet, if these fans could be transported to the present day, much of what they would see and experience would come as a shock. They would suddenly find themselves immersed in a dazzling world of multi-media platforms—a bewildering kaleidoscope of all-sports channels, league and team channels and websites, blogs, apps, national radio shows, YouTube videos, fantasy leagues, video games, and countless magazines, to say nothing of Facebook sites and tweets by coaches, players, and reporters. They would be stunned to discover websites such as NHL.com, where all of the information that they might conceivably have amassed in a lifetime of following hockey is instantly available. They would also be amazed by a

sports culture that never stops, that's always in forward motion, and that includes millions of fans communicating with each other.

Fifty years ago, communications media were defined and limited by a specific technology. Newspapers competed against other newspapers, television networks against television networks, and radio programs against radio programs. Fans from that era could not easily have imagined a digital universe in which every medium has merged with every other medium and in effect become every other medium. They would be fascinated by smartphones, for example, which are not merely telephones but a gateway to newspapers and magazines, books, television programming, live messaging, and a seemingly infinite array of websites. Content is thus no longer bound by technological platform: everything is everywhere. They might also be surprised to discover that, as mentioned above, two major Canadian media conglomerates, Bell Canada and Rogers, now own sports franchises and, through their multiple media outlets and bundled content, compete for control over the dissemination of sports entertainment.

Our time travellers would be in for another shock. NHL teams, for example, are now populated by Swedes, Russians, a large influx of Americans, Czechs, Finns, and others, and Canadians are not necessarily the best players—nor is it clear that hockey is still somehow “our” game. They would discover that the entire world of sports has been globalized. Soccer teams such as Manchester United or Real Madrid, Formula One car racing, baseball players from Japan and the Dominican Republic, and mixed martial arts fighters from Brazil have entered the Canadian consciousness to an extent that would have been difficult to imagine half a century ago. Perhaps the most surprising change, at least to hockey fans, would be the rise of women's hockey, and, more generally, the presence of women in the pantheon of Canadian sports stars. Even though sports culture in many ways remains guilty of sidelining female athletes and, at times, of reducing women's bodies to sexual objects, many women athletes—whether soccer players, speed skaters, or wrestlers—have achieved fame and are lionized by fans. Men are no longer alone in a space that was once almost exclusively their own.

This said, one can argue that some dimensions of sport never seem to change—although they may take different forms. First is the need for spectacle. As ceremonial public events that attract mass audiences, spectacles bring people together in a shared experience, fostering a sense of group identity—of membership in something larger than oneself—and reinforcing societal values. Whether in the form of a national celebration, such as Canada Day, or a major sports event, such as the Olympics, the Super Bowl, or the Grey Cup, spectacles are primal, emotional,

and filled with memories. Sports events are spectacles par excellence, and specific sports—such as hockey in Canada—have come to be associated with national identity. When the eminent cultural theorist Roland Barthes first watched hockey, in connection with a documentary about national sports, he described hockey as quintessentially Canadian, remarking on its intimate link to the country's climate and geography—the frozen waterways and icy climate from which the game emerged. The National Hockey League was founded in 1917, and it was NHL hockey, initially mediated by radio and then by television, that broke the isolation engendered by great distances. By celebrating hockey, one could not help but celebrate Canada. Watching hockey became an act of “Canadianness.”

In a country that spans enormous distances, has pronounced linguistic and regional divides, and has, since the Second World War, seen an enormous influx of immigrants from virtually every country in the world, creating common bonds has been difficult. Moreover, in its struggle to forge a national identity, Canada must share the continent with an economic, cultural, and entertainment superpower whose population is roughly ten times its size. In the face of these challenges, efforts to find unifying narratives and heroes have often foundered on underlying divisions. Politicians are rarely (if ever) permitted to achieve the prominence that would allow them to qualify as national leaders, and artists, scientists, public intellectuals, and literary figures seldom gain the degree of celebrity that is quite common in other countries. Canadians may not be familiar with painter Alex Colville or with writers such as Margaret Atwood or Mordecai Richler, but sports heroes are obvious and transcendent. This was certainly the case with the immortal Rocket Richard, whose modesty, muscle, and uncanny sixth sense about where the puck was heading made him a symbol of the aspirations of Québec society before the Quiet Revolution. Similarly, Gordie Howe, the hardscrabble prairie farm boy who fought for the puck as if he were at war, came to embody iron determination and physical strength. The exploits of other sports stars, such as Wayne Gretzky, Catriona Le May Doan, Sydney Crosby, Steve Nash, Georges St-Pierre, and Christine Sinclair, are part of Canadian legend.

Sport is about place and memory—about where we grew up and where we call home, about the warm experiences of childhood, and about our sense of belonging. It's about deep attachment and loyalty: Saskatchewan Roughrider fans spending hours on buses travelling to games and wearing hollowed out watermelons on their heads, the Montreal Canadiens occupying a special place in the Québec imagination, and Maple Leaf fans, like Chicago Cubs fans, clinging endlessly to hope in the face of grim reality. Sport allows us to re-enter the worlds of play and childhood

and freedom. What could have greater power? But sport is also about nationalism. The playing of national anthems, the pageantry of flags and honour guards, the red, white, and blue bunting in US ballparks, the emblems and decals emblazoned on hockey and baseball uniforms, the honouring of heroes in pre-game ceremonies—all serve to reaffirm collective identity. The Olympics, in particular, provide viewers with the pre-eminent nationalist spectacle. As Harry Hiller notes in chapter 8 of this volume, the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics were watched by more television viewers than any other event in Canadian history, and the games inspired a phenomenal outpouring of nationalistic pride. Despite a tragic beginning, with the death of luger Nodar Kumaritashvili in a practice run, the subsequent convergence of massive TV audiences, patriotic ad campaigns mounted by corporate sponsors, triumphant victories for Canadian athletes, spontaneous celebrations in the streets of Vancouver, and the pride engendered by the successful organization of such a mega-event became part of national memory and created a sense that Canada was a pre-eminent country.

The question is, then, whether modern societies need what sociologists call “the ‘90-minute nationalism’ of the stadium” to stay together.³ Apparently, they do. Ira Wagman, in chapter 6 of this volume, describes the intricate efforts made to preserve traces of Canadian identity within professional sports. Import substitution rules in the CFL, for example, help to sustain the fiction that the CFL has an autonomous Canadian identity, rather than simply functioning as a testing ground and temporary home for players trying to make it back to the NFL. Wagman aptly describes the league as “a kind of athletic Tangier,” the Moroccan port that served for almost a century as a haven for people trying to rehabilitate their careers and reputations. One is tempted to argue that the place of Canadian franchises in their respective sports resembles Canada’s economic and cultural position vis-à-vis the United States: they participate in, but have little control over, the spectacle. Control resides at head offices in New York. Indeed, one might even ask whether Canada would have a significant sports culture at all if it weren’t for government support in the form of municipal tax breaks, provincial lottery money for professional sports teams, taxpayer support for hockey arenas and other sports facilities, funding for Olympic athletes through Own the Podium, a public university system that trains and showcases athletes and has produced a national amateur sports system, and a cavalcade of media regulations, including rules governing Canadian content that promote the airing of Canadian sports. While the universe of government support is amorphous and often confusing, if this government-supplied air were taken out of the sports balloon, the entire system might collapse on itself.

But if sport reinforces collective identity, it also satisfies psychological needs. Sociologists have written about the ways in which following sports help to liberate people from the constraints of daily life. Given family and financial responsibilities, workplace routines, and a nonstop parade of tensions and aggravations, few people experience the equivalent of a home-run blast, a breakaway, or a dunk, bomb, or sack in their own lives. Sport offers vicarious thrills and the opportunity for emotional release. We are allowed to whoop and holler as we watch upsets, unexpected plays, and games decided by the sheer luck of bad calls, goal posts struck, or dropped passes. Letting loose when the game is on is, moreover, a form of “bad behaviour” that is sanctioned by society. As soon as the puck drops or the coin is tossed, beers are popped, swearing is allowed, and violence can be cheered and admired. In addition, wearing team jerseys or painting our faces in team colours functions as a type of masquerade. We are allowed to become somebody different, at least for a little while.

By re-enacting the primordial battle between good and evil, sport also affords us the opportunity to revel in the triumph of justice. When our opponents lose a game or are crushed in a fight, we feel vindicated. Our symbolic enemies can be pinned to the mat, tackled, intercepted, or otherwise thwarted; they can stumble and fall or strike out or be sent off the ice. For some people, watching physical fights is especially invigorating. Analysts such as Jeffrey Goldstein, Jonathan Gottschall, and Steven Pinker argue that we are still close enough to a time of primitive survival to be innately attracted to violent behaviour and the skills needed to stay alive.³ As warriors and hunters, males display their masculinity by remaining fearless in the face of violence and danger; they cannot turn away or appear squeamish without marking themselves as cowards. In this sense, watching fights in hockey or collisions on the football field is part of the transition to manhood. At the same time, one must ask why spectacles of bloodshed and conquest still draw our attention. Some argue that it is through displays of violence that society contains and suppresses it. Others are not so convinced. Gottschall contends that “we are drawn to violent entertainment simply because we like it. We are not nearly as good or as civilized as we think.”⁴

John Fiske offers yet another insight into the function of sports. Fiske began by visiting a call centre where workers were closely monitored at every point in the work day: the number of calls made, the average length of each call, the frequency of bathroom breaks, and so on. Fiske argues that sport reverses such power relationships and thus inverts the social order. Those who are being observed and quantified now have the opportunity to measure others. Football fields are laid out

like ruled paper so that the results of each play can be measured. In baseball, every pitch, every foul ball, every walk appears as a number and becomes part of a statistical calculation of a player's effectiveness.⁵ (One has to love a sport where even top players fail to get on base 70 percent of the time.) In hockey, as Roy MacGregor points out in the opening chapter of this book, statistics are tabulated on every aspect of every minute of every game. As he points out, even though many of these statistics are meaningless, "a mass of numbers does compensate for the little column space required to explain the reality of most hockey moments: 'Shit happens.'" Statistics lie at the heart of fantasy leagues, which allow fans to imagine themselves as general managers or coaches and to assume control of their own hand-picked teams. Fantasy sports leagues have become hugely popular among football fans, consuming vast amounts of their time and energy. Sports talk on TV and radio is all about being surrogate general managers, as is the world of sports video games. Such forms of participation in sports represent a transfer of control to fans, even if this power is superficial, momentary, and illusory.

Scholars have argued that high-profile sporting events, such as the Super Bowl, the Stanley Cup playoffs, and the Calgary Stampede, serve as public celebrations of the values traditionally associated with working-class men: emotional toughness, bodily strength, the ability to endure pain, and the physical power to intimidate others. As spectacles, such events thus work to re-inscribe masculine domination. Especially in an era in which blue-collar jobs are disappearing and men in white-collar professions often find themselves displaced from positions of power by women, sports allow males to reassert their claim to the dominant position in society. In *Hockey Night in Canada*, Richard Gruneau and David Whitson make a similar point about the role of violence. "The proposals to take the fighting out of hockey," they write, "do not really threaten the game itself, despite what is often said in public forums. The ultimate threat, the threat that produces a recalcitrance to change, is the perceived threat to the maleness of the game, and beyond this to the place of traditional masculinity in a changing economic, cultural and gender order."⁶ Indeed, one of the most obvious developments in sport is that, with the possible exception of soccer players, athletes are becoming physically larger, sometimes to the point of freakishness. Moreover, despite the movement among parents to make sports safer for children, sports are arguably becoming more violent and brutal. For our fans transported from the 1950s or 1960s to today, the sheer size of the players would probably come as a shock. NFL linemen have reached sumo-sized proportions, and many, if not most, NHL defensemen now look like they could audition for *Hulk*. As for the level of violence, scientists have determined that

the hits that football players take during a regular game are equivalent to being in a series of car crashes.⁷ Hockey is now in the midst of a concussion epidemic that is changing the nature of the sport.

The need for ever more astonishing displays of physical prowess doubtless reflects the extent to which sports have become a spectacle driven by corporate profits and consumerism. Big sports, big media, and big business intersect with one another, and little room exists at this intersection for amateurs, minor leaguers, or local heroes. In Canada, sports channels, fantasy leagues, advertisers, journalists, and fans focus almost completely on the National Hockey League, the National Football League and the Canadian Football League, and Major League Baseball. No other sport, except on occasion basketball, is invited to the dance. The Olympics do, of course, showcase other sports, such as rowing, gymnastics, skiing, skating, volleyball, and swimming and diving, but only for two weeks every two years. MMA (mixed martial arts) has its own self-enclosed media and promotion systems, but, as popular as it is with fans, it still remains off the grid in terms of mainstream sports. Moreover, with the purchase of major sports franchises by the likes of Rogers and Bell Canada, Canadian sports are largely about corporate self-interest and self-promotion—and, of course, about profit.

Feeding the needs and fantasies of sports fans is an enormous business. Buying jerseys and other memorabilia, outfitting their kids or themselves with equipment, purchasing sports video games, joining fantasy leagues, signing up for cable packages, hoisting a few every now and then, and, when they can afford it, actually attending major league games together represent a substantial financial outlay for many Canadians. Part of what makes sports consumerism so lucrative is that being a fan is seen as good citizenship: not to take at least some interest in hockey, for example, is downright un-Canadian. At least among men, following sports is also the key to friendships and the entryway to everyday conversations. The irony is that, as the marketing of sports to the public becomes ever more prominent, actual participation in sports by Canadians has declined. As mentioned above, we now participate primarily as consumers and fans. Sport is something out of reach to ordinary mortals—a spectacle that occurs at a distance, mediated by screens, journalists, and advertising.

THE MEDIUM IS THE MONEY

The chapters in part 1 describe the role that money plays in creating and driving sports entertainment. Three essays deal with the effects of the takeover by Bell

Canada and Rogers (together with entrepreneur Larry Tanenbaum) of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, which owns the Maple Leafs, the Raptors, and Toronto FC, among other franchises, and the consequences of Rogers's breathtaking twelve-year, \$5.2 billion deal with the NHL for broadcasting rights. It should also be noted that Rogers owns the Toronto Blue Jays, while Bell and Tanenbaum together own the Toronto Argonauts. The fallout in terms of journalistic freedom, the ability of fans to be critically informed about sports, and the future of public broadcasting is without precedent. The fourth essay in this section discusses fantasy sports, which are altering the manner in which millions of fans engage with sports and live the sports experience.

In the opening chapter, *Globe and Mail* sports columnist Roy MacGregor—one of the few journalists honoured with membership in the Hockey Hall of Fame—takes a scathing look at the conflicts of interest in which Canadian sports journalists now find themselves. Bell Canada, which owns CTV and TSN, and Rogers, which owns City TV and Sportsnet, now hold majority ownership of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment, as well as holding exclusive television contracts for a host of other teams and sports, including the CFL, curling, and soccer. Arguably, these arrangements make it difficult for journalists to report critically on controversial issues. To choose an obvious example: if a second NHL team wished to locate in southern Ontario, cutting into a market that the Maple Leafs feel is theirs, what constraints would journalists face? How fully could they express themselves?

According to MacGregor, these constraints have tended to turn sports reporting into a game of trivial pursuit. When it comes to hockey, reporters could be commenting on issues such as the dangerous effects of concussions, the need for stricter legal sanctions against fighting, the wisdom of propping up floundering American franchises, the effects of a cumbersome and boring “grab and hold” style of hockey, and a season that has become far too long. But the NHL might not welcome such critical commentary, which also runs the risk of disturbing their bosses, so instead reporters hide behind minutiae. As MacGregor describes the situation, “So little storytelling—profiles of new players, in-depth reporting of real issues—is done by these sports networks that storytelling today exists more in memory than in reality. Instead, ‘news’ has become such matters as how a contract breaks down, how long a suspension might be, who is first with a trade rumour that may or may not happen.” The situation is even more acute for journalists who work for sites such as NHL.com or for local media that are perennial cheerleaders for their home teams regardless of how well, or badly, they play. The question for MacGregor is, “Will they criticize when criticism is due—even if that criticism is not wanted?”

Exacerbating the situation are new Web-based and social media such as Twitter that force journalists to be filing some sort of report all day long—taking note of everything from morning skates to comments heard in the locker room after a game. The need to be on top of every tweet and be ready for every radio hit means that journalists no longer have the time for the kinds of extended conversations, whether with players, coaches, or managers, that produce wider and deeper insights, honest exchanges, and great storytelling. It's now all trivia, all the time, with journalists in danger of becoming PR agents rather than objective keepers of the public trust.

In chapter 2, Christopher Waddell echoes MacGregor's concerns. Waddell traces the conflation of corporate media interests with sports journalism in considerable detail, noting that Bell Media and Rogers, with their TV, radio, cable, Internet, and smartphone services, have such a hold on Canadian media that only Shaw, Quebecor, and the CBC are now outside their grasp. The effect is to create a journalistic "hall of mirrors" in which the coverage that Canadians receive endlessly reflects the same images. The reality is that sports fans have little opportunity to step outside the hall of mirrors—that is, to see the world of sports from an independent angle. After describing a controversy involving a catcher for the Toronto Blue Jays and a commentator (and former player) on Rogers's all-sports radio station in Toronto, Waddell asks: "Should sports fans care when the same conglomerate is the employer of the interviewer, of the ex-player baseball commentator, and of the player currently under criticism, as well as the owner of the team in question, of the station on which the exchange is broadcast and the rebuttal promoted, and of the stadium that hosted the player scrum (facilitated by the team it owns) intended to clear the air?" Waddell believes that these conflicts of interest will bedevil sports communication for years to come.

In the following chapter, Jay Scherer examines the fallout from Rogers's mammoth broadcasting deal with the NHL, whereby Rogers acquired exclusive NHL media rights for twelve years (beginning with the 2014–15 NHL season). Scherer focuses on how the Rogers deal will affect the future of Canada's public broadcaster, the CBC. For over six decades, the CBC has been home to *Hockey Night in Canada*, with the result that hockey has become integral to the CBC's mission and identity. Although, in the wake of the Rogers deal, the CBC will continue broadcasting *Hockey Night in Canada* until 2018, Rogers will control all aspects of the program, including staffing, and will keep all of the advertising revenue. Moreover, the CBC will no longer be able to use the show to promote its other programming or the network as a whole. In other words, the CBC will be the broadcaster in name only.

While the CBC has the option of paying Rogers for the rights to broadcast *HNIC* beyond 2018, and while retaining the program has a certain symbolic value, the CBC has effectively been pushed off the ice.

Whether the network can survive without hockey remains to be seen. *Hockey Night in Canada* draws a mass audience, which has enabled the CBC to reach people who are not normally CBC viewers. According to Scherer, the simple reality is that “if the CBC were to retreat into catering solely to educated and ‘alternative’ tastes, the public broadcaster would largely disappear from the lives of much of the Canadian population, and political support for the CBC would further decline (which is exactly what CBC critics in the Conservative Party actively wish for).” And then there are the brutal financial realities. By some estimates, *Hockey Night in Canada* accounted for roughly half of the English-language network’s advertising revenue prior to the Rogers deal with the NHL. This money will disappear, although, at least in the short term, the right to continue broadcasting the program spares the CBC the expense of producing hundreds of hours of other Canadian-content programming to replace hockey broadcasts.

The French-language Radio-Canada lost broadcast rights to NHL games in 2002, but its integral role in Québec cultural identity and the popularity of its other programming limited the damage. In the case of the CBC, however, the damage will be difficult to contain. Given that the broadcaster has had to endure deep budget cuts, the amount of money that the CBC would have to ante up merely to purchase the rights to subcontract *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcasts beyond 2018 could cripple the CBC’s ability to pay for other programming, including radio, local content, and children’s shows, as well as news and drama—programming that stands at the very heart of public broadcasting. Under these circumstances, the CBC could easily become a kind of PBS North, a broadcasting charity operation with pockets of excellent programming directed to small, elite audiences rather than to Canadians as a whole.

In chapter 4, hockey blogger Derrick Newman explores another dimension of the relationship between sports and money. Sports and gambling have always gone together, but the Internet has spawned new ways for fans to follow sports and gamble at the same time. The explosive growth of fantasy leagues has come as a surprise to many in the sports world, although so far the growth is largely confined to a single sport, football—and in fact to a single league, the NFL. The NFL’s weekly schedule and its large number of franchises have made it ideal for fantasy sports: baseball has too many games, the CFL has too few teams, and hockey has yet to generate a similar wave of interest, although this could be changing. Participants create

their fantasy teams by cherry-picking players from different teams. As a result, the old link between fans and their favourite teams, while not broken, is now rivalled by multiple allegiances. According to Newman, NFL-based fantasy leagues are now so important that TV networks have altered their schedules in order to showcase players who are likely to be top fantasy choices, and fans now scour sports pages, blogs, and websites for any clues about injuries or changes to lineups. The plague of minutiae about which Roy MacGregor complains in chapter 1 is, in part, driven by fantasy fans, who want as much minutiae as they can get.

IDENTITY AND NATIONALISM

The second part of this book focuses on the relationship of sport to national identity. In a North American sports landscape dominated by the United States, it can be difficult to locate elements that are uniquely Canadian. In fact, to the extent that such elements exist, they are often the result of public policies deliberately designed to maintain a Canadian presence. In chapter 5, political scientist Duane Bratt offers a counterexample to the common complaint that Canadians blindly mimic American sports culture by examining the organizational structure and overall character of college sports. As Bratt notes, at least on the surface, the two sports systems have little in common. The American system of college sports is rooted in two factors that have traditionally distinguished American institutions of higher education from Canadian ones. First, many American colleges and universities are privately run. They receive little in the way of public funding and therefore need to maintain the loyalty of their alumni, who represent a crucial revenue base. Second, many of the leading liberal arts colleges and even a good many state university campuses are located in small towns that lack professional sports teams, making college sports the only game in town. As a result, American college sports have become big business and have acquired a far higher profile than is normally the case for Canadian college sports.

Canadians sometimes envy the extravaganza that American college sports have become, with their gala homecoming celebrations, their tailgate parties, cheerleaders, and marching bands, and their giant stadiums, as well as their generous athletic scholarships, millionaire coaches, and highly lucrative television contracts. Many of the best Canadian athletes in fact migrate to American universities, lured by scholarships and the promise of superb coaching. And yet the downsides of American college sports are equally spectacular. Critics complain about a costly athletic system that actually fails to make money for most schools and that encourages

a win-at-all-costs mentality that produces scandals and cover-ups—a system that also undermines academic priorities by consuming a disproportionate share of financial resources and drawing attention away from academic achievement and that generates less than impressive graduation rates for athletes. Although both the standards and facilities are undeniably superior in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) system has its virtues. Even though Canadian college sports events are largely ignored by local media and attract relatively small crowds—the very opposite of spectacle—the Canadian system produces its share of high-quality performances and outstanding athletes. Moreover, at Canadian universities, professors are still typically paid more than coaches, stadiums are rarely the largest buildings on campus, and academic priorities have not been sacrificed to sports programs—at least not yet. As Bratt warns, before they rush to emulate it, Canadians need to think twice about the American system and about whether CIS is an element of Canadian culture worth safeguarding.

Maintaining a distinct Canadian presence in professional sports other than hockey is, however, a serious challenge. In chapter 6, Ira Wagman describes the policies that have allowed Canadians to maintain a slim toehold in professional sports. The CFL, for example, has created a complex system—much like the Canadian-content requirements in the entertainment industry—designed to limit the number of “imports” on team rosters. The basic requirements are, however, in themselves revealing. Currently, a CFL team is allowed a maximum of forty-four players, including three quarterbacks, who can be Canadians or non-Canadians. Of the remaining forty-one players, no more than twenty can be imports. In addition, a team is allowed two reserve players, who do not need to be Canadians.⁸ In theory, then, imports could outnumber Canadians on a CFL team. Moreover, marquee positions are often occupied by imports, while Canadian players can find themselves relegated to less glamorous positions at the back end of lineups. Similar rules govern professional soccer in Canada, where a small clutch of Canadian players can be found on team lineups.

Arguably, the CFL would actually be more attractive, and even more exciting, if teams were made up solely of Canadian players. Home teams could really be home teams, rather than consisting of a hodgepodge of players, many of them Americans hoping to move up to the NFL and thus waiting for a ticket to leave town. Absent this migrant labour force, CFL teams might be more grounded in their communities. In addition, an all-Canadian CFL might generate much more interest in college sports, because the CIS would now supply the league with most of its players,

as well as a stronger sense of local and national pride. But there is always a “but.” The fear is that, without an American presence, the quality of play would decline, and Canadians would simply cease watching CFL games. We seem to have convinced ourselves that a Canadian product can’t stand on its own.

Efforts are also made to “Canadianize” American sports broadcasts, largely through a practice known as simultaneous substitution. This allows Canadian broadcasters who have negotiated the right to carry broadcasts that originate on American networks to interrupt the American signal in order to insert Canadian commercials. For example, Canadians watching the Super Bowl on a Canadian network do not see American ads. Not only does this generate revenue for the network (from the Canadian businesses that buy advertising time), but it also gives Canadian audiences the impression that they are watching a Canadian program. While the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, Canada’s communications regulator, has made moves to end simulcasting, it faces stiff resistance from Canadian broadcasters.

In another form of simultaneous substitution, commentaries by Canadian sports analysts are inserted into broadcasts of non-Canadian sports events, such as World Cup soccer or March Madness. The theory is that Canadian commentators will “repatriate” these events by infusing them with a fresh and unique Canadian perspective. At the very least the practice generates employment for Canadians. In the face of American economic and cultural hegemony, as well as a sports environment that is increasingly global, efforts to preserve (or inject) something distinctly Canadian serve to remind us that, as Wagman puts it, “much of the cultural production in this country is compensatory in nature.” And yet, as he also points out, the issue of domestic versus imported, arising as it does in a myriad of contexts, ensures that space remains open for the discussion of cultural values.

In chapter 7, André Richelieu, one of the country’s leading experts in sports marketing, sheds light on another dimension of Canadian sports: the Québec experience. According to Richelieu, the Montreal Canadiens remain the premier sports brand in Québec and have become part of “both the identity and the identity-building process of young Québécois.” For decades, the team was able to recruit the finest players in Québec, and even its choice of colours—blue, white, and red—was a way of distancing the team from English Canada. The Bell Centre, where the team now plays, has acquired the status of “a temple where loyal fans gather to express their faith.” The faithful even believe that the team is helped by ghosts hidden in the rafters—the spirits of Howie Morenz, Butch Bouchard, the Rocket, Boom Geoffrion, and Jacques Plante, among others. Richelieu compares

the Canadiens to soccer clubs such as FC Barcelona and Glasgow Celtic, which have become national institutions that transcend sports. The team remains a “projection of French Canada in the world of hockey” despite the fact that, today, few players are Québécois and speaking French is no longer a requirement, even for team captains.

As Richelieu notes, the place of the Canadiens in the imagination of Québécois is magnified by the fact that, for all practical purposes, the team has no professional rivals. Québec City’s NHL team, the Nordiques, left for Colorado back in 1995; the Montreal Expos baseball team is now the Washington Nationals, and Montréal never had an NBA franchise. While Richelieu briefly describes various sports enterprises in Québec, from the Montreal Impact soccer team to the Montreal Alouettes to the Red Bull Crashed Ice teams that specialize in extreme sports, he views Laval University’s Rouge et Or (R&O) football team as the most interesting new development. The R&O frequently wins the CIS championship, often by stunningly large margins. In Richelieu’s analysis, the departure of the Nordiques from Québec City created a vacuum, and, now lacking a hockey team, the business elite threw their money and emotional support behind Laval. The R&O football team—the jewel in the crown of the university’s broader R&O sports program—is a recruiting magnet, attracting the top players, and boasts state-of-the-art coaching and athletic facilities, as well as sophisticated approaches to marketing. R&O sports clubs (thirteen in all) are autonomous not-for-profit entities and are co-managed, with both university representatives and local business people sitting on the board of directors. Other Canadian universities have begun to copy the Laval model, which, if widely adopted, will transform university sports in Canada. Richelieu concludes that, even though Québec’s sports culture has its distinctive features, sport provides Canadians with a “common language,” one capable of cementing relations between Québec and the rest of Canada.

The unifying power of sports, as spectacle, is perhaps most visibly on display during the Olympic Games. In chapter 8, sociologist Harry Hiller describes the unprecedented national effort that went into making the 2010 Vancouver Olympics an iconic event. As Hiller notes, Montréal hosted the Summer Games in 1976, and, in 1988, Calgary was home to the Winter Games—and in neither case did Canada come away with even a single gold medal. The Vancouver Games completely reversed the pattern: Canada finished with more gold medals (fourteen) than any other participating country. This success was due in no small measure to Own the Podium, a non-profit national umbrella organization created in 2005, with federal funding as well as support from the private sector, in order to prepare Canadian

athletes for the 2010 Games. In Hiller's estimation, *Own the Podium* "was perhaps the clearest declaration in Canadian history of the role that high-performance sport via the Olympics might play in developing a more cohesive national spirit."

But the Olympics were, above all, the pinnacle sports event for Canadian media, especially television. Canada's Broadcast Media Consortium, led by CTV, provided almost round-the-clock coverage, with live coverage of the opening ceremonies attracting a staggering 23 million viewers, the largest TV audience in Canadian history. Audiences were bombarded by waves of patriotic advertising, also unprecedented in the history of Canadian television. Perhaps most remarkable, though, was the degree to which the Olympics inspired what Hiller describes as "a spontaneous expression of patriotism almost unheard of in the country before this event." Hundreds of thousands of people thronged the streets of Vancouver, many wearing Canada-themed clothing, and watched events on giant screens, cheering athletes on and sometimes bursting into choruses of "O Canada." Moreover, as Hiller observes, "the Olympics provided the occasion for many new Canadians to express their new national identity in public for the first time." In short, the Vancouver Olympics well illustrated the role that media coverage of sports can play in symbolizing and reinforcing national identity. Canada did well at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, finishing third in the gold-medal count, with TV audiences (especially for the men's and women's gold-medal hockey games) approaching Vancouver's record numbers. But the Vancouver Games had set the stage in making the Olympics a showcase for Canadian nationalism and identity.

In the final chapter in part 2, David Legg turns to another Olympics—the Paralympics. As he notes, despite advances in public awareness, and despite the outstanding achievements of athletes with disabilities, an element of "freak show" voyeurism still lingers. The impulse is to "other" these athletes—to regard them, in fact, as somehow less than fully human—and thus to transform the Paralympics into spectacle of a different sort. As Legg points out, the battle for equity is far from over. Pointing to the impressive amount of British media coverage devoted to the London Paralympic Games in 2012, Legg argues that Canadian media coverage of the Paralympics remains inadequate. Increasing this coverage would go a long way toward reversing cultural biases and the habit of disrespect through neglect. In addition, we need to attend critically to the messages delivered by the media, which too often turn on themes of valiant struggle against some form of handicap. Instead, the Paralympics should be seen as an opportunity to provide people—most of whom will face some measure of disability as they grow older—with positive images and to introduce them to technological innovations that can help to

normalize the experience of disability. Rejecting the “disability” label, members of the deaf community view themselves as people who happen to use a different language. Similarly, the media could help to promote a new understanding of Paralympians not as people to be praised for their determination to overcome a handicap but simply as athletes whose bodies happen to be a little different.

HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA

Part 3 deals with the issues that emerge from what is arguably our greatest national spectacle: hockey. In chapter 10, *Globe and Mail* sports writer Tom Maloney describes the confluence of factors that created “the concussion discussion” in Canada, which began in earnest in 2010 and continues today. What is fascinating about the concussion issue is that while some news organizations, such as the CBC and the *Globe and Mail*, highlighted the issue, pursued investigations, and followed up with story after story, others went into hiding, apparently afraid to be seen—a kind of journalistic version of the witness-protection program. Maloney quotes Roy MacGregor, who has described the issue as “the global warming of hockey,” with the science on one side and a suspicious and reluctant hockey establishment on the other.⁹ Maloney points out that a number of circumstances came together to force the debate. Scientific studies about the frequency and pain of concussions—the “mysterious, frustrating dark fog of post-concussion syndrome”—and the dangers of permanent brain damage and even early death could no longer be ignored. But the scientific evidence might not have ignited as much controversy had superstar and national icon Sydney Crosby not been injured early in 2011, thus putting “a famous face” on the issue of the long-term consequences of repeated head injuries. The concussion debate was eventually joined by former Canadiens goaltender and hockey legend Ken Dryden, who wrote a three-part series in the *Globe and Mail* comparing the scientific evidence on concussions in hockey to scientific studies about smoking in the 1970s and 1980s. As he later told Maloney, “Fifty years from now, people will look back on us the same way. . . . All those big bodies colliding at high speed: how could they/we have been so stupid?” Dryden’s critique broke a psychological sound barrier, legitimating the issue and making it easier for others to join the discussion.

Maloney leaves us with a difficult question: How can hockey be policed and made safer when so much of the game is about manhood, intimidation, and crushing your opponents into the boards? Maloney believes that the debate has brought changes—and he suggests that more changes are likely, given pressure from parents

and from news organizations like the *Globe and Mail*. However, countervailing forces may work against this pressure. Fights are, after all, part and parcel of the sports spectacle, and that spectacle is good business. Many hockey promoters, including representatives of the media industry, argue that fans demand violence. And, hearkening back to Christopher Waddell's "hall of mirrors," we must ask whether journalists will eventually lose their ability to speak out on big issues such as concussions.

Parents can speak out, however, and this is precisely what Janice Paskey does in the next chapter. A professor of journalism at Mount Royal University, Paskey is also a hockey mom, and she presents the choices available to parents who worry about their children suffering injuries and concussions in a sport in which hitting is arguably still encouraged and rewarded. Her essay is also the record of a battle that Calgary parents fought to bring changes to the rules governing body-checking in minor hockey. This account mirrors similar debates occurring in other minor hockey associations across the country. Paskey writes about the fears of young men who wish to play hockey and about a league that was reluctant to back away from values that it considered fundamental to the game. The result, in many cases, could be described as the rise of the soccer moms: fed up with the level of violence in minor hockey, mothers withdraw their children and enrol them in soccer instead. A survey conducted by Hockey Canada and Bauer Hockey in 2013 found that roughly 90 percent of Canadian families choose not to have their children play hockey. Safety was one of the four main reasons; another was that hockey just isn't any fun for children any more.¹⁰

The other two reasons were time and cost. In chapter 12, Richard Gruneau offers a devastating analysis of the downward slide in sports participation in Canada, not only among adults but, perhaps more alarmingly, among youth. His main argument is that participation in sports, particularly at higher levels of competition, is increasingly beyond the reach of working-class families. As he notes, "research on participation rates by adults suggests a consistent pattern of increasing exclusiveness," with participation correlating most closely with higher levels of education and income. In addition, family structures are changing. Sports participation is more common in two-parent families, but such families are becoming less common. Single parents, the majority of whom are women, must generally rely on a single income, and they are also very short on time. In the meanwhile, sports equipment, especially for hockey, has become increasingly expensive, while public funding for pools, community centres, and sports leagues has dwindled—leaving the costs to individuals. "Pay to play" is now the pervasive reality.

Costs have also increased as a result of the professionalization of amateur sports, aided and abetted by Canada's introduction of a national coaching certification program in the 1980s. Sports clubs struggle to find qualified and committed volunteers, and many have turned to creating paid positions, an expense that is reflected in membership dues. Young athletes who show promise tend to be catapulted into elite leagues, where coaches are well paid and demands for parent involvement, as well as financial outlays, can be substantial. In sum, the increase in inequality that plagues Canadian society is cutting through the sports world with a vengeance. As Gruneau's title, "Goodbye, Gordie Howe," suggests, the era when a poor farm boy could make the NHL is fading—but not because of a lack of natural ability. "If a young male player these days isn't from a family with enough resources to pay for power skating lessons, summer clinics, expensive equipment, and travel for league games and tournaments," Gruneau pointedly concludes, "his chances of making it to the pros are slim."

The professionalization of amateur sport is closely linked to the commodification of sport, which further underscores social hierarchies. In chapter 13, Peter Zuurbier extends Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*—the mindset characteristic of a particular social class, as revealed in part by tastes in food, clothing, and cultural pastimes—to an analysis of hockey fans. Whereas once hockey was the great symbol of commonality, its commodification, heavily promoted by the media, has encouraged an ethic of consumption among hockey fans that serves to reinscribe difference, thereby reinforcing class distinctions. As a result, the capacity of hockey to create a transcendent sense of connection among Canadians has been weakened. As Zuurbier argues, fans differ considerably in the way that they experience, and thus come to "know," the game. Those who have actually played hockey stand at the top of the hierarchy, followed by fans wealthy enough to buy season tickets and watch the action live and up close. Most fans, however, must view hockey games on television, in basements and bars—a mediated experience that takes place at a distance from the action. As these fans may also be unable to afford to play hockey themselves, their claim to status within the world of hockey often rests on displays of situated knowledge—assorted statistics, access to "insider" information about players and management decisions, and a wide variety of hockey trivia. Even the clothes worn on game night establish a spectator's place in the ranking. Zuurbier's analysis thus builds on Gruneau's argument that, ironically, a sport whose fundamental ethos is based on hardscrabble working-class toughness has increasingly become a marker of social and economic privilege.

In the last chapter in part 3, Chaseten Remillard examines the communicative functions of hockey art from a new perspective. Scholars of hockey art have for the most part focused on its symbolic dimensions, particularly on its capacity to create an equation between hockey and national identity. Applying Walter Ong's work on oral communication to hockey art, Remillard proposes instead that hockey art fundamentally serves a mnemonic function, much as do words in oral cultures. For example, by referencing iconic images from the past, such as the famous photograph of Bobby Orr suspended in midair after scoring a critical goal, hockey art can prompt us to recall important events and to forge connections between those events and the present. Other images are analogous to oral teachings, conveying practical knowledge about hockey, such how to use the body during play, while yet other pieces celebrate the sport itself by depicting concrete objects, such as sticks and pucks. In the end, Remillard argues, by serving to preserve memory, hockey art establishes a sense of continuity between yesterday and today—the sense of history that is so integral to identity.

DRUGS, VIOLENCE, AND DEATH

The final section of the book looks at the dark side of modern sport—drug use, violence as entertainment, and death. In chapter 15, Glenn Ruhl of Mount Royal University provides readers with an insider's account of the “athletes, misfits, family men, miscreants, scholars, circus freaks, boxers, midgets, and hucksters” who inhabited the twilight world of professional wrestling in the postwar era. Ruhl has an insider's vantage point: his father, Dave Ruhl, was a wrestler who went on to become the broker for professional wrestling matches on the prairies during the heyday of vaudeville wrestling. Old-time wrestling was a world suspended somewhere between fantasy and reality, between fake punches and real emotions. Wrestlers created characters for themselves, clearly coded as heroes and villains, and audiences revelled in watching outsized bad guys pounded and defeated. As Barthes observes in his classic analysis of wrestling, “there is nothing more exciting for a crowd than the grandiloquent kick given to a vanquished ‘bastard.’”¹¹

As broker, Ruhl's father not only arranged the matches, deciding who would fight whom, but also strictly enforced the code of insider knowledge, or “kayfabe,” that governed professional wrestling. The kayfabe code was intended to maintain the illusion that wrestling matches were genuine competitions, rather than staged events the outcome of which was predetermined. As Ruhl notes, however, it didn't seem to matter to audiences how much of the fight was an elaborate pantomime.

More important was the fact that audiences wanted to believe it was real. And the spectacle served its purpose. The wrestling circuit brought larger-than-life stars to small towns, where they played out the eternal battle between good and evil and gave audiences what they wanted: a sense that justice had been done. As a sport, wrestling remains controversial, but the issue today is less whether matches are rigged. Rather, it is a question of whether, in the pursuit of spectacle, sport has descended into a brute form of entertainment.

The following chapter, by Bart Beaty, examines another “marginal” sport: mixed martial arts (MMA). As a sport that relies almost exclusively on revenue from pay-per-view television, Beaty argues, MMA “has come to be understood as a hybrid of sport and entertainment.” While MMA has roots in both professional wrestling and boxing, the sport has evolved into a smorgasbord of judo, jiu jitsu, tae kwon do, wrestling, boxing, and kick boxing. In the space of two decades, it has also journeyed from relatively obscurity to the centre stage of pay-per-view cable TV. In the process, the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)—the principal organization that promotes MMA—has sought to legitimate the sport, moving away from its original boast that “There Are No Rules!” in the direction of the “pure sports” ideal that prevails in most competitive sports. As Beaty notes, whereas, at the outset, the UFC banned only biting and eye-gouging, “the use of third-party government-sanctioned athletic commissions to authorize bouts, conduct tests for performance-enhancing drugs, and impose penalties and sanctions has helped to bring credibility to a sport that was once termed ‘human cockfighting’ by Arizona senator John McCain.”

For quite some time the sport's greatest star was Québec's Georges St-Pierre, whose combination of athletic ability and a polite, soft-spoken manner had earned him a public image as “the squeaky clean, all-Canadian boy whose success is based on a superior work ethic,” as well as a cult-like following among fans. When, in December 2013, St-Pierre announced his decision to take time off from the sport, he had held the UFC's welterweight title since 2008, successfully defending it eight times. Beaty zeroes in on one such defence: St-Pierre's championship fight in March 2013, in Montréal, against challenger Nick Diaz, famous for his “bad boy” reputation. As Beaty points out, “By almost any ‘pure sports’ logic, Diaz had absolutely no claim to a title match. However, in terms of sports entertainment logic, pairing him with St-Pierre made perfect sense: Diaz was the consummate bad guy whom the hometown hero would definitively put in his place.” Whereas, in legitimate sports, teams or athletes earn their right to contend for championships solely on the basis of their athletic records, in sports entertainment the choice of contenders may

be governed as much (if not more) by commercial considerations. For example, “exciting” fighters, who promise to put on a good show, may be privileged over “dull” fighters who nonetheless have a stronger record, or promoters may seek to capitalize on a well-publicized grudge between two fighters. The goal is to sell “wolf tickets”—tickets that will be gobbled up by voracious fans. Beaty argues that, in its pursuit of legitimacy, the UFC has been obliged to negotiate the tension between the “pure sports” ideal and the need to create spectacle of the sort that draws paying viewers. As he points out, the fact that St-Pierre’s fight with Diaz was a huge commercial success should remind us that “sports entertainment is every bit as important to the sports experience as pure athleticism.”

But, as Beaty’s analysis suggests, the UFC extravaganza raises a critical question, one that concerns the demand of audiences for “excitement.” Even more so than hockey, MMA glamorizes violence and puts fighters at risk of serious long-term injury. And yet it does not lack for fans: the St-Pierre–Diaz fight generated an astonishing \$60 million in revenues. Moreover, a pact of silence seems to exist within mainstream sports journalism that protects the MMA spectacle from criticism. What does all this reveal about public attitudes toward violence in sports? Even as we object to excessive risk in sports, do we also encourage it? This is, in effect, the question that Angela Schneider takes up in the next chapter, albeit in a different idiom.

Schneider examines what is perhaps the gravest offence in the sports world: the use of performance-enhancing drugs. Almost all of the stars of professional baseball of the past decade have admitted to taking such drugs, and the NFL’s rules are loose, to say the least. Schneider focuses, however, on another sport: cycling. Professional cycling has a history of drug scandals. As Schneider notes, the 1998 “Festina affair” led many to conclude that the subculture of professional cycling tacitly condoned the use of illegal performance-enhancing drugs. More recently, in January 2013, Lance Armstrong—a seven-time winner of the Tour de France who had for many years vehemently denied using drugs—finally confessed and eventually implicated others. But Armstrong is hardly alone. Doping has been endemic among cyclists, and teams have worked together to cover up the practice. When one rider confesses, others feel betrayed, and damage control is required to salvage the reputation of the sport. The cycle (pardon the pun) seems never ending.

In discussing doping among Tour de France cyclists, Schneider invokes the philosophical principle of charity, according to which we must make every effort to understand the reasons for an action before we judge it. Schneider thus poses a complex ethical question: given the pressure they face to win, can athletes justly be

blamed for using drugs? Even though cyclists are bound by honour to conceal the practice, doping is an aspect of the Tour de France widely acknowledged and even accepted by the French public. After all, spectators expect to see records broken—they want to witness superhuman feats of strength and endurance and ever more exciting displays of risk taking—and, eager to capitalize on the importance of the race to French national pride, promoters are determined to deliver. But, in the end, it is the athletes who are arrested and ejected from the sport. While no one argues that bans on performance-enhancing drugs should simply be lifted, we must ask ourselves why those bans are necessary and where the fault really lies. For many athletes, a few seasons of fame and financial reward are well worth the risks to their health and reputations.

The risk entailed in high-level competition was indelibly impressed on the public consciousness just before the opening of the Vancouver Olympics, with the death of Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili during a training run. The tragedy prompted heavily publicized allegations that the track at Whistler was unsafe. Chapters 18 and 19 capture reactions to the tragedy from two vantage points: that of an athlete, luger Regan Lauscher, who competed on Canada's team, and that of a media professional, Jeremy Berry. Lauscher writes poignantly about what it was like to compete at the Vancouver Olympics in the aftermath of Kumaritashvili's death, amidst what she describes as "a dizzying whirlwind of media reports," many of them pointing fingers at the Canadians, including the luge team. Allegations were rife that, especially in view of its extreme speed (it was, at the time, the fastest track in the world), the Whistler facility lacked sufficient safety features, such as padding on steel beams—in effect, that the track had been designed to magnify risk—making it far too dangerous for most athletes to compete on, all the more so if they were new to it. Reports also insinuated that Canada had not given athletes from other countries sufficient opportunity to train on the track, thereby placing them (perhaps deliberately) at a disadvantage. Lauscher argues that the luge run was fair, that Canada had followed the rules in allowing athletes from other countries time to practice, and that the track had passed multiple inspections by the International Luge Federation, as well as by other bodies. Moreover, Canadian athletes familiar with the track were in effect penalized when the starting lines were moved further down in order to slow the speed of the race.

The heart of Lauscher's argument is that media reporting missed the real issues, most importantly "the issue of athlete eligibility for the Olympic Games." As she points out, luge is an inherently dangerous sport, one that requires years of training and practice, and many countries do not have the resources needed to prepare

athletes for Olympic competition on world-class tracks, most of which are located in Europe. “The Olympics are about competition between the best athletes in the world,” she writes. “They are not an open invitation event for all to compete.” At the same time, she notes, “as in any sport, international success in luge is the key to financial opportunity for nations that need to increase their budgets for technological research and development, for the acquisition of qualified coaching and support staff, and for the funding of five months of worldwide travel, training, and racing.” A very real pressure thus exists to send athletes to the Olympics even if they lack sufficient training—and the result of that can be tragedy.

Drawing on his own experience covering the Games as a journalist, Berry reflects on the media coverage of Kumaritashvili’s death. Berry agrees that the media seized on the contention that the Whistler track was unsafe and focused on criticism of the Vancouver Olympic Committee. But Berry also makes the point that the Vancouver Games were the first digital Olympics, noting that, for the most part, online reactions and commentary reinforced the “blame the organizers” perspective adopted by mainstream media. Moreover, users of social media generally do not share the ethical codes (written and unwritten) that have traditionally governed professional journalism. As Berry observes, “It is becoming harder and harder to separate traditional media from so-called new media and trained, ethical professionals from amateurs.” Almost instantly after the tragedy occurred, for example, a video of the accident went viral, and new organizations then had to decide whether to show the lurid video themselves—with CTV subsequently accused of indulging in “death porn” for continuing to air the video well after questions about the accident had been answered. Berry further points to changes in the media industry that conspired to impoverish the quality of reporting, from the plight of reporters who, during the Olympics, must cover sports (such as luge) with which they are unfamiliar to the pervasive reluctance on the part of news media to be seen as critical of the Olympics—the result, in part, of complex power dynamics at work among Olympic organizers, the Olympic Broadcasting Media Consortium, and host countries. The fact remains, however, that the media, having settled on a storyline, gave lugers scant opportunity or encouragement “to speak out and challenge the narrative.” As Berry concludes, “It is a sad irony that, when luge finally came to the attention of the media, it was only because someone died, and that made a good story.”

In the final chapter of the book, writer and literary critic Aritha van Herk describes one of the most thrilling and dangerous events in the Calgary Stampede: chuckwagon racing. Billing itself as “The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth,” the

Stampede is Calgary's annual civic spectacle, a grand celebration of the cowboy tradition. As the embodiment of the vigilante, "shoot-up" culture of the American West, the cowboy is often assumed to be a uniquely American icon, and it is tempting to oppose the cowboy to the Mountie, the great symbol of lawfulness and social order in Canada's western expansion. In reality, however, southern Alberta was part of the "last Great West"—an expanse of territory perceived as empty that attracted a sizeable American immigration, including many ranchers and cowboys, in the late 1890s and the early years of the twentieth century. But as van Herk explains, the "chucks" have origins in the American land rush lotteries, in which prospective homesteaders would line up and then, when a starting gun was fired, race to stake out claims to particular sections of land, as well as in "the tradition, at the end of a long roundup, of cooks racing one another to the nearest saloon for a drink." It was the American promoter Guy Weadick, generally regarded as the founder of the Calgary Stampede, who, in search of an event that would thrill audiences, hit on the idea of chuckwagon racing—a knife's-edge spectacle that is all about "staring at mortality, the possibility of death always hovering, the thunder of hooves an apocalypse." In the chucks, a thin line exists between triumph and disaster—between winning prize money and ending up face down in the dirt.

I must admit to owning a cowboy hat (black), rodeo shirts, and a bolo tie and having done my share of "stampeding" over the years. I am aware, however, as is Aritha van Herk, that horses are frequently injured or killed and that the breathtaking speed and aggressiveness of the chucks sometimes result in horrendous crashes. As van Herk notes, the equipment and the rules have been repeatedly changed in an effort to make the races safer, and, as valuable animals, the horses are well cared for, even pampered. All the same, chuckwagon racing is dangerous. Much like hockey and many other sports, the chucks celebrate and reassert traditional masculine values of physical strength, bravery, and hard work, as well as the drive to dominate not only others but nature itself. For van Herk, chuckwagon racing, with its "mysterious chaos," enthralls us precisely because it reminds us that we live on the brink of death. It is, she writes, "a living anachronism, and yet indisputably performative, exciting, and at its best, beautiful." The same might be said of sport in general.

The themes that run through this book—the commodification of sport and the role of the media in this process, threats to journalistic independence in the "hall of mirrors," the importance of sports (especially hockey) to Canadian national identity and the struggle to maintain a Canadian presence in both the North American and the global sports environments, the decline in participation in sport among

ordinary citizens and their children, the seemingly essential link of sport to violence and reaffirmations of masculinity, the human need for spectacle—all reflect deeper, and troubling, social issues. At the same time, sports give us something to hold on to, to marvel at, to be loyal to, and to transport us far from our daily concerns. In a world of uncertainty and impermanence, sport takes us back to something basic—the power and beauty of the human body and the potential for physical triumph. In the face of the commercialization and professionalization of sport, however, as well as the growing confusion between athletics and entertainment, we perhaps need to ask ourselves whether we still fully understand what it is we’re cheering for—what message we are communicating.

NOTES

- 1 Richard Menkis and Harold Troper, *More Than Just Games: Canada and the 1936 Olympics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).
- 2 Jason Blake, *Canadian Hockey Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 30.
- 3 See Jeffrey Goldstein, ed., *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Jonathan Gottschall, *The Professor in the Cage: Why Men Fight and Why We Like to Watch* (New York: Penguin, 2015); and Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).
- 4 Gottschall, *Professor in the Cage*, 187.
- 5 See John Fiske, *Power Plays, Power Works* (London and New York: Verso, 1993), 81–83.
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THE MEDIUM IS THE MONEY

1

TROUBLES IN THE TOY DEPARTMENT

Conflicts of Interest, the Triumph of Trivia, and the Changing Face of Sports Journalism

Roy MacGregor

The Accidental Sportswriter. This is how I have long viewed the job that became my career. Then again, I suppose the true beauty of sport is happenstance. No matter how coaches and managers try to organize, control, and dictate their games, they cannot know the outcome until it arrives.

I had played sports, coached sports, and even dabbled in writing about sports—several magazine profiles, even a novel about a hockey player in his last season—but my beat was the country and, more specifically, Parliament Hill. I had been on the Hill for fourteen years when my editor, the late Jim Travers, asked me to lunch to discuss a note I had sent him regarding the *Ottawa Citizen's* decision to have its reporters abandon the Hill's free parking and start paying regular downtown fees. Fine, I said, so long as the newspaper allows me to expense it.

"I have solved your parking issue," Travers told me over coffee. "How's that?" I asked. "From now on you'll be parking at the Civic Centre—you're going to be covering the Ottawa Senators." So began twenty-plus years in what each newspaper along the way—the *Citizen*, *National Post*, *Globe and Mail*—has jokingly referred to as the "toy department."

It has had its moments of great fun. The first year of covering the hapless Senators was, simply, a delight. Most of the players were new to the National

Hockey League. One, Darren Rumble, showed up at the airport for his first road trip carrying a pillow and a brown paper bag filled with ham-and-cheese sandwiches, as had become his habit on minor-league bus trips. When thieves broke into the team's offices and stole \$20,000 worth of new video equipment, leaving behind the team's game tapes, assistant coach E. J. McGuire quipped: "Imagine that, burglars with taste." I could go on and on, but if sports journalism has taught me one thing, it is that sports readers have a limited attention span that continues to shrink.

Sports fans are, however, keenly interested in their games and their teams. This discovery goes back, one might argue, to Homer waxing poetic about wrestling, but sports reporting as we know it had its birth in the 1800s, with coverage of horse racing and boxing, and soon included coverage of new team sports—in particular, baseball. Basketball, football, and, in Canada, hockey soon followed.¹ Newspapers like the *New York Herald* and publishers like Joseph Pulitzer were quick to see that baseball accounts could draw readers to their pages, and, given the glut of newsprint available at the time, offered a cheap attraction that remained inexpensive, especially as early baseball teams began including reporters on their road trips, with the teams usually paying the full ride. This, and the fact that sports did not advertise—there was no need to, with the newspapers so eager to promote upcoming games—may well have sown the seeds for the continuing conflicts of interest between those who cover sports and those who play for and own sports teams.

If sports journalism had its "Golden Age" in the early years of the twentieth century—when the likes of Grantland Rice were defining sports coverage for all the years to come—then perhaps the early years of the twenty-first century could be seen as the "Fools' Gold Age." This is a time when forces far more powerful than Rice's descriptive talents with words—the reach of television, in particular—have begun moving certain segments of sports journalism back to its very roots: beholden to the very subjects they are paid to cover.

This should be of grave concern to sports journalists, editors, readers, and viewers—yet it seems to be of precious little, if any, concern at all. It appears that the rules of sports journalism—if, in fact, there are rules at all—are not necessarily the rules of journalism.

What has happened in hockey, the sport that is of greatest interest to readers and viewers in Canada, is that the pendulum that usually rests between storytelling and minutiae has swung dramatically in the direction of minutiae in recent years. It is the "triumph of trivia" over all else. So powerful have the various "panels" of television "experts" become that they have created an almost bizarre inverse world where the celebrities are the panelists and the players are all but unknown. So little

storytelling—profiles of new players, in-depth reporting of real issues—is done by these sports networks that storytelling today exists more in memory than in reality. Instead, “news” has become such matters as how a contract breaks down, how long a suspension might be, who is first with a trade rumour that may or may not happen.

This is not mentioned as a condemnation of such small news or, indeed, of the conveyors of such information. It is merely an observation shared by those who wonder what has become of television’s old role of taking us inside the players’ world and making young, unknown faces household names. Today’s television sports fans will know the player’s name, but not much else. But they will know even the nicknames of those on the panels.

It makes good sense for Canadian sports networks like TSN and Sportsnet to employ what they call the “hockey insider.” Some of these insiders—TSN’s Bob McKenzie comes first and most easily to mind—are indispensable to sports fans who wish to know what is going on behind the scenes. When virtually every hire, however, is touted as an “insider,” the question arises as to where “inside” is and how one gets inside. If “news,” therefore, becomes specific information controlled by a singular source, usually the NHL head office, then having access to such information is vital. When someone like McKenzie breaks details on, say, the length of a suspension, then that is to be admired, the insider doing what he does best. When so many others are expected also to be insiders, competing daily for those small tidbits controlled by head office—in political coverage, we used to call this the “daily Gaines-Burger”—then you have a situation where the journalists are, by necessity of the demands placed upon them by their network, embedded.

This situation in Canada worsened considerably in 2012 with the ownership transfer of hockey’s most valuable franchise—the Toronto Maple Leafs, estimated by *Forbes* magazine to be worth US\$1.3 billion.² In a landmark deal, Bell Canada (which owns the TSN channels) and Rogers (which owns Sportsnet) jointly acquired a 75 percent share of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment (MLSE).³ In other words, the two main sports television outlets, TSN and Sportsnet, now own the team. Then, in 2014, Rogers paid an astonishing \$5.2 billion (Canadian) for the rights to NHL coverage in Canada, the most valuable broadcast property in that assemblage being the Maple Leafs.⁴ One can only imagine what the reportage on these two outlets might be like if, say, a push was on to locate a second NHL team in the vicinity—Markham, for example, where plans are underway for an NHL-viable new arena—and MLSE decided that this was a development it did not wish to see.

Such problems of at least the perception of conflict of interest are now everywhere. The National Hockey League, following Major League Baseball's lead, today employs journalists in every franchise city. NHL.com has professional writers, some superbly talented, who provide content on a variety of platforms. Their game descriptions and post-game interview coverage is often as good as any of the independent journalists working the beats. Again, though, the question arises: Will they criticize when criticism is due—even if that criticism is not wanted?

What is needed, obviously, is at least an equal number of “hockey outsiders.” Newspapers supply some, but their reach, especially in social media measures, is miniscule by comparison, and they are easily dismissed as curmudgeons or contrarians and as being long past their shelf life. Social media itself supplies some value, which was evident in the recent NHL lockout, where the anger and contempt for the behaviour of the league and its players was far more visible than could ever be found on the networks, with their various ties to the NHL, NHL Players Association, and individual teams.

This is not the raging of a complete Luddite. Back in 1983, I was the *Toronto Star's* experimental guinea pig for the Tandy TRS-80 (“Trash 80”) computer that transformed sports filing and had no small part in killing off afternoon newspapers. I love what the Internet makes possible, admire those who use social media effectively, and appreciate the power of Twitter, even if I refrain from using it to tell followers what I am eating. But that power of Twitter, and the drive to be first above all, can have terrible repercussions, as was seen a few years ago when former NHL coach Pat Burns was declared dead while still very much alive. It can also cause embarrassment and confusion, as in the case of the 2013 “confirmed” trade of Jarome Iginla from the Calgary Flames to the Boston Bruins, when in fact he had been traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins.

There is also great confusion among tweeters who believe that simply by typing and sending, they become journalists. One pitiful example of this occurred in 2012, when some anonymous tweeter posted information claiming that Toronto Maple Leafs general manager Brian Burke was about to be fired for an “extracurricular affair” and then went on to say: “For ethical reasons, I will not divulge the exact information I received from an insider.” Some ethics, some journalism. In April 2013, Burke launched defamation proceedings against eighteen anonymous tweeters and bloggers.

This essay is intended as a cautionary flag raised by someone who sees the sports world marching into a journalism trap where Gay Talese's monumental study of Joe DiMaggio, *The Silent Season of a Hero*, would have to be delivered in

140 characters or less. What it means for the future of sports books—think of authors like Roger Kahn, George Plimpton, Ken Dryden, Roger Angell, Earl McRae, and A. J. Liebling—is even more disturbing.

This conveyance of trivia, quick speculation, and rumour is called, derogatorily, “BlackBerry journalism.” Television, ironically, is the worst offender: with the most visual of tools, it reduces much of sports journalism to talking heads reading off their various crumbs of minutiae that have been handed to them by those who control such information. Do those who exchange the insider minutiae get anything in return? That is for the viewer/consumer to decide, and, so far, the viewer/consumer does not appear particularly bothered by any such concerns.

The obsession with “content” has meant, sadly, next to no time for “substance.” In far too many cases, tweeting and blogging have become forms of public masturbation, where size—as in the number of hits or followers one can attract—matters. Hits, newspapers will one day realize, are not circulation. In many instances—particularly those involving very established institutions such as the CBC or the *Globe and Mail*—it can be argued that a great many of the hits and “comments” are inspired by those who dislike the product and would never be counted among paid circulation anyway.

Jonathon Gatehouse, a *Maclean’s* writer, expresses a common concern about this pressure on sports reporters to be “first” above all else in his 2012 book, *The Instigator: How Gary Bettman Remade the League and Changed the Game Forever*. Such pressure to deliver, he suggests, leaves sports reporters vulnerable to coercion “or blandishments—a good pipeline to the league is the easiest path to a fat TV contract.” Gatehouse also quotes the CBC’s *Hockey Night in Canada* host Ron MacLean, who has his own concerns about the invisible but undeniable strings running between the league that runs the sport and so many who report on the sport on television. “Not only is there pressure,” MacLean told Gatehouse. “There is an absolute temptation to sell your ability to think for yourself for the ability to be told. You’ll live the high life, you’ll be travelling, staying in five-star hotels, and be famous and making good money.”⁵

Again, let me reiterate: having a limited number of connected “hockey insiders” is critical to good hockey reporting in this country. But someone needs to tell us about the players. A generation ago, virtually all Canadians knew and recognized the promising youngsters with the Edmonton Oilers; today, it is only their names that are known, since they are mentioned by reporters who have become far larger celebrities. Someone needs to tell us how the game is being played and coached, and how, rightly or wrongly, it is evolving. Many fans actually don’t care all that

much about minor trades, or whether the suspension is four games or six, or how the contract has an average cap hit of \$5.7 million a year. A couple of good insiders can handle that role; it doesn't take all of sports journalism to chase these minutiae.

Today's sports reporters are not entirely to blame for the confused state of sports journalism. The various "platforms" for which they work treat them like hamsters stuck on an endless wheel, spinning nowhere. They must set up games, tweet from morning skates, transcribe tape, blog from the rink, upload video that no one watches, talk to the endless radio stations that call looking for (usually free) chatter, and file, file, file. There is no longer time for that leisurely chat with players that used to produce such considered thought or insight. Should a reporter attempt such a discussion, invariably hands with small digital recorders will push in—people "quote vacuuming" for Twitter and the Web, the recorder often not even bothering to listen and the athlete instantly falling back on the necessary clichés that render such vacuuming useless for anything but sound clips that add up to nothing.

This is most unfortunate for both sports storytellers and sports consumers. "The secret of good reporting is simply being around," writes Leonard Koppett, a former *New York Times* and *Oakland Tribune* writer. Hanging out is "how a writer learns to know what he needs, what and how to write about it, to evaluate relevance and fairness, and how to distinguish the important from the trivial."⁶ It is a fine sentiment, but it is no longer possible in dressing rooms that are overpacked with credentialed reporters and where every uttered word is considered an animal that must be captured and displayed.

Because content matters more than, and must not be confused with, substance and because content is defined by volume, sports has increasingly turned to statistics, so many of which are meaningless. Hockey, for example, has undergone a "baseballization" since the mid-1990s, when the NHL began breaking down a great variety of numbers within an individual game. Some are of interest and value, such as ice time. Some are dubious, such as faceoffs won or lost: many faceoffs are neither won nor lost—indeed, one strategic move by the centre player is to deliberately move the puck ahead into the other team's zone. Other stats are simply goofy, such as those that record an individual player's "giveaways," when most pucks are lost because another player screwed up, or those that count "hits" when there is no consensus on what constitutes a "hit." To be fair, analytics and metrics have their place in determining a prospect's potential, in tracking an older player's regression, and, most significantly, in confirming what eyes believe they have seen. Furthermore, a

mass of numbers does compensate for the little column space required to explain the reality of most hockey moments: “Shit happens.”

“Excessive use of statistics,” Koppet contends, “if not checked, may turn out to be a fatal malady.”⁷ Frank Deford, the great American sportswriter best known for his work in *Sports Illustrated*, would agree: he declared in one interview, “We’ve gotten swamped by the numbers. People have gotten buried under the numbers. Statistics. That has become everything. Pitch count is more interesting than what the guy is made of. I think that’s a shame because so much of sports is drama.”⁸ In another interview, Deford called this “the pole-dancing of sports journalism,” demonstrating that he had lost none of his impressive descriptive powers.⁹

Social media has had as profound an effect on sports as on politics in the Middle East, though hardly as pressing, important, or potentially dangerous. Some of the impact has been good and some not so good. Social media has, however, undeniably changed sports journalism. When Deford gave the Red Smith Lecture in Journalism at the University of Notre Dame in 2010, he tried to convey a sense of the change he had seen since he began in 1962.

While it’s not just nostalgia and the sappy memories of an old man to say that sports was a better canvas to paint on then, nonetheless, when talking about the changes in sports *journalism*, it’s so hard to distill it from the rest of the discipline. That world I stumbled into in 1962 was already on the cusp of being manhandled by technology.

The late Neil Postman, who was a brilliant social observer, once suggested: “Education as we know it began with the printing press and ended with television.”

So now, I suppose, we could say: Journalism, as we knew it, began with the printing press. It ended with the Internet.¹⁰

Strong words, yes, but consider for a moment what being able to tweet the first break on some minutiae does to those who must somehow gain the minutiae required in order to maintain their job as an “insider.” One major US newspaper where a good friend of mine works built much of its circulation through sports coverage, which it took very seriously when my friend began his tenure there. It still takes it seriously, but in a profoundly different manner. Sports remains a large part of the paper—now struggling, as are all newspapers, to survive circulation decline—and naturally, the Web is seen as a significant part of any solution. Sports reportage there is now measured by the number of hits a story receives on the Web, with daily discussions about how the number of hits might be increased. Feature stories—old-fashioned storytelling—are considered poor fare for hits in a world

of shrinking attention span and the “triumph of trivia.” Sports reporters are asked to provide short informative hits—none so embraced as quick injury reports. It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that the audience out there for such material is the gambling world, whether by direct betting on real games or through the vast growth of vanity sports leagues. This is not the journalism most of us signed up for.

Yet perhaps we should have seen it coming. It was a generation or more ago that the *Chicago Tribune* became the owner of the Chicago Cubs and sportswriters everywhere raised their eyebrows, wondering what this would mean to the paper’s reporting on the team. Now, however, the list of broadcasters owning teams and reporting on them is virtually endless. One example among many is an NHL team in California that pays the costs of a reporter coming on the road with them; the newspaper has no problem with this obvious conflict that, sadly, hearkens back to the very origins of sports journalism.

Back in 1985, a young journalism student, Damien Cox—now a sports columnist for the *Toronto Star*—wrote a piece on well-known sports broadcaster Pat Marsden for the *Ryerson Review of Journalism*. Cox had the audacity to raise the question of journalistic responsibility in sports broadcasting. What was more important—increasing the audience or informing the audience? A beet-red Marsden erupted in anger in response to Cox:

Let me tell you what to do with journalism: shove it in your ass because it doesn’t make five cents for anybody in this business. If you’re in this thing because you want to reform the world or you want to reform sports, then what you should do is, uh, write books about it because you’re never going to get mass appeal. We’re in the business of mass appeal. We live in a capitalistic society, and that’s the way it’s got to be.¹¹

Time has proven Marsden largely correct. Sports reporting is indeed in the business of mass appeal, and sports journalism is a sidebar at best. Frank Deford says that something that did not exist in Marsden’s time, the Internet, has taken this thinking to yet another level. He argues that the feature “takeout” has largely died because of lack of space, decreased attention span, and high production costs. Minutiae rules instead. “The story,” says Deford,

which was always the best of sportswriting, what sports gave so sweetly to us writers—the sports story is the victim. Sportswriting remains so popular—one word. Sports stories—two words, are disappearing.

So while we may properly bemoan the loss of newspapers and magazines, have no fear, sports fans. There will be no dearth of easy access to box scores and statistics and dugout gossip. . . .

No, no need to worry, fans: All that stuff will continue to be well covered. It is the good stories, and, even worse, the good investigative journalism, that we will lose.¹²

Criticism of the toy department is nothing new. Back in 1970, *Globe and Mail* sports columnist Dick Beddoes told the Senate Committee on the Mass Media: “It is unfortunately a fact that the quality of performance on Canada’s sports pages is too seldom on a par with that in Canada’s sports arenas. The profession is still burdened with hacks who make tin-can gods out of cast-iron jerks.”¹³ Not so much anymore. Today, the profession is burdened by not knowing what it is or what it should be.

What it once was is undeniably gone. “Newspaper people speak of a police reporter, a City Hall man, and a Washington correspondent, but always of a sports writer,” A. J. Liebling noted back in 1946:

The sports writer is not expected merely to tell what happened. Upon small, coiled springs of fact, he builds up a great padded mattress of words. His readers flop themselves down upon this Beautyrest and escape into a dream world where most of the characters are titanic heroes, devouring monsters, or gargantuan buffoons, and the rest are clean, high-type, aristocratic sportsmen who own yachts, racing stables, or baseball clubs and are occasionally depicted as setting up schnapps for the scribes [sports writers]. The scribe is expected to be entertaining even when there’s nothing to be entertaining about.¹⁴

Entertaining is one thing; informing is another. Both should go hand in hand in any type of journalism, not just sports journalism. Much good work is still being done today, although it has to be sought out in locations with holding capacities far beyond that of Twitter. One needs to be aware of the cat’s cradle of strings that exists today between those owning teams and those covering teams, those controlling information and those dispersing information.

If this is not a concern among sports consumers, it should be. As the late David Carr, the esteemed media columnist for the *New York Times*, so chillingly puts it: “What I’m worried about is [that] who is going to tell you about the school system is the school system—and it will be all good news.”¹⁵

In sports, we are almost to that point today.

NOTES

- 1 For a useful overview, see Tom Malone, "History of Sports Media," *Sport and Culture*, 25 April 2012, <https://sportsandpr1.wordpress.com/2012/04/25/history-of-sports-media/>; see also Robert W. McChesney, "Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States," in *Media, Sports, and Society*, edited by Lawrence A. Wenner (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), 49–69. On Canada, see W. H. Kesterton, *A History of Journalism in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967).
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- 3 See, for example, "Rogers, Bell Close MLSE Deal," *CBC News*, 20 August 2012, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/rogers-bell-close-mlse-deal-1.1245815>.
- 4 See, for example, Dan Rosen, "NHL, Rogers Announce Landmark 12-Year Deal," *NHL*, 26 November 2013, <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=693152>; Steve Ladurantaye, "A Game Changer for Canada's Game," *Globe and Mail*, 26 November 2013.
- 5 Jonathon Gatehouse, *The Instigator: How Gary Bettman Remade the League and Changed the Game Forever* (Toronto: Viking, 2012), 185.
- 6 Leonard Koppet, *The Rise and Fall of the Press Box* (Toronto: Sport Media, 2003), 30.
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- 8 Ed Sherman, "Sherman Interview: Great Frank Deford Tackles New Subject: Himself," *Sherman Report*, 29 May, 2012, <http://www.shermanreport.com/sherman-interview-great-frank-deford-tackles-new-subject-himself/>.
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- 11 Quoted in Damien Cox, "The Yea Team," *Ryerson Review of Journalism*, 1 March 1985, <http://rrj.ca/the-yea-team/>.
- 12 Deford, "Sportswriter Is One Word," 12.
- 13 Beddoes's oft-quoted remarks were made in his 1970 "Brief to Senate Committee on the Mass Media: Ghost Writing and Sports Writing."
- 14 A. J. Liebling, "The Scribes of Destiny," *The New Yorker*, 28 September 1946.
- 15 Sylvia Stead, "Public Editor: David Carr on the Internet, News and Twitter," *Globe and Mail*, 14 September 2012.

2

THE HALL OF MIRRORS

Christopher Waddell

When Nadir Mohamed, number two in the 2013 *Globe and Mail's* top fifty influential people in Canadian sports, announced his retirement in the spring of 2013, there were no tributes or wails of dismay. There was nothing to match the outpourings that greeted Jarome Iginla's departure from the Calgary Flames in a trade to the Pittsburgh Penguins that spring, or Daniel Alfredsson's decision that July to sign with the Detroit Red Wings for the 2013–14 season after seventeen years with the Ottawa Senators.

Mohamed's announcement that he would step down in early 2014 was barely noticed by Canada's sports writers and broadcasters. Few sports fans across the country probably even know who he is. This anonymity in the Canadian sports landscape is shared by the co-occupant of the second-place slot on the *Globe* list, George Cope. Yet Mohamed, the former head of Rogers Communications Inc., and Cope, the current CEO of BCE Inc., are so influential that only NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman placed above them in the *Globe's* ranking. The extent to which sports and broadcasting in Canada are now mutually dependent is further highlighted by the fact that five of the *Globe's* top dozen most influential people in sports are broadcast executives from the CBC, CTV (owned by BCE), and Quebecor.

At the top of that list are executives at Rogers and BCE. Not only are these companies Canada's largest and third-largest wireless and Internet service providers; they own the two major sports specialty TV channels, Sportsnet and TSN (and the French-language Réseau des Sports, RDS), as well as sports radio networks and, in the Rogers case, *Sportsnet Magazine*, the Canadian challenger to the

American magazine *Sports Illustrated*. BCE also owns the over-the-air television network CTV and its twenty-eight stations; more than thirty specialty channels; more than three dozen radio stations; dozens of websites, including the Sympatico.ca portal; and Dome Productions, a major television and mobile broadcast production house that produces coverage of sports and other events. Rogers owns the CITY-TV network and five multicultural OMNI television stations; fifty-five radio stations across Canada; and more than fifty consumer magazines and trade publications, including well-known titles such as *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine*, and *Canadian Business*.

But the presence and influence of BCE and Rogers in Canadian sports extends far beyond their media activities to ownership of major professional teams in the country and the buildings and facilities where they play. While Rogers is the sole owner of the Toronto Blue Jays and their home, the Rogers Centre (formerly the Skydome), the two companies jointly paid \$1.3 billion in 2012 to buy 75 percent of Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. MLSE owns the Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team, basketball's Toronto Raptors, professional soccer's Toronto FC, the Toronto Marlies American Hockey League team, Toronto's Air Canada Centre, and the facilities where the soccer team and minor league hockey team play. It also owns specialty TV channels and assorted websites and social media sites dedicated to each of the major league teams; large sports bars in Toronto and Ottawa; and the \$500 million Maple Leaf Square condominium, office, and commercial redevelopment of MLSE's Air Canada Centre site in downtown Toronto.

It's no stretch to suggest that between them, the two corporations control most of what Canadians read, listen to, and watch in sports. Their reach even extends beyond their sole and joint ownership of media and teams, BCE at the time also owned 15 percent of the *Globe and Mail* newspaper. *The Globe*, together with Torstar and Square Victoria Communications Group (the parent of Gesca Ltée., which owns *La Presse* and other Québec papers), owns the Canadian Press news service. Among Canada's major media players, only newspaper owner Postmedia Network Canada Corporation, Shaw Communications Inc. (which owned Global TV), Quebecor (which would like to own an NHL team in Québec City), and the publicly owned CBC are outside the BCE-Rogers realm. The CBC has remained a significant presence in the sports world, primarily through its *Hockey Night in Canada* programming, but that ended in 2014.

The \$5.2 billion, twelve-year deal that Rogers signed with the NHL in November 2013 will allow the CBC to keep Saturday night hockey until the end of the 2017–18 season, but it will simply take a feed of the game from Rogers, with Rogers controlling

all editorial content and scooping up all the advertising revenue. That leaves the public broadcaster with the 2014 World Cup soccer broadcast rights in Canada, the Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia, in 2014, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2016, although BCE and Rogers are also players here (despite CTV not winning those Olympic rights after owning Vancouver in 2010 and London in 2012). TSN and Sportsnet will be secondary Olympic broadcasters working in 2014 and 2016 with the CBC.

In mid-2013, Rogers was number two in sports programming in Canada but was gaining on the leader, TSN (owned by BCE), and was hoping to use the NHL contract to move into top spot. There are about 12 million subscribers to cable or satellite television in Canada, and about 9.1 million of them buy TSN, while 8.8 million subscribe to Sportsnet's primary set of channels, with many viewers probably paying monthly for both channels as part of purchased bundles. Through the first few months of 2013, TSN had an average per-minute audience of about 145,000, while Sportsnet averaged about 96,000, a gain of 20 percent from a year earlier.¹ Collectively, the two brought in about \$500 million in revenue in 2012, with TSN turning a pre-tax profit of approximately \$37 million, ahead of Sportsnet's \$22 million.²

Their battle for audiences has led to a fight for television rights. Rogers, of course, has exclusive rights to the Blue Jays. The fifty-fifty Rogers-BCE sharing of the MLSE deal means that Sportsnet and TSN split Maple Leaf games—as well as games involving Toronto's National Basketball Association team, the Raptors—evenly. While an even split of games is a solution that one might expect from those most comfortable around the table of a corporate boardroom, it has created problems. The broadcasting split leaves fans in the dark, for instance, about which Leaf games are on which network and when. That's a recipe for tension within MLSE that could escalate over time and could strain, or even break, the Rogers-BCE alliance of convenience.

Further strain is likely from the NHL deal. TSN thought it had an inside track for renewal and was shocked when the league and Rogers signed their exclusive agreement covering all media and giving Rogers sole rights to the NHL in Canada on television, radio, and mobile devices, as well as online. Sunday night hockey will join Saturday night, with weeknight games as well, on Sportsnet. TSN, which built its audience through a decade of NHL rights, will be reduced to carrying regional games involving a couple of Canadian teams, including the Ottawa Senators. In its first year, though, the deal didn't look that great. Revenues failed to meet Rogers' expectations although the company said it still made a 10 percent profit. Television ratings were also down for the first two months of the 2015-16 season, thanks in part to another struggling season for the Maple Leafs.

Meanwhile, fans will pay—probably a lot. The price that Sportsnet charges cable and satellite distributors will certainly rise. Once viewers have the option after March 2016 to buy single channels rather than the current bundle of channels expect Sportsnet to be much more expensive. A charge of ten to fifteen dollars a month doesn't seem unrealistic, compared to the couple of dollars subscribers pay at the moment. Finally, Rogers wants to use the NHL to increase the number of people choosing Rogers as their mobile carrier for cellphones and tablets. Rogers would love to find a way to force anyone who wants to watch hockey on a mobile device to subscribe to its services. Indeed, it is already doing that. Its Game Centre Live package is available on smart phones, laptops, and tablets for about \$250 a year, but only Rogers customers have access to the Game Plus mobile app and to home Internet features such as exclusive camera angles, multiple angle replays, postgame analysis, and behind-the-scenes details not available on Sportsnet. Bell filed a complaint to the broadcast regulator, claiming that this violates CRTC regulations, but the CRTC dismissed the complaint, stating that Rogers's move was encouraging innovation. Bell's real concern, of course, is that the exclusivity will drain subscribers from Bell to Rogers.³

All of that leaves TSN much reduced but not quite empty-handed, since it retains a long-term deal with the Canadian Football League that covers the season and playoffs, including the ratings-winning Grey Cup game. It has also signed a ten-year agreement with Hockey Canada as exclusive broadcaster of international hockey, including the popular World Junior championship that runs annually in the end-of-year holiday season. TSN also has an agreement with the Canadian Curling Association to cover the national championships for men and women.

Rogers, too, is buying and creating content, such as the Grand Slam of Curling. The corporation also holds a substantial lead in radio audiences: Toronto's Sportsnet 590 The FAN is the most listened-to sports station in the country. Online TSN is the clear leader in page views, while Rogers is integrating its *Sportsnet Magazine* writers into its online sites to catch up. After two years, Rogers says its magazine has approximately seventy thousand subscribers, twenty thousand less than *Sports Illustrated* in Canada.⁴

In what might be called their coop-etition, or perhaps comp-eration, Rogers and BCE have two objectives. First, they hope that their sports channels and programming can help reverse, or at least slow down, the steady drop in the number of cable and/or satellite subscribers in Canada. Regular increases in the monthly cost of cable and satellite TV packages mean that some consumers cannot or no longer want to pay for both cable or satellite and Internet service at home. Faced with a choice

between television and Internet service, the latter (which is usually cheaper) consistently wins. That is helped by the growing popularity of online broadcasters such as Netflix and of television programming delivered through the Internet. For instance, in 2013, Rogers's cable TV revenue declined from a year earlier, owing in part to the 3.9 percent year-over-year drop in the number of its cable customers.⁵

Sports can help reduce cable and satellite cancellations, since it is the last refuge of appointment television—television that viewers must watch when it is broadcast rather than at their convenience. That means larger audiences delivered to advertisers and more revenue for broadcasters. Viewers can now watch almost all programming, other than breaking news, at their convenience, not just when the program is initially broadcast. They have also moved beyond TV screens to smart phones, computers, and tablets—hence, the rise of Netflix, YouTube, and other online viewing platforms, which provide both legal and pirated programming that has drained TV audiences. That is not true, though, for sports. Fans want to watch the game live, not twelve hours or two days later, and they still watch primarily on television. Live coverage of the action in high definition on big-screen television helps promote everything from fantasy leagues and fan support to gambling, both legal and illegal.

In Canada, that is demonstrated categorically by fan devotion to the National Hockey League, even though it has been more than twenty years since a Canadian team, the Montreal Canadiens, last won the Stanley Cup, in 1993. Throughout the hundred-day player lockout by the league in 2012–13, which caused a shortened forty-eight-game (down from the normal eighty-two games) season that began in mid-January, prognosticators and public opinion pollsters all predicted league-television doom. Fans' outrage at the third interruption of a season for a labour dispute since the mid-1990s would hurt ticket sales and TV audiences when the lockout finally ended, the fans proclaimed.⁶

So what happened when pucks finally dropped? The league had one of its best years ever, both in ticket sales and TV ratings. Twenty-two of the thirty NHL teams, including all seven in Canada, matched or exceeded pre-lockout average attendance, and four teams had attendance that exceeded 100 percent of their arena's capacity.⁷ In the important US television market, 1.5 million viewers, on average, watched games on NBC, NBCSN, and CNBC, the largest audience for hockey since 1997, and almost 20 percent above 2012 levels. The Stanley Cup finals, in which the Chicago Blackhawks defeated the Boston Bruins in six games, had a 3.3 rating and an average of 5.8 million viewers on NBC and the NBC Sports Network in the United States. In Canada, audience numbers were strong from the moment the

season started on 19 January 2013, even though the last Canadian team was eliminated in the second of four rounds of playoffs.

As with hockey's Stanley Cup, it has been more than twenty years since the Toronto Blue Jays won the World Series. That was also their last playoff appearance. A major rebuilding of the team in 2013, accompanied by loud and repeated pre-season media predictions of World Series potential, paid off for Rogers, although the team's on-field performance did not match the media-generated pre-season hype. From a low point of an average of 20,068 fans per home game at the Rogers Centre in 2010, twenty-sixth best in the thirty-team league, the Blue Jays were twelfth best in average home attendance in 2013. The average crowd of 31,315 for the eighty-one home games was still just 64 percent of the Rogers Centre's capacity, but it was a 50 percent increase from four years earlier. No doubt, that increase is in part due to blanket coverage of the team on Rogers's Sportsnet television, radio, online, and magazine outlets. Rogers creates a harmonious commercial circle by spending to improve the team, which is then promoted through more coverage across more of its radio, television, magazine, and online outlets, leading to bigger home game crowds and larger TV and online audiences—all of which means more revenue and presumably greater profit for Rogers. In 2015 that paid off as the Blue Jays returned to baseball's post-season playoffs, selling out 20 of their last 21 home games and with season attendance of 2.8 million—the best since 1993. Sportsnet also reported its highest ratings ever, which translated into more advertising revenue.⁸

Sports programming isn't just the best hope for holding onto existing cable and satellite customers. It is also the key to revenue growth for Rogers and BCE through their individual wireless and Internet services. The goal is to use ownership of the exclusive rights to televise hockey, baseball, football, basketball, and other sports to encourage customers to subscribe to that conglomerate's Internet or wireless services if they want to watch sports on anything more portable than a TV screen. But how far can each corporation go in restricting access to sports coverage online and on mobile devices to their own wireless subscribers? Determining what is fair and what is anti-competitive and then enforcing fair access and competition is the challenge faced by the federal broadcast regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). At the moment, a wireless provider can restrict to its own subscribers only content created exclusively for the mobile market. The pressure to broaden the definition of what can be offered only to subscribers has already started with Game Plus being part of the Rogers NHL deal. It's a battle against the regulator that Rogers will probably win, since the CRTC has neither the history, nor the reputation, nor even the ability to enforce its own rulings.

One positive consequence of the focus on sports programming is that it offers opportunities for more coverage of sports that now get minimal or no coverage, except in the quadrennial lead-up to the Olympics. Television exposure and the ability to deliver audiences to advertisers and sponsors can provide more money for Olympic sports, teams, and athletes that now struggle for public attention and support.

The biggest winner from all of this could be the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) system, which in 2013 signed a six-year agreement for Sportsnet to broadcast its major championships, starting with football's Vanier Cup. Basketball and men's and women's hockey will also be featured in the first year of the deal as Sportsnet gives national exposure to thirteen CIS events. By the final year of the agreement, as many as twenty-seven separate events could be covered by Sportsnet.⁹ It is an opportunity to provide national exposure to university athletes and sports, giving those competitors more recognized names and perhaps increasing the often pathetically small crowds for Canadian university sports and championships.

The CIS-Sportsnet agreement is a major part of the CIS expansion plan promoted by the group's then CEO, Pierre Lafontaine, formerly of Swimming Canada. Other elements include a commitment by universities across the country to raise the profile of their teams and events in their local markets, piggybacking on the national publicity and exposure Lafontaine hoped the Sportsnet deal would provide for teams and athletes. Lafontaine believed that a closer relationship with Canada's Olympic athlete development system is equally important in building the profile of university sports across the country. Keeping the best university athletes in Canada rather than seeing them head to the United States for sports scholarships, and supporting them here at home with high-level coaching, competition, and media coverage is his prescription for raising the visibility of university sports in Canada, building on the successes of the eleven thousand athletes and seven hundred coaches at the fifty-four schools in the CIS.¹⁰ Long-overdue attention to a wide range of university sports in Canada from the mainstream media would be a beneficial result of the competition between the two conglomerates for sports properties.

Such benefits, though, seem unlikely to outweigh the drawbacks for fans and the public from the vertical integration of sports media and the teams they cover. The reality of one or two conglomerates owning the team, its broadcasters, and the media outlets that talk about sports—and also broadcasting the games and related information to fans—creates unprecedented opportunities for conflicts of interest. Those conflicts seem likely to be at the core of how Canadians communicate about sports in the years ahead, shaping public perceptions of teams, sports, and

athletes with media coverage designed primarily for the commercial benefit of the conglomerate owner. In the face of that pressure, can sports media maintain the independent reporting, commentary, and analysis that have traditionally been at the heart of the media's role in all aspects of Canadian society, including sports? Or will broadcast, print, and online sports media slowly morph into becoming primarily agents to generate fan interest and audiences and promote sales of tickets and team merchandise to benefit their parent conglomerate?

Rogers is at the forefront of how such a transformation may occur. It clearly explained its objectives in a June 2013 news release that announced the relaunch of The Score, its recently purchased specialty TV channel, as Sportsnet 360. The news release described the channel as

integrated into the overall Sportsnet brand via cross-promotional and content-sharing across Sportsnet's additional assets on television, radio, print, digital and social media. Sportsnet's brand tagline, Fuelled by Fans, which builds on Sportsnet's objective to fuel the passion of Canadians and provides one source that delivers sports fans what they want, wherever and whenever, will also be part of the *Sportsnet 360* sub-brand.¹¹

An incident in mid-summer 2013 provided a taste of the conflicts that may soon dominate sports coverage. It involved a dispute between a Blue Jays baseball player and a former player, now a commentator on Rogers's Toronto all-sports radio station, Sportsnet 590 The FAN. The chronology is straightforward. Gregg Zaun, a former major league catcher who had spent some time playing for the Blue Jays, criticized the current Jays catcher, J. P. Arencibia, harshly and repeatedly in Zaun's radio appearances on The FAN. Zaun picked on Arencibia's low batting average (only slightly more than .200), frequent strikeouts, and inability to throw out almost anyone trying to steal second base.

Arencibia, a frequent presence on social media, responded by telling his more than 143,000 Twitter followers that he would reply the next day on The FAN. On the air, he conceded that his season hadn't been great but went after Zaun, saying that he had never come to the dressing room to speak with Arencibia and instead had simply attacked his performances on the radio. Arencibia then added that Zaun was "a person who used performance enhancing drugs" during his career. (Zaun had been mentioned as a possible user in a 2007 report about drug use in baseball, but he denied it at the time, and nothing has ever been proven.) Zaun responded on The FAN, saying that Arencibia's comments were "over the line," adding: "He may come to regret those at some point."¹²

The *National Post* (not owned by Rogers) described the ensuing on-air discussion on Sportsnet 590 The FAN following Zaun's retort: "The Rogers talk-show host asked the Rogers baseball analyst whether he might sue the Rogers baseball player over comments made on a Rogers radio station. The Rogers baseball analyst said he didn't know. He did not sound particularly keen on the idea. Nor would it likely get much traction among the folks who run the Rogers hall of mirrors."¹³

Social media quickly escalated the Zaun-Arencibia spat into the major story of the day for some of reporters who regularly cover the team. Then, just as quickly as it had emerged as a controversy, the social media world moved on. Is this hall of mirrors a preview of how the Canadian media will cover professional sports in the future? Should sports fans care when the same conglomerate is the employer of the interviewer, of the ex-player baseball commentator, and of the player currently under criticism, as well as the owner of the team in question, of the station on which the exchange is broadcast and the rebuttal promoted, and of the stadium that hosted the player scrum (facilitated by the team it owns) intended to clear the air? Was this a real dispute or just a sideshow designed to distract attention from a team that is underperforming? Perhaps it was manufactured to stoke controversy in the media, with the hope of keeping fans coming to the Rogers Centre and ensuring that media continued to talk about the team despite its failure to perform and win consistently.

The Arenecibia-Zaun contretemps in that Rogers hall of mirrors saw each event bouncing off the wall to another mirror mostly contained within the hall, where the outcome could be fairly easily managed. Pierre Karl Péladeau and Quebecor—which owns Québec's largest newspaper, *Le Journal de Montréal*; the province's major private TV network TVA; and the dominant mobile, Internet, and cable provider Vidéotron—could have their own hall of mirrors if they ultimately succeed in bringing an NHL team back to Québec City. In both cases (the Arenecibia-Zaun conflict and the Quebecor plan), the outsiders TSN and its French-language sister RDS would be free to cover the story, ignore it, or say whatever they wanted about the issue, but what if this was a story about the Toronto Maple Leafs and not the Blue Jays? Then Rogers and BCE would be equally affected and would have equal influence over all the elements of the story, as Rogers did in the Jays case.¹⁴ They would also have a joint interest in shaping the story to maximize any commercial and promotional benefits while minimizing or eliminating any reputation and brand damage. Their joint hall of mirrors could then determine what Canadians learn about a story, which reporters and broadcasters cover it, what is said by whom, where and how it is reported, who is or isn't quoted, how it is analyzed,

what leads are pursued by reporters, what leads and information are edited out of coverage, what assessments are made about the significance of the story, and what access media not owned by the conglomerates may have to the story.

Such a self-contained media world works in several ways. First, media organizations concentrate coverage on sports within their conglomerate. For example, in its role as a Blue Jays broadcaster, Sportsnet devotes a huge amount of daily and weekly airtime to the Jays, starting weeks before the season begins. It is safe to assume that in the pursuit of promoting the team, coverage eats up airtime that might have been devoted to other sports and issues. Its competitor TSN holds the rights to the CFL, so it is no surprise that TSN's popular SportsCentre newscast and game highlights program, which is repeated hourly each evening and the following morning, plays up the Toronto Argonauts and the rest of the CFL, but not the Blue Jays. TSN regularly assigned just one overworked journalist to write stories, shoot video, and blog about all aspects of the Blue Jays and their games, despite the fact that home game attendance and TV ratings are consistently higher for baseball than for the CFL in the Toronto area. But that external environment is only dimly reflected, if at all, by each conglomerate's mirrors. If TSN devoted significant daily coverage time to the Blue Jays, it would risk pushing audiences to its competitor Sportsnet, undermining TSN's commercial interests as well as those of BCE. That operates in reverse for Sportsnet, with its limited coverage of the CFL compared to the programming time spent on everything Blue Jays.

The conglomerates can also control which media have how much access to athletes. There is no guarantee that in future, reporters from all news organizations will continue to have equal postgame and between-game access to players for interviews. At some point, the broadcast and print members of the same conglomerate that owns the team may start to receive preferential treatment. To some degree, that already happens, with "exclusive" stories given to media within the same family. Conglomerate cross-interests can also be seen in the questions journalists ask. Do those reporters who work for Rogers-owned outlets, for example, ask questions of Blue Jays players in a more sympathetic way than those who aren't Rogers employees? Related to that, will those who ask tough questions from external news organizations slowly be edged out the door and denied contact with players and management? How quickly and substantially will related media report or assess dissension or controversy within the team? For example, will Rogers reporters pursue a negative Blue Jays story as aggressively as those outside the conglomerate, or might upper management suggest soft-peddalling things so as not to damage their collective commercial interests?

The mirrors can also be selective, choosing not to reflect some things at all. How likely is it, for instance, that a reader of *Sportsnet Magazine* would find an article within its covers that is critical in a substantive way of Sportsnet TV programming, coverage decisions, or commentators? The same question could be asked about how critically the *Globe and Mail* assessed the activities and performance of TSN and its on-air talent, during the time that BCE had ownership interests in both. What constraints do reporters and writers at each publication either place upon themselves or face from their management when writing and reporting about sports broadcasting and broadcasters who operate under the same corporate umbrella? The other side of this issue is also worth exploring. Does the extent of coverage that each publication devotes to its broadcast partner primarily reflect fair news judgment and audience interests, or marketing decisions?

Such changes in how sports are covered in Canada will be incremental. It will not be easy to pinpoint exactly how reporting and coverage is increasingly managed and manipulated from one month or one season to the next. Messages delivered to audiences are shaped by what is covered and what is ignored and by who is providing the coverage. In many cases, trying to uncover the subtle biases means identifying what is missing: questions not asked, reporters not assigned, players and management not available for comment, little or no time or space for negative stories, and the replacement of criticism by a consistently positive spin on everything from interviews to overall coverage. Whatever changes Rogers and Bell introduce as the years pass should be viewed as just one part of a much broader effort led by the professional sports leagues themselves to layer a public relations and promotion veneer over sports and the journalism flowing from it.

Almost universal access to the Internet means the mainstream media is no longer the gatekeeper controlling what and when fans learn about their favourite players, teams, and sports. Athletes can tweet, fans can blog, and journalists can be made almost irrelevant, or so it seems. The league can circumvent the mainstream media and go directly to the fans with what looks, sounds, and reads like journalism but is really skilfully disguised public relations and promotion. Welcome to the worlds of NHL.com, MLB.com, NFL.com, and NBA.com. Each of these sites is massive (Major League Baseball—MLB.com—is rumoured to be valued at US\$1 billion) and covers games with its own crew of reporters, some of whom have been hired full-time to work for the league site from the shrinking sports departments of mainstream media in Canada and the United States. MLB.com, for example, assigns one of its own reporter-employees to the home team and one to the visiting team for each major league game scheduled every night. The two reporters file

to MLB.com after the game, just like real journalists. For every game every night, the sites provide running game scores and pitch-by-pitch descriptions, final scores, league standings, game video highlights, and a flood of statistics for fans and fantasy league players. The sites also sell tickets and merchandise for all the league's teams (or they direct readers to individual team sites through online links) and offer subscribers various live online viewing packages up to and including buying online access to every major league game played every night.

The league sites provide everything many fans think they need, so much so that some fans abandon mainstream media. The sites contain a wealth of information, but they aren't journalism. They don't regularly hold players, managers, and owners accountable for actions and decisions on and off the playing surface, nor do they challenge accepted wisdom about the sport and its personalities. They don't highlight issues that could undermine the commercial success and viability of the sport, the league, or its individual teams. For instance, will MLB.com be the media outlet that breaks a story about players using performance-enhancing drugs, or will it follow, somewhat belatedly, when the number of stories done by others on a controversial issue makes acknowledging that issue unavoidable? Will NFL.com be on the forefront of examining head injuries in football—the damage they have done and the length of time and degree to which team management and physicians have understood the risks players faced? Will NHL.com commission and promote a study on how often team physicians prescribe painkillers and how much players use them? How extensively will any of these sites look at issues such as labour relations or gambling in professional sports?

As joint owners through their leagues, the teams are the direct beneficiaries of the success of these sites. These league-operated websites may even grow more influential as a source for “news,” as mainstream news organizations continue to cut costs in the face of shrinking advertising revenue. This is particularly true for newspapers and their websites that have, over the years, been the mainstay in providing coverage of local teams. Declining revenue means that newspaper owners are constantly looking for ways to save money. If a team is doing well, then the local media will be on the bandwagon, covering the games, telling the stories, and staying on top of daily developments. But the media can be fickle, particularly when budgets are tight and when things turn around and a former championship contender becomes an also-ran. If there is less and less audience interest in a team that plays poorly and slides down the standings, a cost-cutting news organization may decide to save money by covering only home games. The political equivalent is the private debate that occurred within news organizations before the 2011 federal

election about whether they should save money by sending reporters with New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton for only the last two weeks of the five-week election campaign. They wisely chose not to follow that route: in that election, the NDP achieved a historic victory by becoming the Official Opposition.

Retrenching to covering only home games would turn the consistent coverage of a team and league over to the hall of mirrors. Team owners have a commercial reason for ensuring that all games are featured on the media they own. But, for the reasons already specified, that sort of sports coverage is different from sports coverage provided by media that have no direct connection to the team. Reportage by media affiliated with teams themselves is inevitably compromised, caught in conflicts of interest in which the mirrors shape and distort coverage, turning journalism into promotion and public relations.

To some, none of this may matter. After all, it is only a game, but sports and its impact in communities across the country run much deeper than just what happens on the field or ice. It is very big business, and not just for the billions of dollars involved. Individual athletes, teams, and the sports they play can give a community its personality and character. They create a desirable image that allows people who may have nothing else in common to come together around a shared goal or objective, to see themselves reflected in their sporting heroes and their successes and failures. At the same time, professional sports teams, arenas, and stadiums are major employers in their communities. Sports teams also make demands for municipal, provincial, or federal subsidies or tax concessions and want communities to build arenas or stadiums for them. Public reaction to those requests can be shaped by the image created by and for the team. The owners know that and understand how to use it to their benefit. Sports fans and the general public need to be aware of that as well. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, communicating about sports will be increasingly shaped by the various halls of mirrors created by vertically integrated conglomerates as they challenge, pressure, and hope to replace independent journalism and its traditions. How this is happening, who is doing it and why, and what sports fans are losing in the process will be at the centre of how Canadians communicate about sports in the years ahead.

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3

THE END OF CBC SPORTS?

Jay Scherer

In his editor's note for the November 2010 issue of *The Walrus* magazine, John Macfarlane—also a founding member of Friends of Public Broadcasting (now Friends of Canadian Broadcasting)—underscored some of the key financial challenges facing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in the new digital era. At the time of his editorial, the CBC received an annual parliamentary appropriation of \$1.1 billion, an amount that ranked Canada “near the bottom of Western industrialized societies in our support for public broadcasting.”¹ Even more troubling, Macfarlane noted, the CBC's wide range of national and regional services in English and French across three platforms (radio, television, and now the Internet) required \$1.5 billion annually to operate. Historically, the gap between the CBC's annual parliamentary grant and its operating expenses has been bridged by advertising revenues that have been accrued by shows that have been able to reach truly national audiences, including the public broadcaster's longest running and most popular program, *Hockey Night in Canada* (HNIC).²

As a result of these intensifying political-economic pressures, the CBC controversially expanded its flow of programming in the new millennium to include US game shows (e.g., *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*) and other popular Canadian content (e.g., *Dragons' Den* and *Battle of the Blades*) to attract larger audiences—and thus, markets for advertisers. Predictably, these decisions generated significant discussion and debate and, notably, drew the ire of many cultural nationalists who have long believed that the public broadcaster's main contribution to Canadian cultural life should be to “provide culturally desirable programming that private

broadcasters cannot or will not provide.”³ These debates were also extended to the role of CBC Sports and the provision of popular sports content that is now widely available to most Canadians thanks to the explosive growth of cable and specialty sport channels like TSN and Sportsnet, which are respectively owned by the vertically integrated telecommunications giants BCE and Rogers. As Macfarlane explained:

Until recently, for instance, it was possible to argue that CBC was performing a public service by televising NHL hockey games. Hockey is a staple to which all Canadians should have access, and in remote regions CBC’s was once the only available signal. But no more. In the digital age, private networks have as much reach as the public broadcaster, and just as much interest in cashing in on the public’s appetite for the game—TSN already owns the rights to many weekday games and some playoff series. Still, CBC TV continues to devote an enormous piece of its prime-time schedule to *Hockey Night in Canada*, not because private broadcasters are unable or unwilling to do so, but because hockey is money. As with *Jeopardy!* and *Wheel of Fortune*, the tail wags the dog.⁴

Readers familiar with the history of these arguments will, of course, be well aware that a similar story has already been fully played out in Québec. In 2004, Radio-Canada’s legendary program, *La soirée du hockey*, went off the air after RDS (TSN’s sister station) paid an unprecedented amount to secure the exclusive broadcasting rights to all NHL hockey games (national and cable) in the French market. While RDS’s monopoly of the French market broadcast rights provided the NHL and the Montreal Canadiens with even greater revenue streams, it also substantially increased the amount of NHL hockey available to cable and satellite subscribers in Québec.⁵ Still, the demise of *La soirée du hockey* marked the end of both an era in Canadian television and an important cultural tradition in Québec. Moreover, from this point forward—and despite initial political opposition by the federal government—the “viewing rights” of Canadians to have “free,” over-the-air access to NHL hockey on the public broadcaster were ruptured along linguistic lines.⁶

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore the historical and most recent political debates over whether the public broadcaster ought to remain in the business of airing sports content, especially *HNIC*, on its English-language network. Historically, *HNIC* has been a crucial investment for the CBC, simply because it acted as a promotional platform for the public network, in addition to providing sizeable advertising-based revenue streams that have subsidized the network’s other programming. Beyond these financial arguments, though, what has ultimately

been at stake throughout all of these debates is not just the fate of hockey (and the Olympics and other major sporting events that are important to Canadians) on the CBC but also the type of role the public broadcaster should play in Canadian life, and thus the future of the network itself. As I note below, these debates culminated in 2013, when Rogers paid an unprecedented \$5.2 billion for the exclusive NHL media rights for the next twelve years (beginning with the 2014–15 NHL season), placing the very future of the CBC on an increasingly tenuous foundation. Prior to engaging these most recent issues, though, I want to emphasize some of the most significant political-economic developments that have undermined the role of CBC Sports. These developments need to be understood in relation to a much broader long-standing struggle over the role of public broadcasting in Canada.

THE EARLY DAYS OF CANADIAN TELEVISION

Readers of a certain age will remember that televised hockey was introduced to Canadians in 1952, enabling Canada's baby-boom generation to grow up watching hockey from autumn until spring. The introduction of the new medium was, incidentally, not enthusiastically endorsed by NHL president Clarence Campbell, who, echoing the fears of the Canadian highbrow establishment, called the arrival of television "the greatest menace of the entertainment world."⁷ Campbell's reservations would, of course, be quickly dispelled, and by the mid-1950s, watching *HNIC* on CBC and *La soirée du hockey* on Radio-Canada had become a quintessential Canadian pastime, inserted into the rhythms of the Canadian year. Revenues from both broadcasts had, crucially, become a significant factor not only in the profits of the Montréal and Toronto teams but also in the finances of the public broadcaster itself. The popular hockey broadcasts, moreover, provided important Canadian content for the CBC's English-language network, which was, to the chagrin of many highbrow cultural nationalists, already dependent on popular US imports to please audiences and attract advertising revenue.⁸

The early days of television have been widely acknowledged as a golden age, a creative era when the CBC enjoyed a monopoly as national broadcaster and regulator of other broadcasters (i.e., the private sector) with a mandate to express and promote a separate Canadian consciousness and sense of identity. It was during this time that Canadians across the country were introduced to a wide array of shows (musical game shows, highbrow quizzes, historical docudramas, concert music, and intellectual panel discussions) and a host of sporting events, including CFL football, wrestling, boxing, women's softball, roller derby, and, of course, ongoing

coverage of NHL hockey. In fact, by 1958, sports programming—with hockey at the forefront—accounted for nearly 10 percent of the public broadcaster's TV schedule. Even greater enthusiasm for weekend sports coverage across the country prompted the CBC to expand its programming to include curling, soccer, international hockey, bowling, skiing, swimming, figure skating, and golf.⁹ However, it was nationally significant events that captured the biggest audiences: five million Canadians watched the 1959 Grey Cup match—only the final game of the Stanley Cup playoffs gained a larger audience.¹⁰ The audience numbers for football matches were so significant that the CBC paid the CFL \$325,000 for the rights to broadcast the 1960 season.¹¹ Still, by the early 1960s, *HNIC* and *La soirée du hockey* were the most widely watched TV programs on the CBC and Radio-Canada, drawing audiences of millions of viewers per week.¹²

CTV AND THE NEW ERA OF COMPETITION

The CBC's dual role as national broadcaster and regulator was, however, soon to end, thanks to the long-standing struggle by private broadcasters and their ideological allies to establish an independent broadcasting regulator, the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG). Nongovernment stations (second stations) in cities where the CBC already existed were installed, and in 1961, the first national private network, CTV, was launched. In this respect, the role of sport was paramount in the establishment of Canada's second national network. Nicknamed "The Network That Means Business," CTV emerged in stark contrast to the birth of the CBC, which was intended to be a public instrument of nationhood. While the pursuit of profit unabashedly motivated the businessmen who had invested in CTV, they also shared an ideological affinity with showcasing Canadian private enterprise and destabilizing the public broadcaster's dominance over an expansive national television industry.¹³

It is also important to emphasize the paramount role of sport in the establishment of CTV. The BBG had earlier awarded John Bassett (the owners of the strongly pro-conservative newspaper the *Toronto Evening Telegram* and the CFL's Toronto Argonauts football club) the television licence for the lucrative Toronto market, and, to the surprise of the CBC, Bassett purchased the 1961 and 1962 rights to broadcast the Big Four (Eastern CFL) games and the first right of refusal for the Grey Cup. Bassett, however, lacked the facilities and a national network to distribute his newly acquired CFL content and was therefore unable to provide the games with sufficient exposure for advertisers. However, Spencer Caldwell—one of

Bassett's rival applicants for the television station in Toronto—had received BBG approval to form a network in December 1960. Bassett would ultimately join with Caldwell's network to secure a distribution system for the CFL games, an action that, in turn, prompted the other seven newly licensed private stations to sign up to the network. Thus, it was precisely the merger between Caldwell's national distribution network and Bassett's sports content that secured the BBG's final approval in April 1961 for CTV to begin operating. As Michael Nolan notes, "Without the 'Big Four' eastern conference of the CFL, CTV might never have emerged as a network."¹⁴

The entrance of CTV immediately set the stage for a new era of competition for sports broadcasting rights between the public and private networks, resulting in significant increases in television revenues for various sports leagues. Meanwhile, Canadian sports fans from coast to coast would enjoy an even greater amount of televised sports coverage. From this point forward, though, the CBC would be obliged to meet its private sector competitors "on their own ground in order to remain 'competitive'" for the most popular sports broadcasting rights.¹⁵

By the mid-1960s, in the midst of a long postwar economic boom that would last until the early 1970s, 92 percent of Canadian homes were considered to be television households.¹⁶ Here, it is important to emphasize the impact of increased prosperity, especially for Canadian working people, whose "postwar life and expectations came to be defined by unprecedented levels of geographical mobility, individualized consumption, home-centered recreations, and, significantly, the baby boom."¹⁷ It was within a climate of low unemployment, high disposable income, suburbanization, greater home and car ownership, and substantial increases in the purchase of light consumer goods that both CBC and CTV continued to stake their claims and battled to build significant weekend audiences for advertisers via expanded sports programming. CTV, for example, began to show less expensive broadcasts of *Wide World of Sports*—obtained through an arrangement with ABC in the United States—that blended major US and international sporting competitions and Canadian sporting events to deliver "the younger, larger, higher income families in CTV's ten vital marketing areas."¹⁸ CTV also quickly took aim at the broadcasting rights for the Olympic Games and established a notable presence in providing coverage of a succession of Winter Olympics, beginning with the 1964 Games in Innsbruck, Austria.¹⁹ Notably, by 1961, CTV had secured the rights to broadcast NHL hockey games on Wednesday nights.²⁰

Still, even with the entrance of CTV, the CBC enjoyed a significant presence in homes across the country through telecasts of professional and amateur

events, including Canadian college athletics, track and field meets, skiing, and the Summer Olympic Games. However, it was the sport of hockey and weekly broadcasts of *HNIC* that remained the most valuable and popular sport program for the public broadcaster: as Richard Gruneau and David Whitson note, “The value of these (largely male) audiences increased strikingly through the 1960s, as television became the major publicist of the new postwar consumer society, educating people about new consumer goods and services and new consumer identities.”²¹

By the early 1960s, however, the entrance of cable television had begun to radically transform the continental media landscape, thus opening the door to US signals and threatening to further overwhelm the broadcasting system with foreign content, while siphoning audiences away from both CTV and CBC. Cable quickly provided subscribers with an expansive array of viewing options, better reception, and, for anglophone viewers, the most popular US programs. The ongoing expansion of cable also fragmented audiences to unprecedented levels and undermined the notion of public broadcasting based on understandings of a “mass” audience, while naturalizing the idea of “markets” of subscribers and, beyond this concept, discourses of consumer choice. Despite these challenges, Canadians across the country “demonstrated a marked preference for their own news and current affairs, as well as for Canadian sportscasts” on CTV and CBC.²²

As the competition between the public and private sectors intensified over the course of the next decade—a development that further escalated the cost of sports properties—the amount of airtime dedicated to sport on the public broadcaster emerged as a target of criticism on two widely different fronts. First, CTV’s executives resented having to compete against the public broadcaster for the most popular sports broadcasting rights that captured lucrative national audiences for advertisers. CTV, like its public competitor, was also losing market share to a burgeoning cable industry. Second, many of Canada’s cultural elite openly disagreed with the CBC’s emphasis on professional sport and other examples of mass/commercial entertainment (especially popular US programs) at the expense of other so-called highbrow programming.

The CBC was attacked on both fronts during its licence renewal hearings in 1974, although the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) ultimately supported the concept of public broadcasting and the centrality of the CBC within the Canadian system in its licensing decision. However, while it also encouraged the public broadcaster to continue to provide popular sporting programs for all Canadians, the CRTC rejected the notion that the CBC and Radio-Canada should target a mass audience:

The Commission has never believed that the CBC should abandon entertainment programming, including popular presentations and sports. . . . It is understood that the national broadcasting service should retain a suitable proportion of this kind of programming. . . . However, despite the need for the CBC to continue to provide “popular” broadcasting service, the Commission is of the belief that the CBC, as a public service institution, should guard against considering itself as a “mass-medium” and particularly against considering its audience as a “mass.” . . . The CBC must not consider its audience as an agglomeration of 20 million more or less accessible revenue-producing consumers, but rather as an active community of people, with real and varying communication needs.²³

Predictably, the CRTC hearings “had shaken the CBC’s image of itself, and the public image of the CBC” and had provided a platform for not only its opponents but also its advocates to criticize sharply the public broadcaster and its role in Canadian social life.²⁴ Considering the growing impact of the cable industry, by the mid-1970s, the public broadcaster was under siege from a variety of fronts.

The question of what counted as a suitable proportion of commercial sports programming for the public broadcaster was revisited during the CBC’s licence renewal hearings in 1979. At this point, the CRTC bluntly noted that “a major problem faced by both television services, was that of sports.”²⁵ Even some within the CBC openly argued that the public broadcaster had

allowed live sports events to roar like a cannon-ball freight train through our prime time schedules at certain times of year, mostly during playoffs. This has been particularly disruptive on the English network where the combination of live prime time sports and U.S. programs has been a significantly limiting factor in expanding Canadian-produced programs. . . . Moreover, we’ve been forced to reduce the length of our season for our major news and current affairs programs because of sports gobbling up prime time in the early spring.²⁶

The escalating critique of the CBC’s production of commercial sport demonstrated that by the 1970s, the English-language network was already fully dependent on professional sport to attract audiences and had willingly embraced standard North American marketing and mass programming practices. Radio-Canada, in contrast, functioned more as a regional enterprise that, despite growing competition from the private sector, offered a more diverse and ambitious platform of popular French-language programming without relying almost exclusively on professional sport to attract sizable and loyal audiences.²⁷ These tensions would become even

more pronounced over the course of the next decade, while the presence of sport on both networks, but especially the English-language network, would be challenged more acutely because of the continued expansion of cable television and satellite services and the arrival of specialty sport channels.

THE NEW DIGITAL BROADCASTING LANDSCAPE

At the dawn of the 1980s, “with economic tremors from the end of the postwar boom rocking the economy and U.S. satellite signals nibbling at the edges of the broadcast system, the federal government developed a new policy vision for the communications sector.”²⁸ At the heart of this agenda—and set against the “threat” of foreign satellite broadcasters—was an expanded subscription cable system that heralded the entrance of an unprecedented wide range of specialty Canadian and foreign programming services. These new specialty channels would be restricted to the discretionary tier, to be purchased by household subscribers on top of a basic fee paid to local cable companies.²⁹ The channels were, in these respects, considered private undertakings regulated by market forces.

One of the most significant developments in the history of Canadian sport broadcasting occurred in 1984, when the CRTC licensed the country’s first twenty-four-hour cable sports specialty channel, TSN (then owned by the Labatt Brewing Company). Its sister network, the all-sport French-language service RDS, was licensed in 1989. TSN was clearly established to promote the Labatt brand and products, but it was also a crucial circuit of promotion for the brewery to market its Major League Baseball team, the Toronto Blue Jays, to a principally male demographic that advertisers wanted to target.³⁰ These developments foreshadowed the patterns of cross-ownership and cross-marketing that would fully materialize in Canada in the new millennium as vertically integrated media conglomerates merged their distribution networks with popular sporting content to capitalize on a host of promotional synergies. Despite its early licensing conditions, TSN quickly emerged as a competitor to the major national networks and attracted subscribers to cable in a cost-effective manner.³¹ Moreover, as a result of TSN’s sole focus on sport, the emergent cable channel provided full coverage of entire tournaments, sporting events, and playoff series without disrupting regularly scheduled prime-time shows. Such a development provided TSN with an immediate competitive advantage that “offered guaranteed exposure for sporting events, which in turn enticed other leagues and event organizers to side with TSN rather than any of the other ‘big three’ Canadian conventional broadcasters (Global, CTV, and CBC).”³²

Crucially, in 1989, TSN gained access to the analogue cable system as discretionary services that could be purchased on top of basic cable, and from this point forward, TSN would be able to accrue both advertising and cable subscription revenues, further solidifying its financial foundation and its ability to secure the top major league sports properties.

In addition to the full entrance of cable sport specialty channels, debilitating political pressures were also on the horizon for the CBC. In 1984, a new Conservative government gained power and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney declared the country to be “open for business,” thus setting the stage for the landmark free trade agreement with the United States in 1988. It was within this ascendant neoliberal policy environment that the federal government immediately directed the CBC to cut its budget by \$75 million.³³ At the same time, policy makers embraced a host of market reforms that would eventually lead to the further expansion of the broadcasting system according to the prerogatives of private capital. These trends were heightened during the early 1990s as a result of the impacts of globalization, market liberalization, and the emergence of new satellite and digital technologies that radically transformed the broadcasting and telecommunication industries. All of these developments were evidence of “a ‘power shift’ toward the subordination of the public interest to private, commercial interests” and of the ascension of a new era of “consumer-driven” digital television characterized by unprecedented levels of consumer choice and customized channels.³⁴

The vast increase in channel capacity and the emergence of increasingly capitalized competitors like TSN, however, also sharpened the competition for popular sport programming that could generate national audiences for advertisers. As a result of these pressures, during the early 1990s, private broadcasters and their ideological allies—most notably, the *Globe and Mail*—renewed their lobbying efforts to force the CBC to abandon its coverage of the most lucrative sports, the most significant being NHL hockey and the Olympics. The political campaign against the CBC was in full evidence over the course of the public broadcaster’s licence renewal hearings in March 1994. It must be noted that by this point, CTV had already been the Canadian broadcaster for the 1988 Winter Olympics, in Calgary, and the 1992 Summer Olympic Games, in Barcelona. During these hearings, CBC executives were repeatedly grilled by CRTC chairman Keith Spicer (and other commissioners) and forced to defend the CBC’s continued investment in increasingly costly sports content, especially when other private networks were more than willing to take over those broadcasting rights.

While spatial limits prevent a full treatment of those CRTC hearings, I want to emphasize some of the claims that were made by CBC executives in defence of CBC Sports. First, CBC president Tony Manera noted that in the early 1990s, sports content generated 31.6 percent of the English-language network's revenue and 17.5 percent of the French-language television revenue, for a combined 28 percent of the corporation's total advertising revenue. Moreover, the CBC defended its reliance on sport programming (10 percent of its English-language schedule) by simply noting that despite its escalating cost, sports content was still vastly cheaper than the production of original dramatic programming. Finally, CBC executives also emphasized the symbiotic relationship between various sports and the public broadcaster:

Without hockey . . . to even out our costs across the country, I don't think the CBC could justify maintaining crews and the mobiles that it has across the country that enable us to do all of the other events that we do, such as the CFL. And I would boast that the Canadian Football League may not have survived without the CBC's support over the years. . . . I think it has been the public exposure that we have been able to give to the league that has enabled the league to survive. . . . And without the hockey balancing effect in our schedule, in our resource mix, we couldn't have had those resources to apply to the CFL, or to the Canada Games, or to the Arctic Games, or other events like that across the country.³⁵

Sensing that the CBC was well and truly on the defensive, CTV, only two months after the CRTC's hearings, released a document titled "A Perspective on the CBC," which accused the public broadcaster of losing vast amounts of public funds in the competition for sports content. This was, moreover, a document that was explicitly aimed at damaging CBC Sports during a time of fiscal austerity. Indeed, between 1993 and 1997, the CBC's budget was cut by almost one third (significantly impacting on local programming services), while the Official Opposition Conservatives intensified their calls to privatize the public broadcaster.

It is impossible to deny that all of these pressures contributed to the CRTC's recommendation in July 1994 that the CBC, "particularly the English-language network," decrease its emphasis on professional sport.³⁶ For the CRTC and critics of the public broadcaster, most Canadians now simply had access to "alternative sources of such coverage, including commercial broadcasters and a dedicated sports channel on cable."³⁷ Not satisfied with the CRTC's recommendation, CTV continued its attack on CBC Sports during a parliamentary committee on Canadian Heritage hearing later that year.³⁸ The *Globe and Mail*, meanwhile, fanned similar arguments

in an editorial titled “Why the CBC Should Get Out of Pro Sports,” stating: “With the 500-channel universe nearly upon us, the public broadcaster needs more than ever to focus its resources on the things that make it distinctive, the things that others fail to do. Sports plainly is not one of them. The CBC should hang up its sports blazers and let private broadcasters take the mike.”³⁹

In light of this ongoing political campaign, the role of CBC Sports and, beyond that, the mandate of the public broadcaster were taken up by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage only two years later. The committee recommended, once again, that the CBC should dramatically reduce its coverage of professional sports. Its report also suggested that the CBC should remain in the business of broadcasting NHL hockey but should avoid the congestion that occurs at playoff time—when games are shown in prime-time hours almost every evening for seven or eight weeks—by sharing the rights with private sector broadcasters. Committee members complained about what they saw as the public broadcaster’s “excessive enthusiasm for sports programming,” commenting:

For the past decade, CBC and Radio-Canada have both chosen to provide blanket coverage of each round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. It involves one or more playoff games for up to six nights a week, for a period of at least seven or eight weeks in April and May. Despite Canada’s ongoing love affair with hockey, we believe that the CBC has simply lost its sense of proportion. It disenfranchises millions of viewers (who are not hockey fans) for several months, completely pre-empts other parts of the program schedule that a public broadcaster might be expected to telecast, and consistently delays the major nightly news and current affairs shows on both of its networks.⁴⁰

CBC executives, understandably, vigorously defended the commitment they had made to *HNIC* and to televising the playoffs in particular, pointing to the huge audiences that hockey attracts and the advertising revenues that hockey telecasts bring to the network, revenues that subsidize other programming. However, over the course of the next decade, the CBC would face even greater financial uncertainty, as both Liberal and Conservative governments cut funding allocations from Parliament. Because of these financial pressures, as Macfarlane suggested in his 2010 editorial, the CBC’s English-language network has become more and more similar to a commercial network, designed as it is to maximize audience ratings and advertising revenues while also fulfilling its public service obligations. These developments have, in turn, amplified criticism from both cultural nationalists, who complain that the CBC has increasingly strayed from its mandate as a public

service network, and private broadcasters, who want the opportunities that NHL hockey affords the CBC.

However, just as the public sector was dealing with significant cutbacks, the CRTC began to license new specialty sport channels (e.g., Sportsnet) owned by the major corporate players in the broadcasting industry.⁴¹ Equally important, the federal Liberal government rescinded long-standing regulatory frameworks that once kept broadcasting and telecommunications markets separate; barriers that had earlier separated print, broadcasting, telecommunications, and information/computer sectors evaporated, triggering an unprecedented acceleration of mergers and acquisitions.⁴² In 2000 alone, BCE bought CTV, acquiring TSN/RDS in the process; struck an alliance with the premier national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*; and combined CTV and the Sympatico-Lycos portal (and its other content creation assets) to form Bell Globemedia. A year later, in 2001, Rogers (by then the owner of the Toronto Blue Jays) acquired Sportsnet from CTV.

Overlapping these broader dynamics of convergence and concentration was the entrance of digital television: in 2001, over two hundred CRTC-approved digital TV channels went to air, including a host of new specialty sport channels.⁴³ Nearly all of the new digital channels were, of course, backed by the most successful and, indeed, pre-established media players in the Canadian market.⁴⁴ All of these developments point toward tighter integration in the communications and what has come to be called “infotainment” industries as deep-pocketed telecommunication giants like BCE and Rogers now compete for premium sport content that can now be distributed and cross-marketed to subscribers through a host of integrated digital information and entertainment platforms. Prepared to overpay for sports broadcasting rights in the present as an investment in the future growth of subscribers to pay-TV, Internet, and mobile products (among other distribution outlets), vertically integrated companies such as Rogers and BCE are now able to vastly outbid the CBC, which is inevitably limited by constraints on the public purse and lacks equivalent distribution networks, let alone professional sports franchises.⁴⁵ Unlike the CBC, Rogers and BCE can, crucially, recover some of their costs through multiple revenue streams, including ads, subscription rates, and the “fees for carriage” that they receive from other satellite and cable companies. And, in the new millennium, a number of properties that had previously aired on CBC Sports (e.g., CFL football, curling, the Olympics, MLS soccer, and the Toronto Raptors) were purchased by BCE and Rogers to supply much-needed popular content to their growing number of distribution networks.

It was within this context—and following the controversial demise of *La soirée du hockey* in 2004—that the Canadian media began widespread speculation on the potential demise of *HNIC*, with the CBC's \$65 million-a-year contract with the NHL due to expire in 2008. In the summer of 2006, several media reports suggested that a battle was looming between the CBC and CTV-TSN, with the latter reported to be willing to pay \$140 million a year for NHL broadcasts. In fact, by late 2006, the plight of CBC Sports had become so acute that even former CBC president Tony Manera—one of the biggest proponents of the role of sport on the public broadcaster—publicly reversed his position on the issue of hockey with a now familiar argument:

At the end of the current contract, CBC should stop broadcasting professional hockey. In the past, I have passionately insisted that Hockey Night in Canada belongs on the CBC for very good reasons. It is an important part of Canadian culture and makes money for the CBC, attracting large audiences. But it is time to let go. Hockey fans will still be able to watch hockey on private networks, and the CBC talent will go wherever the game goes.⁴⁶

However, to the surprise of many, including perhaps Manera himself, in March 2007, the CBC and the NHL announced a new six-year deal rumoured to be worth \$600 million: a stunning increase from the previous annual fee of \$65 million. Still, despite the retention of this valuable “property,” there was no shortage of criticism directed at CBC Sports for pursuing increasingly expensive sports broadcasting rights in the new millennium—rights that would soon escalate to unprecedented levels by 2013. In the next section, I discuss why *HNIC* has been such a vital staple of the CBC's English-language network and why it has been historically important for the public broadcaster to have a visible presence in such a key element of national popular culture.

THE IMPORTANCE OF *HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA* TO THE CBC

I bring two interrelated arguments into relief here. First, critics of CBC Sports are correct in their analysis of the new realities of the digital sports broadcasting marketplace dominated by vertically integrated telecommunications empires. With the CBC inevitably limited by constraints to the public purse, since 2007 it has simply seemed impossible for CBC Sports to compete against the new business models of Rogers and BCE, models that have inflated the cost of sports broadcasting rights to unprecedented levels. In light of the new economic realities of professional sport, for many, including the most passionate supporters of public broadcasting like Tony

Manera who have long defended CBC Sports, the time had finally arrived for the CBC to simply leave professional sports to the private sector. As I have noted above, these criticisms had become even more pronounced in the new millennium thanks to growing concerns about the English-language network's programming, which regularly duplicated the commercial programming of private networks.

Against these claims, though, it is important to recognize that historically, a woefully underfunded CBC has struggled to develop genuinely popular content that consistently reached national audiences throughout the broadcasting week, especially during prime-time hours. Anglophone Canadians have also traditionally preferred to watch popular US television programs, and the viewing opportunities provided by digital television have only amplified the available options. In light of this set of pre-existing limits and pressures, *HNIC* was, for decades, the most popular and profitable program for the CBC. Hockey coverage, moreover, has historically provided an important promotional platform for the network while capturing vital advertising revenue streams that subsidized the CBC's wider range of cultural content. According to Richard Stursberg (the former head of the CBC's English services), *HNIC* has been so central to the financing of the public broadcaster that without the show, "the CBC would fall into a grave financial crisis that would imperil its survival."⁴⁷ Indeed, for Stursberg, and many other CBC executives, it has simply been inconceivable for the CBC to even contemplate replacing the four hundred-plus hours of prime-time Canadian sports content with original dramatic programming that would be expected to compete against the most popular US dramatic and entertainment shows airing on CTV and Global:

An average one-hour drama costs the CBC between \$400,000 and \$450,000 per hour to commission on a total budget of \$1.2–1.4 million (the rest being made up from the Canadian Media Fund and tax credits). Given their normal audiences, Canadian dramas rarely make \$200,000 in advertising revenue. This means that each hour of drama commissioned by the CBC produces a loss of at least \$200,000. It can be seen, then, that if four hundred hours of hockey were replaced with four hundred hours of drama, the CBC would need to find an additional \$80–100 million. At the same time, the Canadian Media Fund would have to be supplemented with another \$80–100 million, and the government's television production tax credits would be further drawn by a comparable amount. In other words, if the government wanted the CBC to eliminate hockey and replace it with original Canadian drama, the costs would be somewhere between \$240 million and \$300 million.⁴⁸

Since this was written the costs have escalated even more. This latter scenario is, of course, impossible given the recent financial cuts to the CBC, leaving the CBC with two remaining options to replace the hundreds of hours of popular hockey telecasts:

Break the Canadian-content quotas (now 80 percent on CBC prime time) by replacing Hockey Night in Canada with foreign shows, or replace it with repeats of shows that are already available on the prime-time schedule. Apart from making Saturday nights unspeakably boring, this latter course would also ensure a significant collapse of CBC's share of the Canadian audience, with further consequences for its reputation and relevance.⁴⁹

This leads to a second cultural argument that revolves around both the mandate and “ambition” of a contemporary public broadcaster.⁵⁰ Those of us who have defended CBC Sports over the years have argued that the potential loss of *HNIC* would announce a new era in public broadcasting in Canada with a narrower mandate for the CBC, one in which the role of the public broadcaster is excellence in news and current affairs, original Canadian drama, and “specials” (in the arts, in Canadian history, and in documentary): that is, programming that attracts small enough audiences so as to be not commercially viable. With such a radically reduced mandate, moreover, the role of CBC Sports would no longer be to broadcast the professional sports that are “major league” in Canadian popular culture. Instead, it would be to showcase amateur and “emerging” sports that Canadians do not regularly see on the commercial networks. As noted throughout this chapter, this vision of the CBC and this model of what a public broadcaster should be—an alternative to commercial television—has long been the model supported by many cultural nationalists, and indeed, it is not unlike the subscriber-supported Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the United States: a kind of PBS North. However, it represents a strategic retreat from the more populist—and, frankly, more ambitious—mandate that the CBC sought to assume through the middle part of the twentieth century. This latter mandate was, of course, based on a model in which the CBC does all the things that cultural nationalists believe in, while also seeking to be relevant to a wider sector of the population by creating national audiences for programming that was genuinely popular. *HNIC*, over the years, was clearly the most successful of these programs.

It might be suggested that previous supporters of CBC Sports, like Manera, were further pushed to revise their former aspirations for the network after decades of cuts to the public broadcaster by successive Liberal and Conservative governments. Indeed, throughout the 1990s, hard decisions and cuts came in almost every

area of programming—in news and current affairs (for example, sacrificing local supper-hour news broadcasts in order to concentrate resources on *The National*), in original drama, and in the arts—and the conclusion appeared inescapable: the public network could no longer do everything that it had done in the past. To many of the CBC's most dedicated supporters, then, it appeared regrettable but necessary that the public network concentrate its limited resources on providing Canadians with cultural programming that the private sector will never provide, simply because it is not popular enough to be commercially viable.

However, it seemed that to adopt this strategy and pursue this path—the PBS North path—would radically reduce the place of the CBC in the lives of most Canadians outside the educated elites. Over twenty-five years ago, in a thoughtful polemic decrying the failure of the parties of the European Left to identify themselves with the aspirations of ordinary working people, the English sociologist Stuart Hall argued that there was no aspect of popular life where the Left could afford not to be present.⁵¹ For Hall, the Left had been rightly critical of the manipulations of popular aspirations associated with lifestyle advertising, and of the possessive individualism and mobile privatization that consumer culture encourages. Yet what the leftist critique had routinely failed to acknowledge and address—and, indeed, continues to fail to understand—is that what Hall describes as the “daily experience of ‘the market as provider’” has meant that many people view the private sector not as a manipulator (even though most of us are fully aware of advertisers’ attempts to manipulate us) but as a system that opens up new possibilities for a more enjoyable private life.⁵²

For over sixty years, the presence and national popularity of *HNIC* on the public broadcaster has sent a powerful message to Canadians that the CBC was not prepared to abandon one of the most important features of the nation’s popular culture—NHL hockey broadcasts—to the market, or the private sector. Indeed, one of the cumulative effects of the CBC’s sixty-year commitment to airing NHL hockey was simply that the public broadcaster maintained a regular and visible presence in the lives of millions of (but not all) ordinary Canadians and existed as a source of many of our most vivid experiences of fun and community. I have speculated elsewhere that if the CBC were to retreat into catering solely to educated and “alternative” tastes, the public broadcaster would largely disappear from the lives of much of the Canadian population, and political support for the CBC would further decline (which is exactly what CBC critics in the Conservative Party actively wish for). This is precisely why in the past, I have argued that CBC Sports must

seek to maintain an active presence in the professional sports that matter most to Canadians, particularly with *HNIC*.

CONCLUSION: THE DEMISE OF *HNIC*

The escalation of the costs of sports broadcasting rights in recent years has, however, now made those arguments impossible to defend. Indeed, by 2012, it was once again widely anticipated that the public broadcaster would be easily outbid by TSN and Rogers for the NHL's media rights. And in 2013, Rogers purchased the exclusive rights for all Canadian NHL broadcasting for the next twelve years at a cost of \$5.2 billion dollars—a staggering amount of money that vastly exceeded what the CBC was prepared to pay. Importantly, the CBC did manage to secure an agreement with Rogers to continue to air *HNIC* for an additional four years once the public broadcaster's contract with the NHL expires in 2014, although Rogers will assume full editorial control over *HNIC*—a not insignificant development that will, astonishingly, open the public airwaves to private interests. CBC executives also granted Rogers access to the public broadcaster's Toronto studios and office space, while fifty CBC production staff lost their jobs. Those producers and other employees (many of whom have worked in CBC Sports for over thirty years) who survived the layoffs were forced to relocate to other offices to make way for staff from Rogers—developments that have infuriated remaining CBC staff.⁵³

The CBC will pay nothing for its four-year arrangement with Rogers, nor will it receive a cent of revenue from the advertising that airs during *HNIC*. Still, even without editorial control and the ability to generate advertising income, the continuation of *HNIC*, at least for the short term, will provide vital prime-time Canadian content for the CBC and will spare the public broadcaster from having to produce other costly original programming to fill the void left by hockey telecasts. Moreover, while the CBC will lose roughly \$100 million in advertising revenue annually, it will save a similar amount by not having to pay for the NHL broadcasting rights; the CBC will also save an additional \$55 million per year in production and sales and promotion costs.⁵⁴ In other words, there may be a net gain of approximately \$55 million per year until the CBC's four-year agreement with Rogers expires. Canadian sports fans, meanwhile, will have considerably more choice of hockey games that will air on a number of Rogers-owned specialty channels, in addition to the Rogers-controlled *HNIC* on the CBC until at least 2018 (although not in French).

However, at the conclusion of the CBC's four-year agreement with Rogers, Canadians from across the country may be required to pay increasingly costly fees to access NHL content. Indeed, just as the CBC has been granted a four-year grace period to come to terms with a future without *HNIC*, those four years will also allow Rogers to calculate how to monetize its hockey content. These developments will thus signal the end of the "viewing rights" of Canadians to have access to over-the-air coverage of hockey telecasts, while also marking another stage in the privatization of the sport-media complex in Canada and, in many respects, a further enclosure of the digital commons.⁵⁵ Indeed, while the CBC and Canadian taxpayers have supported the NHL for over sixty years (even longer if we consider the radio era) through extensive and high-quality coverage of the sport of hockey, it appears that the private sector is now set to reap the benefits from this historical public foundation—a quintessential example of what David Harvey has conceptualized as "accumulation by dispossession."⁵⁶

Predictably, these most recent developments have only amplified all of the historical questions surrounding the very future of public broadcasting in Canada and the type of role that the public broadcaster should play in contemporary Canadian life. For example, will the CBC be able to survive without advertising revenue from NHL hockey after the agreement with Rogers expires? What Canadian content will eventually fill the four hundred-plus hours of prime-time programming? In a neoliberal era dominated by anti-tax ideology, will there be a political appetite to increase the CBC's parliamentary appropriation or to consider introducing a tax on private broadcasters and distributors to revitalize and, indeed, expand public broadcasting in Canada? Will ordinary Canadians continue to watch the CBC without *HNIC* or other popular content, including Don Cherry's *Coach's Corner*, which has historically drawn a demographic of viewers who would not otherwise watch the public network? What would Canada look like without the presence of a public broadcaster that has the ability to provide a wide range of content (including sport) for all Canadians, regardless of their level of income, in the digital era? Finally, should there be legislation, as there is in Australia and many European countries, to enshrine the "viewing rights" of Canadians to have free, over-the-air access to sporting events of national significance?

For some, including the *Globe and Mail's* Konrad Yakabuski, the loss of *HNIC* will allow the CBC to "refocus," simply because it "removes the taxpayer-funded network from the professional sport bidding war it should never have entered in the first place. Budget cuts have forced the broadcaster's leaders to reimagine a leaner, cleaner CBC where quality is not a dirty word."⁵⁷ For Yakabuski, the CBC's

continued dependence on hockey has gone hand in hand with a “dumbing down” of the network with populist shows as opposed to more “challenging” programming replete with “thoughtful political debate,” such as Patrick Watson’s *Struggle for Democracy*. Others, meanwhile, have suggested that the loss of NHL hockey is a necessary step to shift the CBC away from commercial sponsorship entirely and to become a “true” public broadcaster which airs programming that addresses viewers as citizens as opposed to consumers.⁵⁸

As I have noted throughout this chapter, there has always been a constituency of Canadians who have passionately supported a vision of public broadcasting that has no room for genuinely popular content such as professional sport and perhaps even other dramatic programming, such as *Murdoch Mysteries* and *Republic of Doyle*, that reach large audiences. Yet the inherent risk associated with these arguments is that they encourage—and indeed, normalize—a smaller and less ambitious mandate for the public broadcaster, one in which the CBC seems almost destined to morph into a PBS model that only provides content that the private networks deem unprofitable.

In my opinion, we need to think carefully about any political position that further shrinks the role and visibility of the CBC in the lives of ordinary Canadians. The CBC can’t simply become a network that only airs shows featuring high culture, the arts, and politics. It also has to provide the type of content that others—especially young Canadians who may not share the tastes and political preferences of cultural nationalists—are interested in watching on a range of platforms, precisely so that they feel like they have a stake in the CBC and a sense of ownership of a public institution that they pay for. That is, while the public broadcaster needs to provide rigorous and critical coverage of the arts, media, and current affairs (content that the private sector will not even contemplate), so, too, must the CBC find new, creative ways of maintaining a popular presence in key elements of national popular culture, including remaining in the game of airing sports content if future opportunities arise.

Moreover, as younger generations of Canadians embrace the seemingly endless possibilities associated with the digital world, the CBC will need to continue to expand its online presence and transform its role from public service broadcasting to public service media.⁵⁹ In fact, a more substantive online presence may provide an advantage for the public broadcaster because it avoids the need for additional digital specialty channels to which various distributors (e.g., the CBC’s competitors—BCE and Rogers) would have to commit.⁶⁰ Indeed, the CBC will have an opportunity—like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) did with

its unprecedented coverage of the 2012 Summer Olympic Games—to showcase a full digital/online platform for all Canadians across the country.

The next four years represent a landmark moment for a broad national discussion and political debate on how the CBC can be reshaped as a public broadcaster that has meaning for Canadians from across the country, and one that can produce unique, informative, and entertaining Canadian content in the digital era. For generations of Canadians, *HNIC* represented a powerful and enduring point of connection with the CBC and a key source of enjoyable experiences of community. It is now up to us to imagine a public broadcaster that can make similar types of connections in a radically different media environment as a sixty-year viewing tradition that has contributed mightily to Canadian culture fades from the screen.

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- It should also be noted that Rogers and BCE can overpay for various sports broadcasting rights and amortize those costs over various properties and platforms (television channels, Internet, radio, and print properties), including recently approved multiple feeds (e.g., TSN2, RIS, RDS2, Sportsnet ONE, etc.), and mobile phones. Or they can simply join forces as a consortium to secure broadcasting rights, just as they did to win the rights to the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver and the 2012 Summer Games in London with an exorbitant and entirely unprofitable bid of Can\$153 million.
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4

PLAYING MAKE-BELIEVE

How Fantasy Leagues Have Changed Sports

Derrick Newman

The human capacity for fantasy allows us to rearrange reality, to conjure up scenarios that, while often improbable (or even impossible), gratify our desire for control. Combine that capacity with sports and you have an alternative reality in which participants can create their own make-believe team or league. Fantasy sports participants can, for example, place all their favourite players—real athletes, often from a variety of teams—on a single fantasy team, as well as make trades that they think would suit their team better than the moves actually made by general managers. This, in a nutshell, is the world of fantasy sports, and it is this concept, fashioned in the 1960s by some day-dreaming sports enthusiasts, that has turned the sporting world on its end.

With the Internet boom of the late 1990s, fantasy sports received the platform it needed to explode into what has become a \$5 billion-a-year activity. According to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association, as of 2015, some 56.8 million North Americans were playing fantasy sports—an increase of 350 percent in the space of a decade.¹ Fantasy leagues have not only changed how fans follow their favourite sports and fan allegiances to individual teams; they have also altered how the leagues themselves are run. Television and radio sports shows, print publications, and sports blogs are now geared to attracting fantasy sports fans. Fantasy sports have also changed how the largest sports broadcasters operate. Broadcasters have

introduced streaming stat lines, specialty-channel programming highlights scoring plays and in-depth analyses of players, and schedules are adjusted based on when the most popular fantasy league players will be playing.

Nor are there signs that fantasy leagues are losing steam. This is because fantasy leagues bring together a number of human drives in compelling ways, combining the spectacle of sports with people's need for community and competition and the age-old attraction of gambling. Being able to manage an organization, even if it is in fantasyland, can replace the powerlessness that many people feel in their ordinary lives with a sense of power and achievement. Arguably, nothing since the birth of fantasy sports approximately three decades ago has come close to having the same impact on the sporting landscape as fantasy sports.

No major professional sport has been affected more than the National Football League (NFL). Although the NFL is an American league, it has a massive following north of the forty-ninth parallel. Most Canadian sports fans adopt an NFL team as their own based either on geographic proximity or on the loyalty created by watching games on television. NFL games are a staple of most Canadian sports television on Sunday and Monday nights, and nightly sports newscasts devote a great deal of airtime to the NFL. In 2008, the Buffalo Bills started the Bills Toronto Series, playing one regular-season game each year in Toronto's Rogers Centre. In 2008 and 2010, they also played a pre-season game in Toronto. The five-year deal expired in December of 2012 but was quickly renewed for another five years. In 2014, it was cancelled by the new Bills owners, who are bringing their focus back to the city of Buffalo.

In a November 2012 poll conducted by Sun Media, people in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Ottawa were asked what their favourite NFL team was.² Not surprisingly, geography determined the response in some cases. The Minnesota Vikings came out on top with a majority of Winnipeg readers. The three next teams on the list have historically been among the best teams in the league—the Green Bay Packers, the New England Patriots, and the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Seattle Seahawks ranked fifth, presumably because of their proximity to Vancouver. Surprisingly, however, the Buffalo Bills were a lowly ninth, unable to win the loyalty of fans in nearby Toronto.

With nearly 70 percent of all fantasy participants calling it their favourite, football is by far the most popular fantasy sport. Aside from the obvious popularity of the NFL, football has unique characteristics that lend themselves to fantasy sports. Unlike in baseball, hockey, and basketball, NFL teams play only one game per week. Every team prepares for an entire week focused on a specific opponent.

So fantasy team managers, like the actual coaches, can spend the week analyzing game films, reviewing playbooks, and dissecting the strengths and weaknesses of opposing players. A week provides enough time and psychological space to analyze lineups, weekly injury reports, and player match-ups. And because the game is played on a field that is divided up much like graph paper, every play can be charted and tabulated.

The scope of fantasy sports has expanded beyond the playing field into living rooms, offices, and classrooms. Businesses lose valuable productive hours to fantasy managers tweaking their lineups. The fantasy sports world has thus spun its web farther than anyone could have imagined. From humble beginnings in a hotel room on the US East Coast, fantasy leagues have become both an industry and a social phenomenon. The creators could not have imagined what they were starting—a game made by fans, for fans, that now affects the very ways in which sports are broadcasted and viewed in Canada and the United States.

THE HISTORY OF FANTASY LEAGUES

Although much debate has surrounded the origins of fantasy sports, there is wide consensus that Dan Okrent, an American writer and a former editor of the *New York Times*, created the first fantasy game—roisserie baseball, the most popular form of fantasy baseball played today. Okrent and his friends thought up the game while sitting in La Rôtisserie Française restaurant in New York City in the late 1970s. Fantasy hockey began only a few years later, in the early 1980s. Jay Arbour, the son of legendary New York Islanders coach Al Arbour, and Neil Smith, a former New York Rangers general manager turned TV analyst, created the first league. The NHL and broadcasters TSN and the CBC jumped on the fantasy train early in the twenty-first century.

Fantasy football's roots are even deeper than those of baseball and hockey. In 1962, Wilfred "Bill" Winkenbach, an Oakland-area businessman and a limited partner in the NFL's Oakland Raiders, along with Bill Tunnel, a Raiders PR representative, and Scott Stirling, an *Oakland Tribune* football writer, created what is now known as fantasy football, the game that gives each fan the chance to "own" an imaginary team made up of professional players. The fantasy league known as the Greater Oakland Professional Pigskin Prognosticators League, or the GOPPPL, began in 1963.³ As described in an excerpt from the original league rules, the objective of the league was "to bring together some of Oakland's finest Saturday morning gridiron forecasters to pit their respective brains (and cash) against each

other. Inasmuch as this league is formed only with owners having a deep interest and affection for the Oakland Raiders Professional Football Team, it is felt that this tournament will automatically increase closer coverage of daily happenings in professional football.”⁴

The rules brought the standardization that was needed in fantasy sports, but most crucially, the GOPPPL league objective outlined the key reasons why millions of people participate in fantasy sports today. The rules also enabled the average fan to test his or her knowledge against that of friends and colleagues. The league brought friends together and became yet another way to gamble on sports. Moreover, the fulfilment of the prediction that GOPPPL would “automatically increase closer coverage of daily happenings in professional football” would have a crucial impact on the relationship that the NFL had with its fans.⁵ The financial stakes for the league soon became obvious. The more that people followed the day-to-day happenings in the NFL, the more they would watch or go to the games, purchase merchandise, and so on. All of this meant more revenue for the NFL. Fantasy football—and fantasy sports, in general—has been arguably the single most influential marketing tool the sporting world has ever seen.

FANTASY FOOTBALL

Fantasy football turns the average fan into a general manager of his or her own made-up football team that competes against other teams based on weekly game statistics from real football players. It all begins with a draft during which players are chosen, much like the NFL entry draft that takes place every spring but with a few key differences. In fantasy drafts, the objective is to fill a roster with current players from existing NFL teams to form a “fantasy team” that a person will then manage throughout the NFL regular season.

A fantasy draft is a spectacle in and of itself. The date is set months in advance. Every manager knows the time and place. Hours of research are usually conducted to determine the best possible player for each position. Mock fantasy drafts are conducted by some hardcore managers in an effort to predict when certain players will be taken. Then, in basements, living rooms, kitchens, offices, and pubs, and online, fantasy drafts take place. Managers sweat over projected statistics, sometimes unwilling to commit to a player because he may have had an unreported injury in preseason or he may be a running back who fell out of favour with the head coach, information that is not yet fully public. Loyalty to fantasy leagues is often so strong that even as a participant grows older, has a family, or moves

to another city, the league still remains. Todd and April Rice, a couple who have both been playing fantasy football for more than a decade, moved from Calgary to London and then, in 2011, to Hong Kong. Despite living on the other side of the world, continuing with their fantasy league in Calgary remains a significant part of their lives. April admits that staying connected to friends back home is one of the reasons for her continuing to play: “I miss watching every Sunday with friends back home, but I know they’re watching and it keeps us in touch,” she told me.

The most popular form of draft is the “snake” draft. For example, if there are twelve managers in a league, someone will draft first overall, and then the second manager will draft a player, and so on down the line until everyone has his or her first player. Then, instead of that first manager drafting first again in round two, the person who drafted last in round one will draft first in round two: the order is simply reversed to level out, to some extent, the opportunity to choose top players. This process will continue for eighteen rounds until every manager has a full roster of NFL players. Every league has different rules regarding starting positions for players. Generally—unlike the original GOPPPL, which focused much more on defensive players—managers will select one or two quarterbacks, two running backs, two wide receivers, one tight end, two flex players (either wide receivers or running backs, giving the manager a choice), a kicker who earns points for field goals and extra points, and a team defence that earns points based on points allowed and defensive touchdowns converted from interceptions and fumble recoveries.

In addition to the starting players on every team’s roster, each team has five or six bench spots, or reserves, which gives managers extra players in case a starter gets injured, or more options when choosing his or her starting lineup every week. When a player gets injured and placed on the injured reserve (IR) list, meaning he is out for the season, managers have the option of putting that player on the fantasy IR, opening up another spot on their roster for a different player. Managers can then go to the free agent list of players (players that weren’t drafted) and pick up any player who will best help their team. This is where managing and research come into play, since managers have to know which players are likely to perform well. According to the September 2010 Nielsen Net Ratings, “Fantasy Football players on CBSSports.com register the highest level of engagement of any major site, with players spending an average of 1 hour, 41 minutes per session and returning 4 times each week to research and optimize their rosters.”⁶ Needless to say, this level of ultra-engagement is rarely found in other activities.

Once the draft is over, which usually happens a week or two before the regular season begins, the fantasy schedule is released. This pits each manager’s team

against another manager's team at least once, and sometimes twice during the season. The NFL season is seventeen weeks long, with every team playing sixteen games and having one week off. Most leagues end their regular season after week thirteen, allowing the fantasy playoffs to occur in weeks fourteen to sixteen. Week seventeen is generally not played in fantasy leagues since many NFL teams rest their top players in preparation for the NFL playoffs, which begin in January. This is the case for head-to-head leagues (the most popular type of fantasy football), in which managers will go up against each other every week, giving them a simple win-loss record.

In most fantasy leagues, managers have a reserve of bench players who can be swapped into their lineups based on certain matchups, injuries, and so forth. This is where the tinkering and managing comes into play: countless hours are spent trying to get the latest scoop on a player's ailment or a specific matchup and trying to determine why a particular player might be in line for a big game on Sunday. This usually relates to who the player's main defensive opponent will be on game day. For instance, if Aaron Rodgers (quarterback for the Green Bay Packers) is playing against the Pittsburgh Steelers, a fantasy manager might think twice about starting Rodgers since the Steelers often own one of the best passing defenses in the NFL. Rodgers might be contained and limited in the number of completions and touchdowns he throws. The same manager might make a different choice if Seattle Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson is playing against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, one of the league's worst defensive teams. Rodgers might be the better overall quarterback, but the matchup might force the manager to think differently. This dilemma is one of many scenarios for any given fantasy team each week, and days can be spent trying to decide the right option at each position.

Points in fantasy football are awarded to each player based on per-game statistical performance, including touchdowns, rushing yards, receiving yards, passing yards, rushing and passing attempts, catches, field goals, extra points, points allowed, safeties, fumbles, and interceptions. At the end of the week, the total points for each starting player are calculated, and the team in the head-to-head matchup with the most total points wins.

After thirteen weeks of regular season play, the top eight teams (sometimes six or four, depending on the size of the fantasy league) make the playoffs. Teams are then slotted into brackets where the top-ranked team will face the bottom-ranked team, the second-best versus the second-worst, and so on. Winners move on until a champion is declared. Prizes, including cash, are awarded and egos either balloon or shatter, forcing fantasy managers to rebuild for the next season.

STAGGERING NUMBERS

In 2012, an estimated 29.6 million people in the United States and Canada were playing fantasy sports, and the breakdown per sport was as follows, with many fans playing multiple sports:

Football (72%) = 21,213,333
Baseball (37%) = 11,050,666
Auto Racing (24%) = 7,202,666
Basketball (20%) = 5,821,333
Golf (13%) = 3,749,333
College football (13%) = 3,848,000
Hockey (12%) = 3,552,000
Soccer (7%) = 2,072,000⁷

In fantasy sports, football is king. In 2012, the NFL extended its television contracts with CBS, FOX, and Comcast's NBC for another nine years, with CTV, TSN, and Sportsnet in Canada continuing as well. More recently, the NFL negotiated an eight-year, \$12 billion deal with DirecTV, which will now pay \$1.5 billion a year for its rights to NFL coverage.⁸ Much of this revenue can be credited to the influence that fantasy football has had on the NFL. According to a January 2010 Nielsen report, "the DVR-proof nature of sports continued to entice commercial advertisers who, despite a down economy, spent \$7.6 billion on sports programming in the previous year. . . . On average 81 million people in the US visited sports websites each month to keep tabs on their fantasy teams or follow any one of the captivating stories this year."⁹

Fantasy sports have become so pervasive that, according to one estimate, it costs employers more than \$13 billion in lost productivity each year from workers playing while on the job.¹⁰ Some employers, however, believe that having their employees participate in a fantasy league encourages camaraderie and adds a social aspect to the work culture. Fantasy football has even spawned its own TV show, appropriately called *The League*, which premiered on FX in October 2009. *The League* focused on six friends, including one woman, playing in a fantasy football league and the resulting trials and tribulations they went through on a weekly basis.

LOYALTY, FANTASY, AND DAILY ROUTINES

After the draft, each owner has imaginary rights over a certain number of players in the league. Pride of "ownership" can become tangible and can have a significant

impact on which real NFL teams owners support and whose merchandise they buy. Each person becomes attached to these players. Andy Mousalimas, an original member of GOPPPL, puts it this way: "It's the ego trip, you know . . . You own your own team. You draft 'em. They're yours. You can say, 'This is my team.'"¹¹ As sports writers Bob Harris and Emil Kadlec write, "Fantasy football offers NFL fans the otherwise unattainable ability to 'get in' on their favorite sport by requiring them to assume all the responsibilities associated with operating real NFL franchises."¹² Greg Ambrosius, the former editor of *Fantasy Sports Magazine*, explains the desire to be a fantasy team owner: "It's the old armchair quarterback theory: every fan thinks they can do a better job than the coach on the sidelines or the general manager in the front office or the owner in the owner's box. Fantasy sports are perfect for people who want to fulfill those fantasies."¹³

In a 2009 article, Chris Russo, the chairman and CEO of Fantasy Sports Ventures, an integrated marketing and media firm that aggregates more than 250 fantasy websites and related digital properties, is quoted as saying:

The one thing that unites all fantasy gamers is their passion to win. . . . When you lose a big player, you start scrambling for a substitute, looking at different options, and considering trades. In many ways it mimics what happens in the major leagues—if one of your players is injured, you have to come up with alternatives. The reason fantasy is so exciting is because the user becomes the general manager—it puts the power of the GM in the hands of the fan. You play to show off your knowledge and to share in a community with your friends. It's more about bragging rights than anything else.¹⁴

Fantasy football also has a substantial impact on game attendance. A survey conducted by iMedia Connection found that "55 percent of those surveyed say that they watch more sports on TV because of their involvement in fantasy sports leagues, and they are much more likely to go to professional sports games than the average American."¹⁵ According to a study by economists Todd Nesbit and Kerry King, the average fantasy football participant attends 0.22 to 0.57 more games per year than a person who does not play fantasy football.¹⁶ Moreover, fantasy football participants become more involved with the NFL and are more likely to spend more money on the game, including on such items as magazines, tickets, cable channels, and merchandise.¹⁷

Even NFL players are getting in on the action. Chris Cooley, a tight end for the Washington Redskins, loves to play. "I had four teams last year," Cooley said in a 2006 *Washington Post* interview. "I made the playoffs with one and honestly lost because I beat myself against Dallas. The guy on the other team had me, and I scored three

touchdowns against Dallas, and I lost to myself on fantasy points.”¹⁸ NFL quarterback Matt Hasselbeck took a different approach and famously benched himself on his fantasy team in favour of a competing quarterback, Brett Favre.¹⁹

The NFL has no rules against NFL players playing fantasy football—quite the opposite, since the league recognizes the value of the make-believe game. Indeed, the league’s official website, NFL.com, has its own version of fantasy football.

Fantasy sports have even changed how people start their day. In an interview, Matthew Lippitt, an avid Canadian fantasy participant in multiple hockey and football leagues, told me that fantasy sports not only changed the way he conducted his morning routine but turned him into an NFL nut. “I became a fan of the team that the players played on because I wanted to watch to see if the players succeeded,” he said. “From that I learned the game itself, and it took fantasy football to open that up to me.” Lippitt, who paid little attention to the NFL before becoming involved in fantasy football, is one example of how fantasy football draws more fans to the NFL. During the NFL season, he gets to work, turns on his computer, and checks Rotoworld.com (a site owned by NBC that specializes in tracking player news) for any updates on his players. Then he adjusts or tweaks the lineup of his fantasy sports team. He also visits these sites at lunchtime. Some might call this extreme, but, according to numerous reports, this is standard behaviour for those engaged with fantasy sports. Gone are the days when the weather was the first thing you checked when you woke up.

EFFECTS ON THE BROADCASTING SCHEDULE

Fantasy sports have infiltrated almost every aspect of sports: they even play a role in which games are broadcast on regional and national television. Fordham University professor John Fortunato found that before fantasy leagues became popular, fans would only watch the team to which they had an allegiance. They didn’t really worry about the other games unless they affected their team’s divisional standings or playoff situations. Today, many fans don’t just watch their home team; they also watch teams that include their fantasy players. For instance, a Green Bay Packers fan would usually have little interest in watching a Denver Broncos–New England Patriots game. Those teams don’t play in the same conference as the Packers, and the game will have no effect on how the Packers finish in the standings. But if this Packers fan has Denver quarterback Peyton Manning or New England’s Tom Brady as his fantasy quarterback, then this game becomes much more important.

Fortunato conducted an experiment based on the ratings of all the Sunday night and Monday night football games in 2009, as well as statistics from CBS.com that measured the percentage of certain players starting on a fantasy roster in a given week. He determined that the more fantasy players playing in a game, the higher the ratings for that game. When broadcasters are deciding which games to broadcast in the spring, it can be hard to discern which teams will perform well during the season. Fortunato believes that it is easier to predict which players will be the top-ranked fantasy stars, and the temptation is therefore to broadcast games based on fantasy league selections rather than real team performance.²⁰

In Canada, Leonard Asper, the former CEO of Canwest Global Communications, has launched Fantasy TV—a specialty channel dedicated solely to fantasy sports. “The one thing that convinced me to do this,” Asper told the *Globe and Mail* in 2013, “is watching my staff and never being sure if they are working when they have their computers on or if they checking fantasy sites, because they are all doing it.”²¹

WHO IS PLAYING?

According to a 2009 FSTA poll, fantasy sports attract relatively young, well-educated, higher-income men. The same research showed women making up almost one-fifth of fantasy sports players but men outspending women four to one.²² In 2015, FSTA research generally confirmed these trends: the average age of fantasy league players stood at thirty-seven, 57 percent had college degree, and almost half (47%) had an annual household income of \$75,000 or more. However, the gender balance had shifted: women now accounted for one-third of the players.²³

Having more female fans may make fantasy football—by far the largest of the fantasy sports—even more desirable to advertisers.²⁴ When April Rice became involved in fantasy football in order to take part in her boyfriend’s hobbies, she was the only woman in her league. “When we started dating I started following Todd’s team,” she said. “It’s why I got into the NFL really! Clearly, a big part of our relationship, and just being a ‘guys’ girl, I loved being in the league.” For their wedding, in the summer of 2010, April and Todd had a special wedding cake designed in the shape of a football stadium with a bride tackling the groom at the fifty-yard line. Clearly, fantasy football has had a significant impact on this Canadian couple’s relationship and has kept them connected to their friends back home even after their move to Hong Kong.

Fantasy sports have become another avenue for betting on game results, and it's completely legal. Estimates are that fantasy football alone generates roughly \$2 billion annually, with \$1.35 billion made up of league fees or dues.²⁵ This means that billions of dollars are being exchanged among friends, colleagues, and acquaintances based on the outcome of NFL games and the stat lines of some of the game's biggest stars. However, because the NFL believes that fantasy football is one of its best marketing tools, it does not look on this as gambling. Sport Select—Canada's legal method of sports betting, run by provincial lottery corporations—has recently included fantasy proposition bets, allowing people to bet on the individual performances of certain players much like fantasy participants do every week. In the United States, FanDuel.com, a site that prides itself on being a single-day fantasy betting site, recently received an \$11 million investment from a group that included Comcast, the cable broadcasting giant and owner of NBC/Universal. "Single day" means that instead of managers competing over an entire season, they are competing over just one day for big sums of money. The *Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act*, which was passed in the United States in 2006, makes a distinction between games of skill and games of chance. The legislation excludes fantasy leagues, stating that such a league "has an outcome that reflects the relative knowledge of the participants, or their skill at physical reaction or physical manipulation (but not chance), and, in the case of a fantasy or simulation sports game, has an outcome that is determined predominantly by accumulated statistical results of sporting events, including any non-participant's individual performances in such sporting events."²⁶

Single-day betting sites may come close to the line by tilting more toward chance than skill. According to the American Gaming Association, the Super Bowl typically generates more than \$100 million in legal wagers, a paltry amount compared to the association's estimate of "\$3.8 billion worth of illegal bets on the 2015 Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and Seattle Seahawks."²⁷ Indeed, the US National Gambling Impact Study Commission reported in 1999 that "estimates of the scope of illegal sports betting in the United States range anywhere from \$80 billion to \$380 billion annually."²⁸ Yahoo! Sports, which runs one of the largest fantasy football websites, has implemented a league-dues page on which commissioners can keep track of who has paid and who owes, which implicitly implies that money is exchanging hands. It has brought gambling into the mainstream, much like poker has done over the last decade.

WHY NOT THE CFL?

With the NFL receiving substantial benefit from fantasy football, why is there no comparable CFL fantasy game? Part of the problem is that there are only nine teams in the CFL, compared with thirty-two NFL teams. An average fantasy football league has twelve teams. The larger pool of teams gives managers the ability to pick from a wider number of players. If the NFL model is applied to the CFL, the number of fantasy teams would be two or three, immediately reducing the effect that fantasy football would have on the game and the nature of the competition among participants.

One website, Fantas-Eh Football (fantaseh.ca), is trying to promote fantasy CFL football but has yet to take hold or attract a substantial number of new fans to the Canadian sport. In terms of social media, Fantas-Eh has only a small number of friends and followers, a blip on the radar in terms of Canadian fan interest and the level of fantasy participation in the NFL. Fantas-Eh draws much of its support from avid Saskatchewan Roughrider fans. But even the Riders fans can't push fantasy football from the far corners to the centre of the Canadian football experience. In March 2013, the CFL and TSN agreed on a new five-year deal worth approximately \$4 million per team, double the revenue per team of the previous agreement. But even with this new commitment to the CFL, TSN has yet to launch its own form of CFL fantasy football.

CONCLUSION

Wilfred "Bill" Winkenbach died on 7 March 1993 at the age of eighty-one. Shortly before his death, he was asked about the growth of fantasy football. "Oh, yeah. I'm surprised how big it's gotten," he replied, and this was when the Internet was in its infancy.²⁹ Now played by more than 41.5 million Canadians and Americans and widely considered to be the NFL's best marketing tool, it has had an enormous effect on the world of sports—and in particular, on the National Football League. The complex and statistical nature of the game, mixed with the thrill of running one's own team on a day-to-day basis, makes fantasy football—and all fantasy sports, for that matter—an emotional draw for avid fans. The Nesbit and King study confirms that those in fantasy leagues participants are more likely to attend games and spend money on sports. To a large degree, fantasy sport remains an NFL phenomenon, but the fact that Canadians have adopted the NFL through fantasy sports has had a major impact on sports in Canada. The NFL still ranks second to

the NHL in Canada in terms of popularity, but given the speed and power of the fantasy train, this may not always be the case.

NOTES

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- 17 See John A. Fortunato, "The Relationship of Fantasy Football Participation with NFL Television Ratings," *Journal of Sport Administration and Supervision* 3, no. 1 (2011): 74–90. See also Todd M. Nesbit and Kerry A. King, "The Impact of Fantasy Sports on Television Viewership," *Journal of Media Economics* 23, no. 1 (2010): 24–41.
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**SEARCHING FOR HEROES
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5

QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS

A Comparison of Canadian and American University Sports

Duane Bratt

In the fall of 2012, while I was thinking about how to write this chapter, two personal events crystallized the comparison between Canadian and American university sports. The first occurred in early September at a political science conference at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. While walking to the hotel after dinner, I passed the football stadium, and it was clear from the lights, crowd, and noise that a major event was occurring. The next morning, I read that the University of Saskatchewan Huskies and the University of Regina Rams had set a Canada West University Athletic Association (CWUAA) regular-season attendance record with around nine thousand people. A month later, I was enjoying a long weekend with my wife in Missoula, Montana, and decided to attend a football game between the University of Montana Grizzlies and the Southern Utah University Thunderbirds on a Saturday afternoon. This game was sold out, with twenty-six thousand fans in attendance.

I couldn't help but make some initial comparisons. The quality of the football was just a bit higher in the Montana–Southern Utah game. The University of Montana plays in the Big Sky Conference, which is part of the Football Championship Subdivision of Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). This is the second tier of Division I, just below the Football Bowl Subdivision, to which the football teams of largest US universities belong. Canadian Interuniversity

Sport (CIS) football is roughly the equivalent of the next rung down: NCAA Division II. For example, when Simon Fraser University left the CIS to join the NCAA in 2012, it entered Division II.

The most striking difference, however, lay in the scale of the two events. Saskatoon has a considerably larger population than Missoula—250,000 versus 100,000. In addition, the Saskatchewan–Regina game involved two fierce intraprovincial rivals, whereas the Montana–Southern Utah event was just another game in the Big Sky Conference. All the same, the Grizzlies game was a much bigger spectacle, with massive tailgate parties that involved music, plenty of barbecued food, and copious amounts of beer. Almost every store in town had Grizzlies swag for sale, and many spectators made a weekend out of it, whether they stayed in an RV or frequented Missoula's hotels, bars, and restaurants. Of course, Missoula is a college town without a professional sports team in the state, whereas Saskatoon is not only home to the Huskies but has many fans of a well-known professional team, the Saskatchewan Roughriders, which plays down the road in Regina. All the same, it is difficult to imagine any Canadian college football game generating a comparable degree of excitement. These two football games, less than a month apart, revealed many of the similarities and differences between Canadian and American university sports.

Canadian university athletes often feel a little envious of the relatively high status of university athletics in the United States. They emphasize the superior quality of the athletes and the facilities, as well as the spectacle that surrounds university games. What athlete would not want to play in front of eighty thousand spectators, with millions more watching on television, as opposed to just friends and family? What fan would not prefer to attend a game that is also a form of entertainment, with tailgate parties and beer drinking, pep rallies and cheerleaders? In this chapter, however, I discuss the significant downsides to the American university sport model. I argue that the American system is not better than the Canadian one; the two are simply different, each with its own advantages and disadvantages.

THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES

While many people would naturally focus on the differences between Canadian and American university sport systems, there are, in fact, a number of similarities. First is the basic fact that university students in both countries compete in many of the same team sports, such as football, basketball, hockey, and volleyball, as well as in some of the same individual sports such as track and field and swimming. Most sports have both men's and women's divisions, but a few are specific to one gender

(football for men, field hockey for women). The CIS sanctions twelve sports, and the NCAA, twenty-two. Second, both countries have national governing bodies: the CIS and the NCAA. The CIS has fifty-four schools under its umbrella, and the NCAA has over a thousand. Within both the CIS and the NCAA, there are regional conferences, which may sanction additional sports.

While a few similarities do exist between Canadian and American university sports, it is the differences that are quite striking. These differences can be classified into two overarching categories: the athletic experience and the spectacle. The athletic experience includes the number of athletic scholarships, the number and quality of coaches and support staff, the quality of the athletic facilities, and the quality of play.

The Athletic Experience

Athletes in NCAA Divisions I and II receive athletic scholarships, but Division III (and the Ivy League schools) only offers academic scholarships and need-based financial aid. Athletic scholarships can include free tuition and fees, room and board, and required course-related books.¹ There are restrictions on the number of athletic scholarships that schools can provide. The allotment of athletic scholarships is based on division, sport, and gender. Table 5.1 shows that football at Division I Bowl Subdivision has the highest number—eighty-five at any one time—while smaller sports have much fewer, such as men's rifle at 3.6. Contrary to widespread belief, some financial aid is available for athletes at CIS schools. Athletic scholarships equivalent to tuition and compulsory fees are allowed for returning players, not new players, if they maintain a certain grade-point average. Demand for richer athletic scholarships with looser academic requirements has been divisive within the CIS, pitting some large schools (such as Laval University, the University of Calgary, and the University of British Columbia) against Ontario universities and smaller schools.²

At Canadian universities, only a few sports have a full-time head coach, and football is the only sport with full-time assistants (usually two). For the most part, coaches are either part-time or jointly appointed to an academic unit within the university. The situation is strikingly different at American universities, where all teams have large full-time coaching staffs, many of whom are extremely well paid. The average annual salary for an NCAA Division I football head coach is now over \$2 million. For top basketball coaches, "annual contracts now exceed \$4 million, augmented by assorted bonuses, endorsements, country-club memberships, the occasional private plane, and in some cases a negotiated percentage of ticket receipts."³ The possibility of becoming a top NCAA coach keeps a large number of

Table 5.1 Allotment of NCAA athletic scholarships

	Men		Women	
	Division I	Division II	Division I	Division II
Archery	n/a	n/a	5	9
Badminton	n/a	n/a	6	10
Baseball	11.7	9	6	10
Basketball	13	10	15	10
Bowling	n/a	n/a	5	5
Cross country	12.6	12.6	18	12.6
Equestrian	n/a	n/a	15	15
Fencing	4.5	4.5	5	4.5
Field hockey	n/a	n/a	12	6.3
Football	85 (Bowl); 63 (Championship)	36	n/a	n/a
Golf	4.5	3.6	6	5.4
Gymnastics	6.3	5.4	12	6
Hockey	18	13.5	18	18
Lacrosse	12.6	10.8	12	9.9
Rowing	n/a	n/a	20	20
Rifle	3.6	3.6	n/a	n/a
Rugby	n/a	n/a	12	12
Skiing	6.3	6.3	7	6.3
Soccer	9.9	9	14	9.9
Softball	n/a	n/a	12	7.2
Squash	n/a	n/a	12	9
Swimming/diving	9.9	8.1	19	8.6
Team handball	n/a	n/a	10	12
Tennis	4.5	4.5	8	6
Volleyball	4.5	4.5	12	8
Water polo	4.5	4.5	8	8
Wrestling	9.9	9	n/a	n/a

Source: "College Athletic Scholarship Limits," *ScholarshipStats.com*, n.d.,
<http://www.scholarshipstats.com/ncaalimits.html>.

quality coaches in the sports pipeline. It also ensures that American coaches, either established or aspiring, can focus on coaching and stay on the cutting edge of new techniques and tactics so that they can reach, or stay at, the highest coaching levels. Canadian schools cannot compete, and as a result, we see many Canadian coaches moving to the NCAA for the money and opportunities. For example, Shannon Miller, who coached the Canadian women's hockey team at the 1998 Olympics, left the national team program months after the Games for a job coaching at the University of Minnesota-Duluth, and Gary Gait, one of Canada's greatest lacrosse players, is the head coach of the women's lacrosse team at Syracuse University.

American universities have substantially better athletic facilities than do schools in Canada. The stadiums and arenas are larger, with bigger dressing rooms and many other amenities, and support facilities such as weight rooms and practice facilities are also fancier. Canadian university athletic facilities pale in comparison. In Canada, football stadiums, except for those schools that share facilities with Canadian Football League (CFL) teams, often seat only a few thousand spectators, not the hundred thousand that can fit into "The Big House" at the University of Michigan; hockey teams play in rinks that seat one to two thousand, not the eleven thousand who can attend games at the University of North Dakota's Ralph Engelstad Arena; and basketball teams play in gyms that accommodate one thousand, compared to the twenty-one thousand at the Dean Smith Centre at the University of North Carolina. Weight rooms are often shared with the regular student population. Specialized video rooms and other training areas, if they exist, lack the space and the state-of-the-art technology that are standard at many NCAA schools.

These aspects of the athletic experience mean that the quality of play is much better in the NCAA than in the CIS. The evidence for this is manifold. First, CIS football is roughly equivalent to NCAA Division II, as shown by Simon Fraser's decision to leave the CIS and join NCAA Division II in 2012. Second, even though the CFL has a quota for Canadian-trained players, a good percentage of these Canadians were trained at American schools. As table 5.2 shows, even though hundreds more Canadians are playing CIS football than NCAA football, the number of players drafted into the CFL in the first round has been about equal. Only in the later rounds have CIS athletes dominated, but that domination reflects the quantity of Canadians, not their quality. This trend is continuing: the CFL Scouting Bureau, in preparation for the 2013 draft, identified the top fifteen Canadian prospects, and only seven of them were from CIS schools.⁴ This quality gap is accentuated when we separate players into the so-called skill positions of quarterback, running back, receiver, linebacker, and defensive back versus the non-skill positions

of offensive lineman, defensive lineman, fullback, safety, and kicker. Table 5.3, which is based on the 2012 CFL rosters, compares the number of skilled and non-skilled players from NCAA and CIS schools. The bottom row shows the handful of players who graduated from the Canadian Junior Football League. Since CFL individual team rosters allow nineteen imports (Americans), twenty non-imports (Canadians), and three quarterbacks (almost always Americans), I have only counted the Canadians. As the table indicates, the majority of CIS players in the CFL are in non-skill positions.

Table 5.2 CFL draft, 1992–2012

1st round		All rounds	
NCAA	CIS	NCAA	CIS
85	87	417	873

Source: Compiled from data available at Canadian Football League, <http://www.cfl.ca>.

Table 5.3 Canadian CFL players by position, 2012 season

	Skill positions QB, RB, R, LB, DB	Non-skill positions OL, DL, FB, S, P/K
NCAA	23	39
CIS	74	90
Canadian Junior Football	5	9

Source: Compiled from data available at Canadian Football League, http://www.cfl.ca/tm_players.

Third, an examination of the rosters of Canadian national team sports shows a quality gap between the CIS and the NCAA. The 2012 training camp roster for the Canadian senior men’s national basketball team had twenty-six of thirty players from NCAA schools and only four players from CIS schools.⁵ The 2014 Canadian senior men’s field lacrosse team, which won the world championship, had all twenty-three players with NCAA experience, and the entire coaching staff was actively coaching in the NCAA.⁶ The Canadian women’s soccer team that won bronze at the 2012 London Olympics had sixteen of eighteen players from the NCAA and only two players from CIS schools.⁷

The only exception to this gap in quality is in hockey. CIS teams regularly compete against, and often beat, some of the top NCAA teams in exhibition play. However, hockey is the exception that proves the rule. Hockey is unique for a number of reasons. First, Canada's national winter sport has a very high number of participants, high-quality coaching expertise, and substantial financial resources. Second, the different eligibility requirements between the NCAA and the CIS means that, on average, CIS teams have older players: they are often in their early to mid-twenties, as opposed to nineteen or twenty. In the NCAA, after players turn twenty-one, they lose a year of eligibility for every year that they compete in an organized sport when they are not studying in university full-time. In the CIS, the average player has already completed his major junior eligibility, and sometimes a year or two of minor pro, before starting a CIS career. In some cases, ex-NHLers compete in the CIS: for example, Mike Danton played for St. Mary's University after playing for the St. Louis Blues. In women's hockey, Hayley Wickenheiser, who is in her mid-thirties and is widely considered to be the best women's hockey player in the world, played for the University of Calgary.

The Spectacle

The spectacle includes the attendance, media coverage, and overall atmosphere that accompany sporting events. For the most part, CIS athletes play in front of hundreds or, at most, a few thousand, although there are exceptions within certain sports (e.g., football at Laval), schools (e.g., New Brunswick or Acadia), and national championships (e.g., football, basketball, and hockey). In many cases, this means playing in front of little more than friends and family. In contrast, the glamorous NCAA sports routinely draw sellout crowds of sixty to ninety thousand for football and fifteen to twenty thousand for men's basketball. Other NCAA sports such as hockey, baseball, and soccer outdraw their Canadian counterparts by a wide margin. For example, in a special hockey match in January 2016 called the Crowchild Classic, the Mount Royal University Cougars played the University of Calgary Dinos at the Calgary Saddledome in games where tickets were given away. They drew over five thousand for the women's game, and over thirteen thousand for the men's. Both games set CIS attendance records. Meanwhile, an ordinary regular-season men's hockey game at the University of North Dakota, a perennial NCAA power, typically sells out its 11,889-seat arena.

NCAA sports are also saturated with media coverage. This can be measured in billion-dollar contracts for TV rights, millions of viewers for regular-season televised games, the amount of coverage in national and local media, and the focus of

betting (legal and otherwise) on high-profile football bowl games and, especially, the March Madness brackets of the national basketball tournament brackets. It is a media event when President Barack Obama selects his annual basketball bracket. I cannot imagine former Prime Minister Stephen Harper, a well-known hockey fan, being asked his opinion on CIS hockey.

NCAA sports are big business. In 2010, the NCAA signed a fourteen-year \$10.8 billion contract with CBS for the television rights for its men's basketball national tournament.⁸ In 2010, both the Big Ten Conference and the Southeastern Conference hit a billion dollars in athletic receipts (ticket sales, concession sales, merchandise, licensing fees, television contracts, etc.). Ohio State outsourced its sports merchandise to IMG College, a sports marketing firm, for a guaranteed \$11 million a year. EA Sports paid more than \$35 million in 2010 in royalties for NCAA-based video games.⁹ Revenue is one side of the equation; the other is spending. Overall, at public universities, Division I athletic programs spent \$6 billion in 2010.¹⁰

In contrast, CIS sports operate more like a local pizza parlour. They struggle to get games televised on sports cable stations like TSN or The Score. Even when they do, the CIS, or a regional division like the Ontario University Athletics (OUA), often have to pay to get their games on the air, and then sell advertising themselves. Although there are exceptions, tickets to games at many universities are often given away. Merchandise sales of university sports paraphernalia are minute.

The overall atmosphere at American university games provides additional entertainment and excitement. There are tailgate parties, cheerleaders, marching bands, and pep rallies. If you are a spectator looking for entertainment beyond the actual game, you cannot beat an American university sporting event. Even professional sports in Canada or the United States cannot compete with the atmosphere at a big-time college game. As Taylor Branch notes, fans who lack tickets to a game are often perfectly content to participate in the tailgate festivities and then watch the game on television in their RV in the stadium parking lot.¹¹

EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCES

What explains these differences in the athletic experience and spectacle of Canadian and American university sports? There are several key factors: private universities, a national sport system, the location of universities, and liquor laws. In Canada, most universities are publicly funded.¹² Provincial governments, which have responsibility for post-secondary education, and university presidents would find it difficult to justify allocating scarce financial resources away from classrooms, laboratories, and

libraries and toward stadiums, weight rooms, high-paid coaches, and large athletic support staffs. The situation is different in the United States, where a private university system parallels the public one. Private schools such as Duke, Notre Dame, and Princeton (and in earlier years, Harvard and Yale) use winning teams and the spectacle around university sports to attract students and to get alumni to donate money. Public schools, because they have to compete with the private schools, often follow suit. As David Schmidly, former president of the University of New Mexico, commented: "One of the most effective ways to market your university nationally is to have a really quality athletic program. It helps recruit faculty, students, and donors. It helps with the image of the whole university."¹³ Even public universities, especially in an era of government austerity with regard to post-secondary education, often have to fundraise for most of their revenue.

A second explanation for the differences between the CIS and the NCAA is that Canada and the United States have very different sport systems. Although in recent years, there has been some melding of the systems in both countries, youth sports are generally governed through a club system in Canada and through the school system in the United States.¹⁴ In Canada, if a child wants to play hockey, soccer, or lacrosse, he or she joins a local club that is unconnected to the school system. The coaches and administrators are volunteers, not teachers and principals. In the United States, sports revolve around the elementary, junior high, or high school. Little League and American Legion baseball in the United States are notable exceptions, but this could be explained by the fact that baseball is a summer sport, with much of it taking place when school is not in session.

Canadian children move through this system as they age, hitting the junior ranks in their late teenage years. In Canada, hockey is governed by the Major Junior A (the Canadian Hockey League) and the provincial Junior A, Junior B, and Junior C leagues throughout the country. Soccer, baseball, and lacrosse also have junior club leagues, of different tiers, for those aged seventeen to twenty-one. High school sports are often considered second rate for athletic development and level of competition. Even football, which is a major high school sport, has three junior club leagues spanning the country. In the United States, high school sports remain king. The example of football at Permian High School in Odessa, Texas, which was immortalized in the film and TV series *Friday Night Lights*, is the norm across much of the country. Many high school football teams draw over ten thousand spectators for a game, and many football and basketball games are on radio or television. As a pathway to professional sport, the Canadian club system, especially for hockey, is dominant. Even in football, where the CIS is the major feeder to the

CFL, the competing Canadian Junior Football League still is able to place fourteen of its alumni in the CFL. In the United States, the NCAA is the farm system for the NFL, NBA, and NHL. Very few American players make it to the professional ranks without first apprenticing in the NCAA. This contrast between sport systems is starkest when it comes to hockey. North American players drafted into the NHL come either from the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), in Canada (not the CIS), or the NCAA (not junior hockey), in the United States. European players come from Europe or, increasingly for some of the top players, from Major Junior A in Canada. Table 5.4 illustrates this by categorizing all of the players taken in drafts from 2007–2012. Players drafted from Canada overwhelmingly come from Major Junior A, with a sprinkling of provincial Junior A players. No players were drafted from the CIS. Although the US Hockey League (USHL) has experienced dramatic growth, the majority of American prospects still compete in either the NCAA or the US high school system. In addition, in contrast to the CHL, playing in the USHL does not preclude a player from subsequently playing in the NCAA: “Almost 25% of the players in NCAA Division I hockey are USHL alumni.”¹⁵

Table 5.4 Player location in NHL drafts, 2007–12

CHL	CIS	NCAA	US High School	US Junior Hockey	Europe	Other
516	0	46	91	122	208	65

Source: National Hockey League, <http://www.nhl.com/ice/draftstats.htm>.

A third explanation for the differences between Canadian and American university sport is the location of the universities. In Canada, most of our universities are in major cities. For example, Toronto has the University of Toronto, York, and Ryerson; Montréal has McGill, Concordia, the University of Montréal, and the University of Québec at Montréal; and Vancouver has the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. In these cities, professional sports provide plenty of competition, whether it is the NHL, CFL, MLB, or NBA. It is tough for university sports to gain an audience. In fact, it is the universities in smaller communities that tend to have the greatest support in Canada. This can be seen with Queen’s in Kingston, Ontario; Western in London, Ontario; Acadia in Wolfville, Nova Scotia; the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton; or the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. Further illustrating this point is the fact that the Laval University football program did not take off in Québec City until the Québec Nordiques moved to

become the Colorado Avalanche in 1996. A group of businesses that had supported the NHL team were now left without this marketing resource, and in the breach, Laval started a football program with unprecedented financial support.¹⁶

The situation is different in the United States. There are, of course, universities in the major cities, but for the most part, the universities in cities like New York (Columbia, Fordham, or New York University) or Chicago (University of Chicago or Northwestern) are not leading sports schools. The top NCAA schools are outside the major cities. For example, the University of Michigan is in Ann Arbor; Notre Dame is in South Bend, Indiana; the University of Alabama is in Tuscaloosa; the University of Florida is in Gainesville; and Duke University is in Durham, North Carolina. The University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) and the University of Southern California are two of the exceptions that prove the rule.

The propensity for major US universities to be in college towns or small cities goes back to the *Morrill Land-Grant College Act* for state universities in 1862. The grant, originally designed for education in agriculture and the mechanical arts, was a major boost to higher education in the United States. It provided free federal land for states to establish universities, with the number of grants determined by the number of representatives and senators per state. Although some private universities benefited (e.g., Cornell and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology), the act mostly led to the expansion of public universities. These new schools included Iowa State University, the University of Maryland–College Park, the University of California system, and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. The act also ensured that universities were located in remote parts of the states and led to the creation of college towns supporting the public universities.

A final explanation for US-Canada differences is the fact that liquor laws are more liberal in the United States. While it is true that the drinking age is lower in Canada—eighteen or nineteen, depending on the province, versus twenty-one in all US states—American laws are much more tolerant to drinking in public, which is a staple of the large tailgate parties that are often at the heart of the NCAA sport experience. Many spectators go to NCAA events not for the actual game but for the party atmosphere surrounding the games. US liquor laws are a contributing factor in this atmosphere.

REFLECTIONS ON THESE DIFFERENCES

A common perception, on the part of both Canadians and Americans, is that the NCAA system is somehow superior to the CIS one. As a result, many star Canadian

athletes not only want to go to US schools but are encouraged to do so. Canadian national sports organizations often celebrate the athletes who sign with NCAA schools and consider such signings a mark of their own success. Canada Basketball's website has a regular feature celebrating Canadian athletes competing in the NCAA.¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, with the notable exception of hockey, Canadian sport has delegated its high-performance athlete development to the NCAA. Of course, Canada is not alone in this: many countries rely on the NCAA to train their athletes. For example, Auburn University, located in Alabama, sent twenty-seven Olympians to the 2012 London Games, but twenty-four of them were non-Americans.¹⁸

Besides the athletic experience and the spectacle of the game, this desire to attend US schools is fed by the widespread belief that all NCAA athletes receive a "full-ride" scholarship in the United States. In fact, however, such a scholarship is available only in Division I, and only to a few chosen students in a few high-profile sports. Division II has only partial scholarships and Division III schools have no athletic scholarships. Moreover, even in Division I, it is a common practice to divide scholarships across several players. As table 5.1 shows, there are fewer scholarships than rostered players. For example, a men's hockey team will have about twenty-five players but only eighteen scholarships. It is also untrue that these are four-year scholarships: they have to be renewed on a year-by-year basis, and poor athletic performance can result in a scholarship being revoked. Athletes and parents who may be blinded by the allure of a "free education" also forget that tuition at Canadian universities can be thousands of dollars a year less than at American universities. This gap is even larger when out-of-state and/or international fees are included.¹⁹ This means that if a student gets only a partial athletic scholarship in the United States (which is most common), it is still often cheaper to attend a Canadian university. This is especially true when the Canadian dollar is worth much less than the US dollar. For example, in February 2016 the Canadian dollar was worth only 73 cents against the American dollar.

Also ignored is the fact that, whereas academic standards tend to be roughly the same across all Canadian schools at the undergraduate level, in the United States, the quality of post-secondary education varies widely. Although the United States has some of the world's best universities, some of them private (such as the Ivy League colleges, as well as schools like Stanford and Duke), and some public (such as the University of Michigan and the University of California at Berkeley), academic standards at many schools are far weaker. This means that graduates from some US schools will have received a substandard education in comparison to the education they would have received in Canada. Clearly, it is "buyer beware" for athletes and parents in the United States.

Another issue is the amount of money spent on NCAA athletics, which raises questions about institutional priorities. Does athletic spending come at the expense of academic spending? A study released in 2013 comparing the spending of US public universities on athletics versus academics found that per-capita athletic costs at the top-tier NCAA Division I schools was \$92,000 a year, but academic spending was only \$14,000. This gap even exists, albeit more narrowly, at lower-rung Division I schools, with athletic spending at \$37,000 and academic spending at \$11,800. And the gap between athletic and academic spending is growing: among Division I public institutions, athletic spending increased twice as much as academic spending between 2005 and 2010.²⁰ Terry Hartle, a senior vice-president at the American Council of Education, said that the report “confirms what a lot of college presidents have long feared: that intercollegiate athletics has become a financial arms race. . . . Sooner or later, the increases will be unsustainable.” Although many university presidents would like to reduce athletic spending, “taking significant steps in that direction would cost them their job, because the constituencies for increasing spending are numerous and powerful, and the counterpressures are few and relatively powerless.”²¹

There is a widespread belief that successful athletic programs generate large profits. After all, look at the large number of tickets sold, as well as the revenue generated by the sale of merchandise and by television contracts. Yet it has been repeatedly proven that few universities make money from their teams. Of the 119 NCAA Division I Bowl subdivision universities, only twenty-five of them ran an athletic department surplus in 2007. A majority of football programs, the alleged big moneymaker of university sports, failed to cover operating costs from 2004 to 2006. If capital costs and university overhead were included, these financial results would be even worse.²² This means that universities have to allocate budgetary resources away from academic programs to athletic teams. The median athletic subsidy for all sports at Division I schools is between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per player.²³ Proponents argue that winning teams bring more donations to the school, but studies have shown that these donations are often directed toward the athletic programs and not for general academic use.²⁴

Concerns about the poor academic performance of many NCAA athletes seem to go hand in hand with complaints about the allocation of funds. Evidence abounds of the lack of attention to academics at many NCAA schools. One notorious example is Dexter Manley, a star defensive lineman with Oklahoma State University and later a professional player in the NFL, who testified before Congress in 1989 that throughout his four years of university studies, he was functionally

illiterate.”²⁵ Another, which also dates to the 1980s, is a statement made by Hale Almand, the attorney called upon to defend the University of Georgia after an untenured English instructor sued the university, arguing that she had been fired because she would not inflate grades for athletes in her remedial English classes. During the court case, Almand said, astonishingly: “We may not make a university student out of him, but if we can teach him to read and write, maybe he can work at the post office rather than as a garbage man when he gets through with his athletic career.”²⁶ Or, as an Ohio State quarterback memorably tweeted in the fall of 2012: “Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain’t come to play SCHOOL classes are POINTLESS.”²⁷

The NCAA claims that “student-athletes annually outperform their student-body counterparts in graduation rates, and in almost all demographic categories.”²⁸ However, the methodology used to come to that conclusion has been disputed by many academics because the NCAA includes part-time students (who have higher dropout rates and do not include athletes) and counts athletes who transfer in good academic standing as graduates. Using the adjusted graduation gap (AGG), a model that factors out part-time students, shows that “in most athletic conferences, athletes graduate at rates lower than non-athletes.”²⁹ This gap is widest among male football and basketball players at NCAA Division I Bowl Series conferences.³⁰ For example, football players in the Pacific 12 Conference “graduated at rates 27 percentage points lower (in other words, an AGG of -27) compared to full-time male students at those institutions in the 2004–10 cohort.”³¹ Richard Southall, an associate professor of sport administration at the University of North Carolina, led the AGG study and found that the gap was highest among black football players. Referring to the NCAA Division I Bowl Subdivision conferences, Southall said, “It’s three times more likely that black football players . . . don’t graduate at the same rate as black non-athletes.”³² This gap also exists in men’s basketball, where the number of black players who do not graduate is double that of white players.³³ Gerald S. Gurney, an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Oklahoma, argues that the NCAA and its member schools are manipulating graduation rates through “major clustering [of athletes in certain majors] and devalued degrees.”³⁴ NCAA athletes are more likely to be enrolled in physical education, sport management, or sport journalism programs than in other academic areas.

Andrew Zimbalist, a prominent sports economist, has even argued that the concept of a “student-athlete” was designed to help the NCAA in its “fight against workmen’s compensation insurance claims for injured football players.”³⁵ This was a defence that was crafted in the wake of the lawsuits following the death of Ray

Dennison, a football player for the Fort Lewis A&M Aggies in the 1950s. “Student-athlete” is also a deliberately vague phrase. As Taylor Branch points out, being a student-athlete meant that

college players were not students at play (which might understate their athletic obligations), nor were they just athletes in college (which might imply they were professionals). That they were high-performance athletes meant they could be forgiven for not meeting the academic standards of their peers; that they were students meant they did not have to be compensated, ever, for anything more than the cost of their studies.³⁶

Another development that tends to be overlooked is the segregation of athletes. The claim is often made that participation in athletics helps to provide a broader educational experience. This is a good thing. However, we often see athletes living in special athletic dorms, enrolling in only a few programs (physical education or communication, not engineering or English), taking courses reserved for athletes, attending athletes-only study sessions with special tutors, and socializing only with teammates. Everything is team-oriented: the games, the practices, the academics, and even the living arrangements. In contrast, Canadian universities do not have athletic dorms and their students take a much broader range of courses. There is much more intermingling with the rest of the student population.

Yet, despite compelling evidence that the NCAA model is not without some fairly alarming consequences, Canadian schools seem eager to emulate the American model. The most extreme example is Simon Fraser University’s decision, in 2012, to abandon the CIS in favour of the NCAA. Other schools, such as the University of British Columbia, have also flirted with the idea of leaving the CIS. Some schools have instead imported the commercial approach to college athletics. Consider Laval University’s Rouge et Or football team, the biggest and most high-profile sports program in Canada.³⁷ It has a \$2 million budget—four to five times higher than the average in Canada—which allows it to hire five full-time coaches (most schools have two or three), establish a more sophisticated weight room, and run a spring training camp in Florida. The team is run at arm’s length from the university by a nonprofit board. The board chair is Jacques Tanguay, a prominent Québec businessman and Laval alumnus who has owned several minor league professional sports teams. The investment has paid off. Between 1999 and 2015, Laval has won eight Vanier Cups as the top university football team in Canada. The University of Regina football team, the Rams, has a similar story. In 1999, the Rams, one of the most successful junior football programs in Canada, began to compete

in the CIS through a community partnership agreement according to which the team “remains financially independent of the University and must pursue a broad range of fundraising projects and activities in order to keep the program running.”³⁸ This arrangement also allowed the team to keep the nickname “Rams”: all other University of Regina teams go by “the Cougars.” Like the Laval Rouge et Or, the Regina Rams program has invested in first-class training facilities. The Carleton University football team, the Ravens, having returned to competition in 2013 after a fifteen-year absence, is following the model of Laval and Regina.

While this new, more commercial model may seem attractive, it is important to remember that money tends to breed corruption. Athletic scandals do, of course, occur within the CIS. For example, the University of Waterloo football program was shut down in 2010 because of a steroid scandal that implicated nine players.³⁹ However, the frequency and severity of NCAA scandals is exponentially greater, and the vast majority of them are directly related to money. Here is just a short sample of some of the more infamous ones. In 2010, the NCAA stripped the University of Southern California of its 2004 national football title and Reggie Bush had to return his 2005 Heisman Trophy as top collegiate football player because Bush and his family had received “free airfare, limousine rides, a car, and a rent-free home in San Diego from sports agents who wanted Bush as a client.”⁴⁰ Many players at the University of Miami Hurricanes, the dominant college football team of the 1980s, were widely suspected of being paid by rap artist Luther Campbell for big plays.⁴¹ Southern Methodist University’s football program was given the “death penalty” by the NCAA—meaning it could not play for the 1987 and 1988 seasons—because SMU boosters had for years been paying players under the table.⁴²

Non-football sports have also faced significant controversies. In the 1950s, there was a major point-shaving scandal, whereby players would ensure that they won the game but by less points than the point spread established by gamblers. The scandal involved the City College of New York basketball team, five other New York-area universities, and the University of Kentucky.⁴³ The NCAA penalized the University of Michigan basketball program because a booster was loaning hundreds of thousands of dollars to star players in the 1990s.⁴⁴ The Syracuse Orangemen lacrosse team was stripped of its 1990 national title because the head coach’s wife had co-signed a car loan for star player Paul Gait.⁴⁵

These financial scandals reveal a related problem. While star university athletes bring in plenty of dollars to their school and the NCAA, they receive nothing more than free tuition, accommodations, and books. This is all in the name of amateur sport. “You see everybody getting richer and richer,” commented Desmond Howard,

the 1991 Heisman Trophy winner from the Michigan Wolverines. “And you walk around and you can’t put gas in your car? You can’t fly home to see your parents?” Dale Brown, a former basketball coach at Louisiana State University, made the same point even more emphatically: “Look at the money we make off predominantly poor black kids. We’re the whoremasters.”⁴⁶ This has led many commentators to argue that NCAA athletes should be paid. Ellen Staurowsky, a professor of sport management at Drexel University, estimates that football players in the NCAA Division I Bowl subdivision have an average market value of \$121,048. She argues that we are well “past the time when we fall for the NCAA party line that suggests that a ‘free education’ is adequate compensation for college athletes who generate billions of dollars in revenue for corporate marketing and media partners.”⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Clearly, the Canadian and American university sport systems are fundamentally different. Many people in both Canada and the United States assert that the American system is better. However, an examination of the effects of the different sport systems on the athlete, the fan, the community, and the university reveals that while the systems are different, one is not better than the other.

Under the American model, more resources (better facilities and larger coaching staffs) are devoted to sports, which significantly raises the quality of play. Therefore, in terms of the athletic experience, the American system is better. This is recognized throughout Canada by Canadian athletes and national sporting organizations. However, the point of university athletics is to develop the student-athlete. On the student side, there is growing criticism of the American system, whose defects are not nearly as profound in Canada. In particular, many critics agree that in too many sports and at too many schools, the educational experience has been watered down to ensure that athletes focus on their sport. While CIS schools have many student-athletes, NCAA schools have too many athlete-athletes.

The American system provides fans with much more extensive opportunities to follow their favourite sport. Compared to the NCAA experience, the ability to follow CIS sports through television and other media coverage, websites, and gambling is almost nonexistent. Moreover, the spectacle around the game—pep rallies, tailgate parties, marching bands, mascots, cheerleaders, and team apparel—is a big part of the NCAA experience. Almost all of this fanfare is missing in Canadian universities.

The effect of university sport on the community is greater in the United States, where university sport is often a rallying point for people who live in the university

town or state. While town-gown conflict is often an issue at many small-town universities in both Canada and the United States, the appeal of student athletics helps to mitigate it. Locals become attached to the university even if they are not students, alumni, professors, or other employees. Given the greater spectacle of American university sports, there is a greater role for the surrounding community in the United States.

The effect of sports on the university has been both positive and negative. University sports can build spirit among the student body. Attending the Saturday game should be just as much a part of university life as the classroom, library, dorm room, or even the campus pub. For example, several American universities (Georgia State University, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Mercer University) recently decided to start an NCAA Division I football program in order “to enhance their reputation and spirit of community on campus.”⁴⁸ University spirit is often lacking at Canadian universities, and this can be explained, in large part, by the absence of the athletic spectacle. However, this emphasis on athletics in the United States also has a downside. Scarce resources are diverted from academic priorities to athletic programs. Coaches are the best-paid people on campus, and successful ones can become more powerful than university administrators. Professors feel undervalued compared to a winning football team, and ordinary students feel that the star athletes on campus are given special treatment.

University sports is yet another area in which the United States, with its entrepreneurial ethic, differs from other countries. No other country matches the emphasis found in the United States on university athletics as a form of profiteering. Largely by an accident of geography, however, Canadians are more intimately linked to the United States, both culturally and economically, than are people elsewhere. Canadians follow American university sports on television and often attend live events. Canada also sends more athletes to the United States, as a percentage of all foreign athletes in that country, than any other country. At the same time, a comparison between Europe and Canada would reveal many similarities in the structure of university sports, as distinct from the NCAA system. Soccer academies in Europe are, for example, very similar to the hockey clubs in Canada. Countries in Europe, as in Canada, have traditionally viewed universities as academic institutions and have pursued athletics through outside organizations. Before we choose to abandon the sporting traditions that have evolved here in Canada in order to embrace the American system, perhaps we should pause to consider the differences.

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6

OF HOME TEAMS AND VISITING PLAYERS

Imports and Substitutions in Canadian Professional Sports

Ira Wagman

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.”¹ 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.”² 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.³ 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.”⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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.”¹¹ 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.”¹² 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.”¹⁸ 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.¹⁹ 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.²⁰ 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.²¹

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.”²² 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.”²³ 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.²⁴ 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."²⁵

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.³¹ 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.



Figure 6.1 1990–91 Topps and O-Pee-Chee cards. Source: “O-Pee-Chee,” *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O-Pee-Chee>.

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 SweetTarts.³² 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.³³ 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.”³⁴ 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

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7

THE CHANGING WORLD OF SPORTS IN QUÉBEC

André Richelieu

Sport starts the conversation. It is indeed “one of the few social activities of human beings that can be recognized in virtually every community and culture around the globe as a vehicle for bringing people together.”¹ As I quickly realized when I travelled in other cultures, if there is one topic that can break the ice, it is undoubtedly sport. Politics, religion, even family might be taboo in a conversation abroad. But the topic of sport has a marvellous power not only to get two people to talk to each other but also to bring people together and even trigger a sense of belonging. As Canadians, we have seen how certain sports have shaped and defined us in many ways through time; how sport has been and still is a platform for socialization, in small groups or large.²

Canada’s Aboriginal peoples played a wide variety of games, including ring and pole, snow snake, and cat’s cradle, as well as games played with dice or with birch bark cards. In addition, of course, Canadian sport is indebted to Aboriginal culture for the lacrosse stick and the toboggan. The Scots subsequently played a major role in bringing British sporting traditions and activities into North America. Golf was played as early as the mid-eighteenth century, by some of General James Wolfe’s Scottish officers, and in 1807, after curling was introduced under similar circumstances, the Montreal Curling Club—the first such club in the country—was founded. Montréal was indeed the locus of developments in sport during the

late nineteenth century, a period during which Canadians stood at the forefront of the development and popularization of three major sports: lacrosse, hockey, and basketball. By the start of the twentieth century, various sports had already begun to undergo a process of professionalization and commercialization.³

By the end of the twentieth century, hockey had replaced lacrosse as the national game. The “Flying Frenchmen” of the Montreal Canadiens, with their legendary players and their twenty-four Stanley Cups, have marked Canada’s sport scene, but there is more to our sport pedigree than hockey. Montréal hosted the entertaining but (very) expensive 1976 Summer Olympic Games. The Alouettes, the Expos, the Laval Rouge et Or, Georges St-Pierre, and other teams and athletes have been part of the changes in the sport scene in both Québec and Canada. Undoubtedly, the province of Québec has been an actor in, as well as a stage for, the transformation of sport in our country. The purpose of this chapter is to draw a picture of the changing world of sport in Québec.

As the face of Québec changes, so does the sport scene. With this idea in mind, the chapter is structured into two main sections. The first deals with major sports teams in Québec and with the role the Montreal Canadiens have played, and still play, in Québec’s identity. The second section looks at changes in Québec society’s sport scene with a focus on the rising Université de Laval Rouge et Or sport organization and brand. The conclusion highlights the key points of the chapter and considers new horizons.

MAJOR SPORTS TEAMS IN QUÉBEC AND THE ROLE OF THE MONTREAL CANADIENS

The recent history of Québec has been marked by several professional sports teams, the most important being the Montreal Canadiens. In a recent study, Bernard Korai and I analyzed the cultural impact and the importance for francophone fans of the Montreal Canadiens hockey club, as well as the extent to which young Québécois associate themselves with the team as part of their identity-building process in comparison to their predecessors.⁴ What follows are the main conclusions of our research.

When the Montreal Canadiens were established in 1909, Canada was in the midst of a strong rivalry between anglophones and francophones. These tensions were exacerbated by the birth and growth of a French-Canadian nationalist identity. Francophones perceived the financial and political hegemony of their Anglo-Canadian counterparts as a threat to their cultural and linguistic integrity, and, for the most part, they opposed political dependence on either Great Britain or the

United States. In 1910, Henri Bourassa launched *Le Devoir* newspaper to promote Québec's Nationalist League, which he created in 1903 to feed his battle against Canada's Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, whom he considered to be a sellout to the cause of "British Imperialism."⁵

The birth of the Montreal Canadiens was an opportunity to strengthen the French-Canadian fibre. In *Canadians et Canadiens*, Michel Brunet details how the term *Canadiens* was used to distinguish francophone Canadians from the "other"—that is, anglophone Canadians.⁶ The adoption of blue, white, and red by the Montreal Canadiens was a way to emphasize their distance from anglophone Canadians and to claim, with a resounding voice, the French identity.⁷ Slowly but surely, the Canadiens became a projection of French Canada in the world of hockey to such an extent that the majority of its players were francophone.⁸ The Montreal Canadiens were therefore considered an emblem, a standard bearer for Québec's nationalist cause. For Jean Grondin, "the Montreal Canadiens are a compensatory institution: their victories make us forget our collective and personal setbacks."⁹

In this context, each of the team players, as a de facto ambassador of the French-Canadian "nation," participated in the collective resistance against the Anglo-Saxon "enemy." During a game on 13 March 1955, a violent altercation occurred in which Maurice Richard punched a linesman in the face. Following the incident, the president of the NHL, Clarence Campbell, suspended Richard for the remainder of the 1954–55 season, including the playoffs. On 17 March 1955, the presence of Clarence Campbell at the Montreal Forum provoked a riot that caused an estimated \$100,000 in property damage; thirty-seven people were injured and one hundred arrested. The suspension and the riots that followed became the focus of Québec nationalist sentiment. It was only after Maurice Richard publicly acknowledged his error and accepted his suspension that tensions eased. French Canadians viewed his suspension as another proof of Anglo-Saxon socioeconomic oppression.¹⁰ Paul Rompré and Gaétan Saint-Pierre rationalize the deification of Maurice Richard this way: "For the Québec public, Maurice Richard, tenacious and indestructible, scoffed at by the opponents, the referees and the magnates of the NHL without scruples, was a supreme symbol of resistance to Anglo-Saxon oppression."¹¹ The Montreal Canadiens and Maurice Richard were, in this era (1950–60), as strong a symbol of emancipation and aspiration for French Canadians as Jackie Robinson was for African Americans in the aftermath of the Second World War in America's Major League Baseball.¹²

Beyond the emotions and feelings that the team evokes on the ice, then, the club is, for the majority of French Canadians, an institution through which they

have been self-identifying for more than a century.¹³ Like the soccer clubs FC Barcelona in Catalonia and Glasgow Celtic in Scotland, in the province of Québec, the Montreal Canadiens are much more than a hockey team. The fervour has reached such heights that the team has been sanctified by the nickname “La Sainte-Flanelle” (Saint Flannel). The Bell Centre, the team’s arena, is considered by a fair number of French Canadians to be a temple where loyal fans gather to express their faith. These fans even believe that they can count on the presence of certain ghosts hidden in the rafters to help the team win.¹⁴

It is this symbolic aspect of the team that has served as an anchor to create a strong Montreal Canadiens brand that nourishes itself, the connection with fans, and the myths and symbols associated with the team.¹⁵ Through the identity of the team—its name, logo, nicknames (Sainte-Flanelle, Habs, CH)—fans create a mental representation of a certain promise that the team strives to deliver through its performance on the ice and its media-friendly presence. During its history, the team has created a personality as a brand by cleverly using the intangible benefits (emotions and feelings of pride, social experience and entertainment at the arena, hope of winning the Stanley Cup again) and the tangible benefits (past championships, merchandise goods) offered to fans.¹⁶ This strategy has allowed the team to increase fans’ sense of belonging to the Montreal Canadiens’ brand and thus to heighten the level of trust, identification, and loyalty of these fans. This is now magnified with the Canadiens being the only NHL team in the province since the departure of the Nordiques for Denver in 1995 and the main professional sports club in Québec since the Expos moved to Washington, DC, in 2004. The Canadiens have capitalized, emotionally and commercially, on this near monopoly even though the quality of the product on the ice might have suffered because of a lack of strong local and regional competition.

This being said, our research shows that nationalist sentiments seem to be more moderate in the younger generation than in the older one.¹⁷ This may be explained by the fact that the respondents in our study, who were all between eighteen and twenty-five years old, belong to a generation for whom claims of identity and Québec nationalism seem to be much more toned down than in the generation before them. First, the experiential dimension appears to be increasingly important to young fans when they interact with the Montreal Canadiens, especially in the arena, where sport and entertainment often converge to become “sportainment.”¹⁸ Ironically, the increased entertainment at the arena came after an American, George Gillett, bought 80 percent of the club in 2001. (He sold it in 2009). Second, even though the identity of the Canadiens represents the primary connection between

young Québécois and the Montreal Canadiens brand, the club is the rallying point not only for Québécois but for Canadian hockey fans in general, since twenty-three out of thirty NHL teams are American and no Canadian team has won the Stanley Cup since Montréal did in 1993. We should also add that Québec society is similar to the rest of the world in at least one respect: through communications technology, travel, and university exchange programs, Québec youth are exposed to a continuous stream of diverse cultural influences in areas such as music, fashion, cinema, and art. Thus, while still embracing its own cultural symbols, a more open and confident society might be inclined to reject the sectarian nationalist current so dear to the hearts of the previous generation of separatist politicians.¹⁹ The results of a generalized form of social restructuring in Québec that occurred in the late 1960s under the Liberal Party ushered in a new era of change that celebrated the total demarcation between the State and the Church and considerably diluted the nationalist jolt of the 1950s. This so-called Quiet Revolution created an ideological fracture between the generations before and after 1960, a cultural gap that is very visible at the heart of the French-Canadian population through the relationships maintained between the younger and the older generations.

According to Patrick Vassort, the power of sport is so great that it transcends culture, history, and social mutations.²⁰ In short, the Montreal Canadiens are truly a part of both the identity and the identity-building process of young Québécois. The team is an entity strongly tied to francophone Québec, which both feeds and is fed by the team because of the past and present symbolism associated with the hockey club.

However, this attachment to Québec should not obscure the fact that the Montreal Canadiens are, for many Canadians, one of the brightest symbols of Canadian identity, if only because of Canadians' connection to hockey and to the success the Canadiens have enjoyed throughout the years in the NHL. Through the team's evolution and the values that it portrays, the Montreal Canadiens aspire to be at once French Canadian and Canadian. This dual identity is not only generational; it is also a reflection of the Québec population's general desire to keep its provincial belonging while claiming a Canadian identity. As some Québécois like to put it, "My heart says Québec, my head says Canada." We think, therefore, that if the Montreal Canadiens continue to be a team with a large audience, it is surely because the team harmoniously embodies the Québec-Canada identity dichotomy, a dichotomy that is embodied in Québec society itself. We could even say that the case of the Montreal Canadiens highlights the recognition of major exogenous variables influencing the management of a sports team brand in the framework of increasing globalization and of people opening up their horizons instead of narrowing them.²¹

Moreover, the identity of a team, and especially of a team brand, represents the foundation on which the club can position itself on the market vis-à-vis other sports clubs or entertainment options and can enable its managers to articulate a unique selling proposition (USP) that would lead to and sustain strong fan identification and fan loyalty. As several of the examples presented in figure 7.1 illustrate, however, and as we shall see below in the case of the Laval University's Rouge et Or brand, too much emphasis on the commercialization of a sports brand can rob it of its originality and exclusivity, leading to its commoditization, in which it becomes so widely spread and used for commercial purposes that it ends up losing its prestige and value.

CHANGES IN THE SPORT SCENE IN QUÉBEC SOCIETY

According to Statistics Canada, immigrants represented 7.3 percent of Québec's population in 1911, 8.2 in 1981, 9.9 in 2001, and 11.5 in 2006.²² As James Allen and colleagues point out in "Sport as a Vehicle for Socialization and Maintenance of Cultural Identity," some point of attachment is needed to facilitate group solidarity when cultural practices, religious beliefs, and political ideology become more diverse. The authors refer to Durkheim, who described the shared beliefs of individuals, or the collective consciousness, as a vehicle for maintaining social solidarity and stability.²³ Without this binding of individuals into a cohesive social unit, society would disintegrate and end up in chaos. We saw in the previous section the role of the Montreal Canadiens in this regard, but how does that translate in the context of Québec society today? Table 7.2 presents a quick sketch of how the face of Québec sports is changing. More precisely, this shift is visible in the rise of American-style football and in one sports organization, Laval University's Rouge et Or.

THE RISE OF AMERICAN-STYLE FOOTBALL AND THE ROUGE ET OR

Football has been gaining in popularity in the province of Québec with the recent successes of the Montreal Alouettes and the football teams associated with Québec universities. The decade-long fall (1994–2004) and subsequent disappearance of the Montreal Expos created not only a strong disconnect between the baseball team and sports fans in Québec but also a rejection of professional baseball in general, at least for a period of time. Québec sports fans were looking for another summer pastime, and football gave it to them.

Table 7.1 Four major professional sports franchises in Québec

Montreal Canadiens	Québec Nordiques
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Founded in 1909, the club was one of the “Original Six” teams in the NHL.• The Canadiens have won twenty-four Stanley Cups, most recently in 1993.• Forty-four former Canadiens players have been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame.• The team remains the major league team in the province of Québec.• The Canadiens are part of both French Canadian and Canadian culture, despite repeated political recuperation attempts by Québec separatists.• The team epitomizes the commercialization of a sports brand with the obvious threat of robbing its exclusivity to the point of “commoditization.”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Nordiques are the only major professional sports team based in Québec City in modern history.• The Nordiques played in the World WHA from 1972 to 1979, before joining the NHL in 1979.• The team played in Québec City until 1995, when it was sold and relocated to Denver, becoming the Colorado Avalanche.• The Nordiques remain a huge component of the fabric and identity of Québec City, even close to twenty years after their departure.• With the construction of a new 18,000-seat arena and struggles among some US franchises, the hope of bringing the NHL back to Québec City is more alive than ever.
Montreal Expos	Montreal Alouettes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The first franchise awarded to Canada by Major League Baseball (MLB), the Expos played their first season in the National League in 1969.• Despite great teams filled with talented players in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Expos reached the playoffs only once (in 1981).• In 1994, the Expos had the best record in MLB. However, a mid-season strike and horrendous management following the work stoppage jeopardized their viability.• In 1999, art dealer Jeffrey Loria bought the club; in 2002, he sold it to MLB.• On 29 September 2004, MLB announced that the Montréal franchise would move to Washington, DC. The team was renamed the Washington Nationals and won its first division championship in the US capital in 2012.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Founded in 1946, the Alouettes (“Als”) became a highly successful team in the 1970s, with three Grey Cup titles in 1970, 1974, and 1977.• Mismanagement led to a change in team ownership and a change of name (to the Concordes), and ultimately to its disappearance from the CFL, just prior to the start of the 1987 season.• The current franchise moved to Montréal from Baltimore in 1996.• When a U2 concert conflicted with a home playoff game in November 1997, the team decided to return, temporarily, to Molson Stadium in downtown Montréal. The game was sold out, prompting the team to relocate to the smaller venue for the 1998 season.• The Als became one of the most successful teams in CFL history in the 2000s.

Source: www.Canadiens.nhl.com, www.MontrealAlouettes.com, www.NHL.com.

Laval University's Rouge et Or, the University of Montréal's Carabins, and Concordia University's Stingers regularly rank in the top ten university teams in the country. In fact, the football boom in Québec received a great deal of press, since football was once perceived as an anglophone pursuit. The Montreal Alouettes played in front of sellout crowds for 105 consecutive games, a streak that lasted until the 2011 season. According to a comment on an Internet discussion forum, "Molson Stadium only holds 20,002 people, but when games are occasionally shifted to Olympic Stadium, crowds swell to 50,000+."²⁴

Football is also becoming increasingly popular at the high school and university level. The number of Québec universities fielding football teams has now increased to six, and Québec-based college football teams are now considered some of the strongest in the nation. Laval hosted the Vanier Cup in 2009, 2010, and 2013. Laval University's CIS team, the Rouge et Or (R&O), has established itself as the most dominant team in Canadian college football. The team played its first regular season in 1996 and has won the Vanier Cup (Canada's university football championship) eight times, in 1999, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2013. The R&O has a record of 8-1 in the Vanier Cup. A 2009 post on an Internet discussion forum suggests that "the number of kids playing football in this province [Québec] has swelled from something like 40,000-50,000 players 10 years ago to over 250,000 today." The popularity of the Laval University team is living proof of this increased interest in football. The stadium where the R&O play, called the PEPS, "has held as many as 18,500 for a college football game."²⁵

Because of this football success in Québec, discussions have now turned to a Québec City expansion team in the CFL, but three issues are slowing the process:

- The city lacks a professional, state-of-the-art football stadium (even though the Rouge et Or's stadium is being upgraded as part of "Le Super Peps" project).
- It is far from obvious that popular success in university football would translate into commercial success for a CFL franchise.
- Two football teams, one in university and one in the CFL, competing for the disposable income and allegiance of fans would probably risk cannibalizing each other in a market of an estimated 700,000 people, especially since Québec City already hosts a junior hockey team (the Remparts), as well as several other sports entertainment options.

Beyond its successes on the field, the Rouge et Or has worked very hard in developing and crystallizing both fan identification and fan loyalty into what is now a brand in itself. It does this through managing its programs, building the personality of its brand, and using particular PR strategies.

Table 7.2 Major teams and sporting events in Québec today

Rouge et Or	Montreal Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Rouge et Or began its first regular season in 1996. It has won the Vanier Cup eight times so far, most recently in 2013.• Talks have now turned to a Québec City expansion team in the CFL, but would popular success in college football translate into commercial success for a CFL franchise?• Two football teams competing for the disposable income and allegiance of fans would probably risk cannibalizing each other in a market of an estimated 700,000 people.• Since the late 1990s, the number of youth playing football in the province has grown steadily. In 1992, Football Québec had about 8,000 members; now it has more than 35,000.^a• Obviously, the success of the Rouge et Or has transformed the sporting club into an ambassador of Laval University, but it has also robbed it of its originality to the point of commoditization. There are pressures to exploit the Rouge et Or brand in response to the financial crisis, in general, and the educational crisis, in particular, in Québec.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Montreal Impact is a professional soccer team that began its activities in Major League Soccer (MLS) in 2012.• The club tries to build on the growth of soccer in the province, as well as on the popularity of soccer among immigrant communities.• In its first season in the MLS, the club barely missed the playoffs, making the playoffs the next year. In 2014, the team had a dreadful season, losing fans and raising questions about its long-term viability. Only one other Canadian team has ever qualified for the MLS playoffs to date (the Vancouver Whitecaps, in 2012).• The pressure is strong on the Montreal Impact to perform well in the near future, since winning, or at least the hope of winning, is mandatory for Impact: soccer is big in Canada as a participation sport but not as a spectators' sport.• It is estimated that there are 200,000 registered soccer players in the province of Québec (out of about 850,000 in Canada, of whom 40 percent are female, according to the Canadian Soccer Association).
Extreme Sports	Québec Capitales and Trois-Rivières Eagles
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New extreme sporting events—such as rock climbing, snowboarding, tough mudder, the UFC, and Red Bull Crashed Ice—are gaining in popularity.• The Red Bull Crashed Ice is a mix of hockey, boardercross, and downhill skiing.• Red Bull Crashed Ice first hit Québec City in 1996, and, the event there in 2014 drew an estimated 100,000 spectators.^b• The UFC is gaining in popularity, in part thanks to Georges St-Pierre (GSP), a Montréal fighter who had successfully defended his title nine times.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Capitales were established in 1999.• The club plays in the historic Stade Municipal.• The Capitales have won the Can-Am League championship six times, in 2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013.• The Trois-Rivières Eagles began playing in the Can-Am League in May 2013.• There is a slow revival of baseball in Québec now that mourning the loss of the Expos seems to be over.

Extreme Sports	Québec Capitales and Trois-Rivières Eagles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSP, also known as Rush, has built a brand with a strong international appeal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A return of MLB to Montréal is highly improbable in the short- or mid-term; the cost of acquiring a franchise and building a new stadium would be between US\$600 million and US\$800 million.

^a Christian L. Dufresne, “Le football, un sport devenu conventionnel,” *RDS*, 11 June 2014, <http://www.rds.ca/universitaires/un-sport-devenu-conventionnel-1.1156963>.

^b “Quebec City, 20–22 Mar 2014,” http://www.redbullcrashedice.com/en_CA/event/quebec-city.

Sources: www.CanadaSoccer.com, www.ImpactMontreal.com, www.gspofficial.com, RedBull.com, www.RougeetOr.ulaval.ca/football, www.UFC.com.

HOW THE ROUGE ET OR IS MANAGING ITS PROGRAMS

Sports activities at Laval University are the responsibility of the Service des activités sportives (SAS; see figure 7.1).²⁶ The SAS’s R&O program was founded in 1950, when the ice hockey team officially adopted the Rouge et Or name. The Alpine Club was established one year later, followed by the men’s basketball and swimming teams. Since that time, several additional clubs have emerged, and others have been withdrawn from the program. In 1990, all varsity teams at Laval University adopted the same Rouge et Or name to provide consistency. Today, the R&O excellence program consists of thirteen sports—athletics, badminton, basketball, cross-country, diving, football, golf, rugby, skiing, soccer, swimming, triathlon, and volleyball—and the club’s cheerleaders, who work closely with the program.

The thirteen clubs are autonomous not-for-profit entities and are co-managed; members of the SAS as well as local business people are on the board of directors. “It’s not quite a public-private partnership, but it is very close to it,” says Gilles Lépine, director of the excellence program at Laval. The advantage of such a structure, Lépine claims, “is that the administrators feel that they are part of the club and are fully engaged in its management, even if it is on a voluntary basis.”

The R&O has its headquarters at the Pavillon de l’éducation physique et des sports (PEPS). The largest sport centre in eastern Québec, the PEPS has played a leading role in raising awareness about sport. Over the years, the R&O has become an emblem of Laval University and the entire region of Québec. Thousands of spectators gather to watch the Rouge et Or games, with the football, basketball, and volleyball teams having the strongest support. In the words of the former rector of

Laval University Michel Pigeon: “It is a great pride for Laval University to present one of the most dynamic aspects of university life: the elite sport. The R&O clubs reflect our reputation of excellence as a training facility. The success of our athletes at the provincial and national level says a lot about the quality of the environment in which they work.” The former director of the R&O, Gilles D’Amboise, adds:

The activities of the R&O take place in a context of high performance, keeping in mind the dual status of a student-athlete (i.e., student and athlete). . . . Moreover, in the midst of sporting excellence, it is also worth remembering the impressive contribution of the support services within the University, such as physiotherapists, statisticians, equipment managers, housing services, etc. All these elements complement the Rouge et Or clubs and allow the organization to perform within the university system.

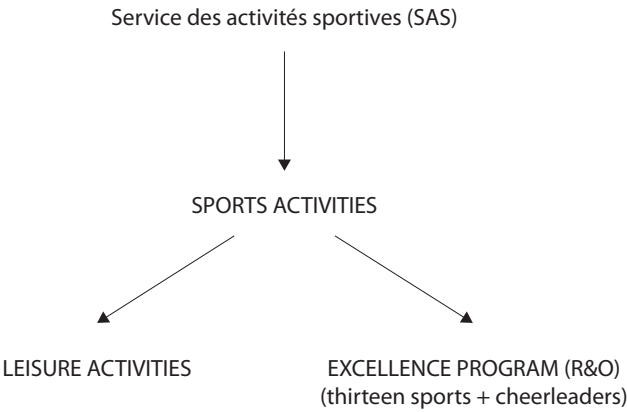


Figure 7.1 The structure of sport activities at Laval University. Source: Adapted from André Richelieu, “Combiner gestion de la marque et relations publiques dans une démarche stratégique: Le cas du Rouge et Or de l’Université Laval au Canada,” in *Sport et marketing public*, ed. Christopher Hautbois and Michel Desbordes (Paris: Economica, 2008), 237–53.

BUILDING THE PERSONALITY OF THE R&O BRAND

The R&O has undergone several transformations since 2005, not only in its operating structure but also in its brand strategy. The R&O executives wanted to make the Rouge et Or teams a driver of growth for the sports excellence program at Laval University. Thus, in 2005, a strategic review of the brand personality of the sports

excellence program began, of which I was a part. This review was subsequently used to introduce a public relations strategy.

This review was part of a long-term vision for the strategic development of the R&O brand and involved the first research study in Canada aiming to build a university's sports excellence brand. The main goal of this study was to articulate the R&O brand's identity or personality, which represents the foundations of a brand strategy (see figure 7.2). The research, conducted over a period of one year, from March 2005 to March 2006, consisted of a qualitative phase (focus groups) followed by a quantitative phase (a survey). The results helped define the identity of the R&O as a collection of sports teams, made up college athletes and students at Laval University.

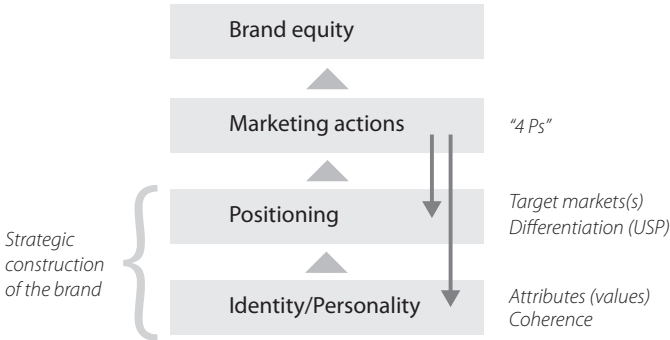


Figure 7.2 The construction and management of a brand. Source: André Richelieu, “The Strategic Management of the Brand in the World of Sport,” *Journal of Brand Strategy* 2, no. 4 (2014): 403–15.

Meanwhile, the five major attributes of the R&O brand were identified, in order of decreasing importance, as excellence, perseverance, sportsmanship, prestige (fame), and competitiveness. Other elements—such as the definition of *spokesperson* (a current student-athlete), the animal most representative of the R&O (the lion), and the ideal geometrical shape (a star)—allowed the R&O managers to contemplate practical changes in connection with the logo, on-field jerseys, promotions, and public relations, as well as in the marketing of their products (see figure 7.3). Among other challenges was that of how best to capitalize on the success of the football team in order to grow the R&O brand while recognizing and respecting the qualities specific to each of the constituent sports clubs. In other words,

according to Gilles Lépine, the problem was “how to use the football locomotive without derailing the whole train.”



Figure 7.3 The attributes and symbolic associations of the Rouge et Or brand. Source: Adapted from André Richelieu, “Combiner gestion de la marque et relations publiques dans une démarche stratégique: Le cas du Rouge et Or de l’Université Laval au Canada,” in *Sport et marketing public*, ed. Christopher Hautbois and Michel Desbordes (Paris: Economica, 2008), 237–53.

The goal was not only to crystallize the R&O brand in the Québec City area but also to expand it beyond the local market and make it a national brand. In this regard, the R&O worked on the following items: (1) transcending football while capitalizing on it, (2) promoting the uniqueness and coherence of the brand while recognizing and respecting the personality of the different sports in the excellence program, and (3) benefiting from the synergies among the respective images of the R&O, Laval University, and Québec City. Indeed, co-branding has become a strong lever for the R&O’s own promotion, especially as far as the recruitment of student-athletes is concerned. The R&O and its brand are a symbol of excellence that had to be enhanced and promoted beyond the PEPS to exploit its potential. How far should a university brand go in its commercialization without risking being commoditized? In an era when university rankings, the number of students per classroom, and other measures often make us forget that the primary mission of a

university should be students' learning, how does Laval University's R&O manage to balance things out?

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGY OF THE R&O

Following the study conducted on the brand personality of the R&O, a public relations strategy was implemented to enhance the brand image of the university sports brand and leverage it—for instance, to recruit students. According to Gilles Lépine, “The R&O is an instrument of promotion and recruitment of students. It is a leverage for the SAS (Department of Sport Activities), the R&O and Laval University. In this context, the study of the brand personality of the R&O nurtured the mission of the PEPS, justified our initial intuitions and made the R&O a true leverage for the PEPS and Laval University.” In fact, as Lépine also pointed out, “the more developed the branding of the sports excellence program is, the greater the sense of belonging for all parties involved (i.e., managers, employees, athletes, students, fans, etc.), directly or indirectly.” This is important—first, because each club of the R&O is a nonprofit organization managed independently, and second, because the R&O does not have the resources of a major corporation to support and promote the brand that it is trying to build.

A budget is nonetheless allocated to public outreach activities that aim to raise the profile of the R&O in the community, such as the distribution of posters and promotional items to students in schools and campaigns associated with the R&O brand that target the general public—posters on buses, for example, as well as advertisements in local newspapers and promotional initiatives directed at specific business and public institutions. These activities, according to Lépine, are part of “a roadmap that respects the personality of the brand and the five key values” identified earlier. Specifically, this strategy of promotion and public relations is closely associated with the launch of the campaign titled “The Relentless Pursuit of Excellence,” which takes the first attribute of the brand highlighted by the study and emphasizes it on promotional posters alongside a different star athlete.

A broad range of promotional activities have also been undertaken within the Laval University community itself. In addition to the launch of the “Relentless Pursuit of Excellence” campaign, these include:

- Unveiling of the “R&O Corridor” at the PEPS
- An R&O store at the PEPS
- Use of red and gold for jerseys and equipment of R&O student-athletes, with a star added on the jersey to underscore a championship win

- Use of press conferences, press kits, and brochures highlighting excellence, student-athletes, and the red and gold colours
- Organization of sports camps for the youth in PEPS, which aim to introduce them to the R&O universe and send them home with a souvenir (T-shirt, hat, etc.) emblazoned with the R&O logo
- Communication via the Internet for contests and surveys
- R&O games broadcast in the university radio station

There are three important elements to this approach:

- The R&O tries to develop its brand around its major attributes highlighted in the study conducted by the Rouge et Or to build and sustain excellence.
- In order to become a cornerstone in the recruitment of students, the R&O wants to develop a sense of belonging and pride within the academic community, to attract students not only in Québec but also across Canada and even abroad.
- The R&O wants to go beyond football to include the thirteen sports programs it manages under the same umbrella brand of the R&O.

The branding process undertaken by the R&O thus combines management, branding, and public relations in integrated marketing communications. The objective is to make the R&O an instrument for promoting the academic institution and a resource for both recruiting students and attracting sponsors.

This approach is seen as essential by the R&O and Laval University's managers in an environment where resources for universities are scarce and the competition to attract students is fierce. In the province of Québec alone, more than ten universities compete against one another for top-quality students, and the entire population of the province is a mere eight million people. In this context, the brand becomes a key strategic lever.²⁷ For Laval University, one of the challenges will be to finance the development of the R&O brand to sustain the growth of the institution and position it as an academic leader in Québec, in Canada, and around the world. This can only exacerbate the risks of commoditizing the R&O and Laval University's brands. But with the budget cuts imposed by the provincial government on universities (\$140 million from their budgets for the 2012–13 school year), the freezing of tuition fee increases, and the continuous pressure to remain a first-class university, capitalizing on the strength of the Rouge et Or's brand is not so much a means for growth as a strategy for survival.²⁸

CONCLUSION

Sport plays a cohesive role in any society. Because of its resonance among citizens, some sport organizations can build strong fan identification and loyalty, which ultimately benefit not only the organization but also the society as a whole in that the organization becomes a rallying point for the entire population.²⁹ The Montreal Canadiens, which have become a symbol of French-Canadian identity, are an excellent example of this. However, this attachment to Québec should not obscure the fact that the Montreal Canadiens are, for many Canadians, one of the brightest symbols of Canadian identity in sport because of Canadians' connection with hockey and the success of the Canadiens throughout their years in the NHL. Through the team's evolution and the values that the team has come to represent, the Montreal Canadiens have aspired to be at once French Canadian and Canadian. That's why the Canadiens are more than just a hockey club: they have become a brand in their own right. The identity of a team, and especially of a team brand, represents the foundation on which the club can position itself on the market vis-à-vis other sports clubs or entertainment options and which enables its managers to articulate a unique selling proposition (USP). But too much emphasis on the commercialization of a sport brand can rob it of its originality and exclusivity, potentially leading to its commoditization.

The success of Laval University's Rouge et Or has made it not only an effective ambassador for the university but an important tool for the recruitment of students and sponsors. In an environment of scarce resources and fierce competition, the brand becomes a key strategic benefit that requires support. For Laval, one of the challenges will be to finance the development of the R&O brand to sustain the growth of the institution and position it as an academic leader provincially, nationally, and internationally. Laval must also avoid overcommercialization, which could dilute both the R&O brand and the identity of the university. Furthermore, the examples of the Red Bull Crashed Ice, the UFC, and soccer presented in table 7.2 emphasize the end of the monoculture, which has led to a splintering of individual interests (practice versus spectator sports; "traditional" versus "new" sports; influence of urban, hip-hop subculture; well-being initiatives). Many Canadian immigrants come from societies where sports are played that are different from those popular in North America; these newcomers contribute to changes to Québec as a society and to sport in the province. Soccer, for example, is growing in Québec through the influence of new immigrants.

Mixed martial arts has seen the emergence of a Québec super hero, Georges St-Pierre. St-Pierre's first UFC fight occurred in 2004. In the end, he defended his

UFC title nine times before his retirement.³⁰ Transcending sport and the UFC, St-Pierre, also known as Rush, has built a brand with a strong international appeal via his involvement on social media, a book he recently launched titled *The Way of the Fight*, his merchandise collection, and a foundation established to help stop bullying (<http://www.gspofficial.com/gsp-anti-bullying>). But what makes the “GSP” brand so strong, beyond his performances, are the values of authenticity, respect, and professionalism that he displays in and out of the UFC octagon. In Las Vegas or in Bangkok, in Paris or in Tokyo, he is a proud ambassador for Québec and Canada, similar to Celine Dion, illustrating so vividly the Québec-Canada dichotomy in La Belle Province. He has also contributed to making the UFC more respectable in the eyes of the general public, no small feat considering that the UFC has long been banned from several US states and Canadian provinces. However, by becoming a commercial brand and a promoter of a questionable sport, St-Pierre also makes himself more vulnerable to commoditizing his own persona. Perhaps this is the price one pays when a sports organization or an athlete—whether the Montreal Canadiens, Laval University’s Rouge et Or, or Georges St-Pierre—capitalizes commercially on a sport’s success.

Although there are differences between Québec society and that of the rest of Canada as far as sport is concerned, there are also many similarities. After all, Canadians have historically been bonded by sport in the unforgiving climate where hockey was born. Through sport, we find a common language and a way to come together as a nation to share and cheer for our national heroes, be they Sidney Crosby with his “golden goal” in Vancouver or Canada’s women’s soccer team’s bronze medal in the 2012 London Olympics.

NOTES

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- 13 Grondin, "La métaphysique du hockey."
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THE OLYMPICS AS AN ICONIC EVENT

The Question of National Unity and the Vancouver 2010 Games

Harry Hiller

Is sport just exercise and competition, or is it more than that? When athletes or teams perform as representatives of a community, a city, a province, or a country, do they perform only as individuals or groups of individuals, or are they viewed as carrying the reputation or the hopes of their people with them into their competition? Can sport be a vehicle to promote regional or national cohesion among a group of people by opposing them to a different group of people? These intriguing questions suggest that sport can, indeed, serve multiple purposes beyond its purported function of demonstrating athletic skill.

Much of the public excitement around competitive sport builds on the assumption that athletes represent some kind of social community (whether local, regional, or national) in which they are challenged by athletes or teams representing a different community.¹ While there is not always symmetry between where one lives and whom one supports, it is the notion of “representation” that changes the competition from focusing purely on the athlete to having implications for the supporting community. It is the perception of representation that arouses and sustains media interest, which, in turn, increases public interest. Think of how the media promote the Toronto Blue Jays as “Canada’s team” in competition with American teams in Major League Baseball, or the much vaunted “Battle of Alberta,” when Edmonton

plays Calgary in football or hockey. The notion of representation may also be a factor in how the supporting community responds to the competition. Supporting a team that is losing can be demoralizing, whereas supporting a winning team can boost self-esteem. This tendency has been identified as “BIRGing” (basking in reflected glory), when a team’s successes serve as an ego-enhancement technique for a community. The opposite has been referred to as CORFing (cutting off reflected failure): the fading of interest in a team, as an ego-protection technique, when that team is losing.² The implication here is that the supporting community can be deeply affected by the outcome of a competition in which their representatives participate.

THE OLYMPICS AS A REPRESENTATIONAL ICONIC EVENT

The Olympics constitute a special kind of competition because competitors are explicitly representatives of their countries. They compete under the auspices of their countries’ own national Olympic committee. They march behind their country’s flag at the opening ceremonies, and if they win a gold medal, their national anthem is played for all to hear. The athletes against whom they compete also represent their countries, and it is the national media from each country that transmit the stories and results of the competition through their own, unique national lens. Standings at the Olympics are typically measured by medal counts of countries. Olympic competitors are constantly reminded that they carry the hopes and expectations of the people of their country on their shoulders because of the principle of representation. Opponents, then, are not just personal competitors: they also represent their countries, and interpretations of a competition can often be couched in terms of assessments of the countries that different athletes represent. Interpretations of competitions often reflect how some countries are represented as “friends” and others as “enemies” and how winning is often interpreted in ideological terms.³ Thus, many international sporting competitions have social meanings, not just athletic meanings.

At the same time, the Olympics also must be understood as an international mega-event. A mega-event is a short-term high-profile activity that requires long-term planning and the mobilization of resources that often involves reprioritizing other items considered less urgent. The fact that the Olympics have very specific requirements (such as competition venues, housing, and transportation) and a fixed ready date for international guests, and are broadcast to an international audience means that their impact is especially compelling. What is unique about

the Olympics is that they constitute a multi-sport event that in and of itself broadens interest that transcends the Games. For example, people who do not consider themselves sports minded may find themselves mesmerized by figure skating during the Olympics, even though it is not a sport that they normally follow. Much of this interest is the result of media saturation and the presentation of the Olympics as a spectacle with a great deal of drama, colour, and ceremony, all of which is produced to draw an immense audience.⁴ The production of the Olympics as a televised spectacle enhances the Games in all its facets as a performance, eliciting wide public interest across nations.⁵

The combination of the high-profile status of the Olympic Games and the fact that virtually all major countries participate in them means that in a globalized world, the Games occupy a special place. Apart from sessions of the United Nations, in which the general public has little interest, the Olympics are the only regularly scheduled occasion on which the world's nations come together, and they receive intense media coverage, garnering the largest broadcast audience of any single event in the world. For this reason, the Olympics call for unprecedented preparation on the part of host cities, and they have acquired an iconic significance worldwide. But can the Olympics also be an iconic event for a host state? From a national perspective, an iconic event generates such unusual interest and participation that it plays an important role in the memory of its people and in the nation's recorded history.⁶

ICONIC EVENTS PRECEDING VANCOUVER 2010

It could be argued that one of the greatest sporting landmarks in Canadian history was the XXI Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver, British Columbia, in February 2010. In this chapter, I attempt to determine this event's iconic significance. Although the test of history cannot yet be applied to these Games, contemporary evidence can be explored. While Canada hosted two Olympic Games before Vancouver (the Summer Games in Montréal in 1976 and the Winter Games in Calgary in 1988), I have chosen the Vancouver Games for this analysis because they are still fresh in the nation's collective memory and appear to have had an unprecedented impact on both the host city and the nation.

This is not the first time that sport has played an important role in arousing widespread public interest across the nation. Analysts often refer to the Canada-Russia hockey series in 1972 as a particularly stirring moment that awakened national consciousness.⁷ Held during the height of the Cold War and utilizing professional

players from Canada for the first time in international competition, the tightly fought eight-game series was won in the final thirty-four seconds of the last game with a goal by Paul Henderson. Perhaps cementing for all time hockey's iconic role for Canadians, this hockey series made it clear that sport plays a pivotal role in the collective identity of Canadians.

As already noted, the Olympic Games comprise many sports and are thus much more complex than an international hockey series, requiring a diversity of venues and much more coordinated planning and involving dozens of nations. The Montréal Games in 1976 are often remembered more for the controversies that they stirred, the most notable of which was the spiralling debt incurred, than for the achievements of the world's best athletes.⁸ After Mayor Jean Drapeau had guaranteed that the Game's costs would be kept under control, the price of the Olympic stadium became the symbol of the city's financial failures. It took thirty years to pay off the debt on "The Big O," which was often referred to instead as "The Big Owe." The Montréal Games were also held at a time when the nationalist movement in Québec was very influential, raising the question, for example, of whether the Queen of England, as Canada's head of state, should be invited to open the Games. Political wrangling at numerous government levels contributed to muting the impact of the Games across Canada.⁹ This is not to minimize the successes of the Games but to point to the factors that limited its impact and, above all, its legacy.

The Calgary Games, in contrast, took place under very different conditions. The financial consequences of hosting the Games, as represented by the experience of Montréal, had had a chilling effect on the bidding to host the Games. Los Angeles (hosting in 1984) stepped into the breach and became the model for a new kind of Games, essentially financed without government backing and using existing facilities rather than embarking on massive construction projects. Part of the success of this approach was related to new revenues generated by the sale of television rights. The Calgary Games (1988) built on this model; although government backing and new venue construction were required, it was the sale of television rights (an unexpected \$309 million contract with ABC) that brought substantially increased revenues. Calgary had just begun to grow out of its role as a regional city: its influence on the national and international scene was expanding, primarily because of its central role in the oil and gas industry. In this context, a local euphoria surrounded preparation for the Games, which were seen as a "signaling" or "showcase event" for an ascendant city that was just entering the global stage.¹⁰ The city's strong volunteer heritage and the customary participation of local inhabitants in "festival" events was clearly manifested during the hosting of the

Calgary Olympics, resulting in strong positive affect that was transmitted across the country.¹¹ However, both the Montréal and Calgary Games were notable in that no Canadians won a gold medal in their own country. Thus, prior to the Vancouver Olympics, sporting success was not a part of Canadians' memories of Olympics hosted in their country.

The Montréal Olympics took place in an era of boycotts; many nations did not participate in protest of various issues. Four years later, a number of the United States's allies boycotted the Olympics in Moscow, with many of Russia's allies, in turn, boycotting the 1984 Games in Los Angeles. Most African nations boycotted the Montréal Games over the International Olympic Committee's decision not to ban the New Zealand rugby team, which had toured South Africa, where apartheid was still the law. Although the Olympics are supposed to be a peaceful encounter among nations of the world, an undertone of global conflict permeated the entire Olympic movement around the time of the Montréal Games. Not only were these the first Olympics to be held in Canada, but they were also the Summer Games, which included many competitions in which Canadian athletes were not particularly strong.

In contrast, the Calgary and Vancouver Games were the Winter Games, in which Canada was more likely to excel. Furthermore, in both 1988 and 2010, controversies surrounding the Olympic movement were much more subdued, even though between these two Winter Olympics, corruption and unbridled doping were rampant, particularly around the time of the Salt Lake City Games (2002). Calgary marked the beginning of a new era in two respects: television audiences were increasing, as was local participation in the Games through activities in the public realm. For example, in Calgary, the public was invited downtown every evening for medal ceremonies in a newly constructed park, Olympic Plaza, along with a laser light show in which colourful beams were projected between high-rise office buildings. Dozens of hot air balloons were launched every morning, free pancake breakfasts were served to locals and visitors alike, and the downtown pedestrian mall became a hub of daily pin trading and busking. Calgary's Games set a new trend in that during the Olympics, local residents experienced their downtown as a gathering place for fun rather than just a place for work and shopping. Two of the heroes of the Calgary Games who underscored the point that there is a place for ordinary people in the Olympics were Eddie the Eagle, a British ski jumper, and the Jamaican bobsled team—both of whom finished last. One of the songs played in Calgary about Eddie during the Games had this refrain, "He made us see the Olympics for what they really are—that everyone can play the game and everyone's

a star,” which, of course, reverses the idea of the Olympics as being a place for only high-performance athletes. The Jamaican bobsled team members who competed in Calgary have the distinction of being the only athletes to have had a movie made about them after finishing last in the Olympics. From the point of view of local residents, success was not measured by the number or colour of medals won but by public participation and a profitable bottom line.

HOW THE VANCOUVER GAMES WERE DIFFERENT

The Vancouver Games provide a dramatic contrast to both Montréal and Calgary in that they were highly successful for Canada in terms of medals. A nonprofit national umbrella organization known as Own the Podium was created in 2005 to bring concerted funding to support the development of high-performance athletes—particularly in preparation for the 2010 Games. Since Canada was the only country in the history of the Olympics to have hosted the Games while not winning a gold medal, it was thought that a coordinated effort was needed by all sports organizations across the country to provide the resources for success. Supported by both the federal government and segments of the private sector, Own the Podium established goals to ensure that Canada would become a leading winter sports nation. As a result, Canada finished with the most gold medals (fourteen) of any competing nation at the Vancouver Games and finished third overall, with twenty-six medals. While some criticized as unsportsmanlike the theme of dominance implied in the notion of “owning” the podium, which was thought to be particularly offensive coming from a host nation, it is clear that resources were mobilized based on the assumption that Canadians’ renowned sense of inferiority in international competition needed to be replaced by a different attitude that would enhance the collective spirit of Canadians. In that sense, Own the Podium became an important symbol of the relationship of athletic success to national identity and of the Olympics as the mechanism, or the iconic event, to mediate that relationship.

Another indicator of the iconic status of the Vancouver Olympics was the extent of television viewing in the country during the Games. The opening ceremonies, televised live, became the most watched television event in Canadian history up to that point. Twenty-three million viewers, or about two in every three Canadians, tuned in to some part of the ceremony. About 84 percent of all people watching television in Canada that evening were watching the opening ceremonies, with an additional one million Internet video views. On the last day of the Olympics, the

gold medal hockey game between Canada and the United States became the most watched television event in Canadian history. Almost half of the Canadian population watched the entire game, while 80 percent watched at least part of the game. About two-thirds of the Canadian population watched Sidney Crosby score the winning goal against the United States, in overtime, that gave the Canadian men's hockey team the gold medal. The closing ceremony on the evening of the same day became the second most watched broadcast ever. The fact that the Games were aired live on nine television networks and in eight languages in what was known as Canada's broadcast media consortium helped to ensure success. Overall, television viewing in Canada increased 22 percent during the Games over the preceding five weeks.¹² Clearly, the Vancouver Olympics had extraordinary drawing power among Canadians, and the amount of participation through television viewing provides an understanding of how these Games might play an important role in Canadian national consciousness.

For most people, in Canada and around the world, the Olympics are a mediated event. In other words, the media interpret the Games to their audiences by choosing what to focus on and what to discuss. The dominant media form, of course, is television, and because of the number of countries that broadcasted the Vancouver Olympics, the potential global reach of the Games was an unprecedented 3.8 billion people.¹³ In reality, 1.8 billion people watched at least some of the Games; unless they were involved in the Games in some other way as well, their knowledge of the Vancouver Olympics came to them through the lens of a television camera and the words of a commentator. Other forms of media also play a role; print media, for example, decide what is newsworthy and how to interpret the news they choose to present. For example, the cause of the death of the Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili was open to numerous interpretations, from poor design of the track to inexperience of the athlete. The way in which this accident was interpreted reflected on whether the Vancouver Organizing Committee (VANOC), the IOC, the International Luge Federation, or the athlete was to blame. Furthermore, the adjustment to the luge course made by authorities after this accident had a major impact on the results of the race: moving the starting point affected the Canadian women's team, who lost their training advantage by having a much shorter course. This is an example of how the media play a major role in helping others interpret events as they unfold. The media can create a sense that the Games are a huge success, but they can also create images of an event filled with controversy and conflict. Similarly, they can decide to zero in on matters that create emotional responses, such as the death of Canadian figure skater Joannie Rochette's mother prior to the competition, which

focused viewers and readers especially on her. These are some of the ways in which the Olympics in Vancouver were mediated to audiences across Canada.

However, some host city residents have a somewhat different vantage point on the Games, for they are at ground zero and are not totally dependent on the media. Since the IOC makes its host city decision seven years in advance of the Games, people in Vancouver had been part of the local Olympic drama for at least the seven years of preparation. Many issues drew citizens into public and private discussions, starting in 2003, when local residents were asked in a plebiscite whether they wanted to host the Games.¹⁴ Although the final tally supported hosting the Games (64% in favour, 36% opposed), battle lines were drawn and controversy persisted around three basic questions:

Is hosting the Olympics a good idea for our city, and what are the costs?

How might hosting the Olympics affect me?

How should I respond to the decision?

These questions were debated continuously in Vancouver, particularly over costs and benefits, with a focus on fiscal priorities in the context of government cutbacks.¹⁵ The notion that hosting the Olympics is an international honour was challenged by questions about the Olympics as a form of capitalist manipulation and alienation. As the Games grew closer, it became clear that VANOC would be temporarily transforming the way the city normally works, with Olympic lanes on major roadways, road closures, heightened surveillance, and threats to civil freedoms supposedly justified by the need to “cleanse” the city from any sources of disturbance or conflict. In other words, that hosting the Games was an unalloyed benefit to the city was by no means a foregone conclusion. In the event-preparation period, the Olympics thus provided the basis for considerable dialogue and debate among local residents, stimulating much civic and social interaction. In Vancouver, organizations such as No Games 2010 and the Olympic Resistance Network played a major role in contesting the positive interpretation of the Games provided by Olympic organizers by accentuating the controversial aspects of the Olympics.¹⁶

As the Games began, it was intriguing to watch the spirit of an interactive festival taking over the city. First, the Games transformed the public realm as people mingled on crowded streets that were closed to vehicular traffic to become pedestrian corridors. At peak times, an estimated 150,000 people crammed the Robson Street-Granville corridor. Second, multiple forms of entertainment became available: live sites and pavilions with massive tents were erected in parks, parking lots were provided with huge screens for people to watch events; live bands performed

in a variety of venues; and exhibitions were set up around the city. The Yaletown live site, for example, typically received twenty-five thousand visitors a day, with many people turned away because of its confined space. Third, interest was so high that access to everything, whether the live sites or the rapid transit system, involved lengthy lineups where people often broke out in cheers or singing. The mood was radically transformed: people were high-fiving strangers, dressing in costumes, and being entertained by buskers or flash mobs.

Fourth, the Olympics stimulated all kinds of social interaction and a sense of inclusion. Even people who watched the Olympics on television often did so with other people, whether in bars or at home parties, rather than alone.¹⁷ Local people did not need to have tickets to Olympic events to feel they were part of the Games. As John MacAloon notes, local people in a host city experience the Games not primarily through the spectacle created by the media but through interaction with others that is stimulated by being located at ground zero.¹⁸ These social connections in the public realm, which can be described as “urban encounters,” played a major role in helping Vancouverites experience their city in a new way. Helen Liggett notes that these encounters are important in the creation of “momentary hybrid spaces” where people come to see themselves not in terms of their mutually exclusive identities but in terms of how they share spaces important to city life.¹⁹ All of this rather unusual activity, at least compared to normal life in Vancouver, helped to contribute to the role of the Olympics as an iconic event for the city. But this mood was also transmitted to the rest of Canada by the media, and many reports were received of celebrations in cities across the country prompted by the Olympics because these were Canada’s Games.

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES: OPINION SHIFTS AND PATRIOTISM

One of the most significant outcomes of the Vancouver Olympics was the shift in public opinion about the Olympics. Before the event, Vancouverites had vigorously debated the costs and benefits for the city of hosting the Games. By the time the Games concluded, the share of people who thought that they would have a negative impact on the city had dropped from 36 percent to 10 percent, while those who thought they would have a positive impact had increased from 52 percent to 83 percent. By the end of the Games, 85 percent of Vancouver residents were following the Olympics either “very closely” or “moderately closely.” Although 83 percent thought the Games were a success, only 65 percent thought they were “worth it.”²⁰ This suggests that questions about economic value remained, and yet there

was an overwhelming sense that the Games had been successful. The reticence of people in Vancouver before the Games was reflected in a telephone poll conducted in January 2009, which found that while 73 percent of Canadians felt that holding the Games in Vancouver would have more benefits than drawbacks for the province, within British Columbia, only a small majority (54 percent) agreed, and 40 percent said that the drawbacks would outweigh the benefits. Similarly, 72 percent of Canadians were of the opinion that the Vancouver Games would have more benefits than drawbacks for the country as a whole, but only 52 percent of British Columbians concurred, and 39 percent felt that the opposite would be the case.²¹ Debt and misplaced fiscal priorities were the greatest concerns before the event, but as the Games unfolded, success was broadened to include no breaches in security and no organizational problems that would give the Vancouver Olympics a black eye.²² An analysis of responses to surveys at the end of the Games demonstrated that one of the most powerful factors in the attitude shift was the opportunity for residents to participate in the Olympics through non-ticketed events in the public realm, including free concerts at live sites and visits to the exhibitions and pavilions. This is not to suggest that all people were happy with the Olympics, but it is clear that the social dynamics of the event in the host city played a role in cooling opposition and creating fond memories of a unique iconic event not typical of normal urban life.

The second major outcome of the Vancouver Olympics was that they fostered a spontaneous expression of patriotism almost unheard of in the country before this event. While the most dynamic expressions of patriotism occurred in Vancouver, they were also experienced elsewhere in Canada. The nationwide department store chain the Hudson's Bay Company carried Olympic merchandise, with the most popular being the famous red mittens. Not only were over 3.5 million pairs of mittens sold across the country, but they were sold out within the first week. These mittens sported the Canadian maple leaf and were the clearest means of connecting the Olympics with Canada as a nation. On the streets of Vancouver, people wore other Canada-themed clothing, often burst out in cheers for Canada, and were even frequently heard spontaneously singing the national anthem, "O Canada." These were striking expressions of love for country—particularly since 40 percent of Vancouver's population is foreign born, half of whom had arrived in the last fifteen years. Recent immigration to other Canadian cities means that the "new Canadian" factor may also have played a role in expressions of patriotism elsewhere in the country: the Olympics provided the occasion for many new Canadians to express their new national identity in public for the first time.²³ The

emotional fervour building to the gold medal final men's ice hockey game on the last day of the Olympics—and against the United States, in particular—created the background for a patriotic frenzy that was strikingly unusual. Interestingly, all of this happened with little prompting. Merchants obviously helped by making the themed apparel available, but it was what people did with these products that was so dramatic. These raucous demonstrations of patriotism provide clear evidence for the iconic significance of the Vancouver Olympics in Canadian history.

ASSESSING THE ICONIC STATUS OF THE OLYMPICS IN CANADA

What role did the Vancouver Olympics play in developing a national consciousness? Without question, the 2010 Winter Games became a powerful vehicle for the expression of Canadian patriotism. Given Canada's failure to win a single gold medal in the two previous Olympics held in Canada, it was fascinating to watch the mobilization of financial resources to enhance Canada's medal count (or "podium performances") to become "a world leader in high-performance sport."²⁴ This initiative was clearly motivated by the patriotic goal of enhancing Canada's position in global sport and thereby building national pride. Even though Canada had a slow start in medal performances in the first week of the Games, which led to disappointment and scaled-back expectations, the second week brought a significant reversal, and Canada ultimately finished first with a record number of medals. Because of the prominence of hockey in Canadian culture, emotional fervour was particularly raised by the success of the women's hockey team and, especially, the dramatic overtime finish by the men's hockey team in the gold medal final on the last day of the Olympics, which created an almost scripted grand finale. The Own the Podium program was perhaps the clearest declaration in Canadian history of the role that high-performance sport via the Olympics might play in developing a more cohesive national spirit. This is because Olympic athletes have always been viewed not just as individual competitors but as representatives of a nation. Whether the global community would be impressed by the outcome of the Own the Podium program was less important than the sense of confidence and victory it gave to Canadians. In a country accustomed to being dominated by larger, more powerful nations, including in the Olympics, it is important not to underestimate this outcome.

A very important element in drawing national attention to the Olympics was the Olympic torch relay, described as a unique opportunity "to unify Canadians from coast-to-coast-to-coast and generate a feeling of national pride."²⁵ The torch

relay that led up to the 2010 Winter Games involved twelve thousand torchbearers who relayed the torch forty-five thousand kilometres to more than a thousand communities across the country, bringing the torch within one hour's drive of 90 percent of the population of Canada. Clearly, the torch relay provided a common symbol and focus for the country's inhabitants. While this common focus also provided opportunities for protesters to express their opinions, many Canadians spoke of the intense patriotic emotions evoked by the torch relay and associated rallies.

Another element of considerable importance was the attempt by organizers in Vancouver to incorporate Aboriginal peoples into the Olympic narrative. Given the sense of exclusion often felt by First Nations people in Canada—in particular, the contested nature of land claims and treaty rights in British Columbia, even in the territory in and around Vancouver—the Olympics were seen by some as an opportunity to draw international attention to the plight of Aboriginal people. Instead, VANOC was able to co-opt Aboriginal participation and inclusion by inviting the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations to be the four host nations for the Games. While some argue that this negotiated position allowed Aboriginal peoples to play a significant part in the host city experience through, for example, art and crafts merchandising and the Aboriginal pavilion, which drew thousands of visitors during the Games, others contend that this participation was mere tokenism that did little to reverse the sense of subordination felt by Aboriginal peoples.²⁶ Of course, the Olympics alone cannot reverse the effects of years of domination, but the Games undeniably represented an attempt to elevate Aboriginal cultures and, in some sense, to include them as foundational to Canadian consciousness.

Is it appropriate, then, to claim that the Vancouver Olympics serve as an iconic event for Canada as a nation? Will they be identified as an important moment in Canadian history or a significant marker in the development of a national consciousness? Patricia Leavy uses the term *iconic event* to describe events or experiences that are indelibly engraved on a people's spirit and memory and that serve as a repeated reference point in that group's history.²⁷ All societies have collective memories, which are often perpetuated and interpreted over time by the media or by governments in a way that enables an event to take on mythic proportions, so much so that the event becomes an important part of social and political discourse. But will the 2010 Vancouver Olympics play that role in Canadian national consciousness?

While such sentiments cannot be said to reflect the feelings of all Canadians, two letters to the editor that appeared in the *Vancouver Sun* on 2 March 2010, at the

conclusion of the Games, provide evidence of at least some of the intensely patriotic emotion that people expressed at the time. A woman who had been born in the United Arab Emirates but now lived in Canada described her experience this way:

The day of the biggest hockey game, and I thought that I would have to miss it for a meeting with about eighty women and girls at my mosque. I arrived and started to listen to our respected speakers, but soon we were interrupted by one of the organizers. He said we would stop our program to watch the hockey game and then continue later. The organizers had set up a forty-two inch HD television for us. Hockey is a passion for many and Islam tells us to love our country and support it in every way. All of us were rooting for Canada.

She then described how she had prayed that Canada would win and how the hall echoed with screams when the winning goal was scored. Although these women came from a place where hockey was not part of the culture, the Olympics gave them an opportunity to identify emotionally with their new country and to express their love for it. The writer of another letter commented that, while it was the Team Canada athletes who carried “the weight of a country on their shoulders,” the performance of these athletes had

given “regular folks” the ability to finally wear our red and white and shout: Yes, I am proud to be Canadian! . . . No matter what ethnic background we come from, province or village that we live in, we are finally ONE PEOPLE. . . . Children now have the visual memory, the written history, and the oral legends to fuel their own dreams.

Although this perspective may be somewhat overdrawn, it reflects the euphoria that many people experienced during the Games. Granted, because emotional reactions tend to be fleeting, they may not be a good barometer of reality over the long term. All the same, the memory of participating in the Olympics, whether as a spectator or an athlete, has the potential to be reawaken those feelings of reverence and pride.

CONCLUSION

There is no question that Canadian athletic success contributed to a very positive sense of national “victory” through the Vancouver Olympics. It can be argued that the phrase “Own the Podium” in itself connotes a sense of power, dominance, and even arrogance that runs contrary to Canada’s traditional spirit of national

inferiority. To the extent that the Vancouver Games represented a reversal of that mode of thinking and to the extent that it is possible that the performance in Vancouver may not be repeatable at future Olympics (indeed, Russia mounted a program similar to *Own the Podium* for its Sochi 2014 Games, and although Canada earned only one less medal than in Vancouver, we came third overall), it is possible that the 2010 Games on Canadian soil will be a watershed moment in Canadian history.

In hindsight, other factors may also contribute to that assessment. Around the time of the Vancouver Games, the Canadian government was in considerable disarray. Canada has always had very strong conflicting currents along regional and ideological lines, and the election of a minority government at the federal level in 2008 provided ample evidence of that fact.²⁸ Talk of a nonconfidence vote and a possible coalition government among the contending parties created a situation where Parliament had become dysfunctional and was prorogued for a second time in just over a year, from 30 December 2009 until the Olympics ended. It is ironic, then, that at a time of considerable political division, the Olympics could provide welcome relief, if not a sense of unity.

One of the major themes of the Olympic movement is the idea of legacy—namely, the long-term and enduring outcome of the Olympics for the host city and country. Whereas Olympic legacy was once thought of mostly in terms of the construction of new sport facilities to be used by athletes and the general public, the emphasis more recently is on how the Olympics make the host city a more pleasant, efficient, and sustainable place to live.²⁹ Again, this is often thought of in terms of hard legacies such as new airports, better transportation systems, better accommodations for tourists, or new facilities that can be converted for other uses after the Games are over.³⁰ As Richard Cashman documents for Sydney, not all Olympic outcomes prove to be positive, but the most valuable legacies are often the soft ones—national or civic pride, warm feelings and pleasant memories, a sense of accomplishment. These positive, but less quantifiable, effects are sometimes referred to as “emotional capital.”³¹ Some economists have argued that the question of whether the economic benefits exceed the economic costs must be answered negatively, or it must be acknowledged that it is impossible to calculate.³² What many do acknowledge is that often it is the soft legacies—the intangible, immeasurable outcomes—that remain. In the end, it is these soft legacies that will determine whether the Vancouver Olympics achieve lasting iconic status in the Canadian pantheon of national mythologies. What I have tried to explore in this chapter are the factors that might ultimately confer such a status on the Vancouver Games.

NOTES

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DEBATING DISABILITY

Paralympic Athletes and the Media

David Legg

Historically, persons with disabilities have been regarded as damaged—as less than whole and thus perhaps less than fully human. They have been categorized among the sick and consigned to institutions, they have at times been exploited as entertainment, and, more commonly, they have been viewed as personal tragedies, as people who are deserving of pity but are fundamentally “other,” not worthy of inclusion in society except as victims or misfits.¹ Paralympians have arguably contributed to changing these perceptions. In fact, athletes with disabilities suddenly seem to be in vogue, not the least because of the notoriety of Oscar Pistorius, the South African runner who, in 2012, competed in both the Olympic and Paralympic Games in London, earning two gold medals and a silver in the latter.² Similarly, American Amy Purdy, who won a bronze medal in snowboarding at the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games in Sochi, has garnered much media attention. How we communicate about athletes with disabilities has thus evolved, but the question remains how far these changes reflect a genuine shift in public consciousness.

The phrase “athletes with disabilities” is often used to refer not only to Paralympic athletes but also to athletes who compete in the Deaflympics and those with intellectual disabilities who compete in the Special Olympics. However, although the International Craig R. Hall, Andrew M. Johnson, Lorie A. Forwell, Molly Driediger, and Elaine N. Skopelja et al. Committee of Sports for the Deaf was at one time under

the Paralympic umbrella, it chose to separate, in part because members of the Deaf community do not see themselves as having a disability. Rather, they regard themselves as people who use a different language and share a distinctive culture. Athletes with intellectual disability (ID) have, on occasion, competed in Paralympic events, but they are predominantly served by the Special Olympics.³ For the most part, then, the Paralympics feature athletes with a *physical* disability.

The beginning of sporting opportunities for those with physical disabilities is linked to rehabilitation centres, primarily those created for World War II veterans who had sustained spinal injuries.⁴ Prior to World War II, 80 percent of paraplegics died within three years of their injury, and this low rate of survival discouraged efforts at rehabilitation. Following World War II, however, medical knowledge regarding spinal cord injuries improved dramatically, resulting in more effective rehabilitation techniques. In 1944, Sir Ludwig Guttmann, a neurosurgeon at Stoke Mandeville hospital, north of London, decided to use wheelchair sports for war veterans with spinal cord injuries as a form of treatment.

The success of sport as remedial exercise and clinical treatment provided the incentive for Guttmann to hold a day of formal competition, on 28 July 1948. The village of Stoke Mandeville thus became known as the birthplace of wheelchair sports. This original foray quickly grew into an annual international competition known as the Stoke Mandeville Games, first held in 1952 on the same day as the opening ceremonies of the London Olympic Games (likely by no coincidence). In 1960, Guttmann moved the Games to Rome, where they followed on the heels of the Olympic Games, which Rome was also hosting. Thus began a pattern for the Paralympic Games, which have been held approximately two weeks after each Olympic Games ever since.

Initially, Paralympic events were only for those with spinal injuries, but eventually the Games expanded to include athletes with visual impairments, cerebral palsy, and amputations. At the Rome Paralympic Games in 1960, which are considered to be the first official Paralympic Games, Pope John XXIII, speaking of the event's effect on the public and setting a precedent for communication about the Paralympics, stated: "You are the living demonstration of the marvels of the virtue of energy. You have given a great example, which we would like to emphasize, because it can be a lead to all: you have shown what an energetic soul can achieve, in spite of apparently insurmountable obstacles imposed by the body."⁵

From the first Summer Games in 1960 and the first Winter Games in 1976, the Paralympics were usually (but not always) held in the same country as the Olympic Games, but not in the same location. On the occasion of the 1988 Games in Seoul,

however, this changed, as the Korean royal family determined that the Paralympic Games should be accorded the same status as the Olympics—held in the same venues, with similar opening and closing ceremonies. This, too, set a precedent, which was followed in 1992 for the Barcelona Summer Games, in 1994 for the Winter Games in Albertville, France, and for every Paralympic Games thereafter. The pattern became formal policy following an agreement signed in 2001 between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), specifying that cities bidding to host the Olympic Games were also required to host the Paralympics.

I first attended the Paralympics in 1996, in Atlanta. Since then, I have attended four other Paralympic Games—in Salt Lake City (2002), Athens (2004), Vancouver (2010), and London (2012)—as well as four Parapan American Games, in Mar del Plata, Argentina (2003), Rio de Janeiro (2007), Guadalajara (2011), and Toronto (2015). In 1999, I became a board member of the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC), serving from 2011 to 2013 as the organization's president and as CPC representative on the board of directors of the Toronto 2015 Pan American and Parapan American Games Organizing Committee. This experience has afforded me ample opportunity to observe and reflect on the media portrayal of athletes with disabilities.⁶

As the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund rightly notes, people with disabilities have, over the decades, endured “misrepresentation, defamation, and lack of representation” at the hands of the news and entertainment media.⁷ That said, especially over the past five years or so, they seem to have acquired greater visibility. For example, in 2011, in a post-Christmas ad for children's clothing, Target quietly included a boy born with Down syndrome among the children pictured in the ad.⁸ And, in 2012, Katie Driscoll and Steve English created a website titled “Changing the Face of Beauty” in order “to promote the use of special-needs models in mainstream ads.”⁹ Yet people with disabilities are a long way from achieving equity. Those who do acquire a public profile tend to be exceptionally attractive individuals, such as the strikingly beautiful Aimee Mullins, a former Paralympic athlete who has had a successful career as a model and actress (and recently signed a major contract with L'Oréal).¹⁰

Amy Purdy—whose sponsors include Kellogg's, Coca-Cola, Duracell, and Procter and Gamble—has, in particular, become a corporate and media darling. After winning her bronze medal at the Sochi Paralympic Games, she returned home to compete on *Dancing with the Stars* and has since been featured in a commercial for the Toyota Camry, which aired during the 2015 Super Bowl. She has

also been interviewed on television talk shows. Another example is Noah Galloway, who, in November 2014, became the first person with a disability to appear on the cover of *Men's Health* magazine and was a guest on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. A former US Army serviceman, Galloway lost a leg and an arm as a result of injuries sustained in Iraq.¹¹

Prosthetics themselves have also been the focus of media attention, not merely as examples of cutting-edge technology but as objects of interest and beauty. In April and May 2012, London's SHOWstudio mounted an exhibition that aimed to "engage directly with prosthetics' ability to adorn, equip and enhance."¹² More recently, *Dezeen*, a British design and architecture magazine, profiled Canadians McCauley Wanner and Ryan Palibroda, who design and manufacture fashionable covers for prosthetic limbs. For the article, two Calgary-based athletes, snowboarder Michelle Salt and cyclist Jaye Milley, were photographed wearing these new prosthetic covers. A month later, *The Guardian* also featured an article about the design team.¹³

Despite the newfound visibility of athletes with disabilities, however, challenges remain. Critics argue that the focus falls not on the quality of the athletic performance but instead on the overcoming of a handicap. The public is encouraged to view Paralympians not simply as highly skilled athletes but as moral heroes, whose "strength" and "courage" have allowed them to triumph over daunting circumstances. The achievements of Paralympic athletes are thus reduced to a series of "feel good" stories, which, for William Peace, "is nothing short of demeaning."¹⁴ Such stories are not really about the athletes, who merely serve as symbols for the generic underdog—and, while they may restore our faith in the human potential, they arguably do little to alter underlying social attitudes. In London, only days before the 2012 Paralympic Games began, the *Guardian's* Frances Ryan noted that media coverage for the Games would probably not challenge, much less change, prevailing views of disability but would instead find ways to accommodate them. "An Olympian," said Ryan, "is deemed inspirational because of what they have achieved. A Paralympian is an inspiration because, despite it all, they've made it this far. It is, in part, a reflection of the unspoken thought that lurks in perceptions of disability: a disabled life is a dire existence that only the most courageous could 'overcome.'"¹⁵

The tendency to exclude Paralympians from the realm of genuine sport—to treat them as some sort of sideshow—is, of course, nothing new. Scholars Maria Hardin and Brent Hardin note that "Jean Driscoll's seventh win in the wheelchair division of the Boston Marathon was framed as a 'social event' in a 1996 edition

of *Runner's World*, and CBS's airing of the 1997's 'World's Fastest Man' competition included all events except one: a race between amputees."¹⁶ Anne Golden, who interviewed sports reporters at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympic and Paralympic Games, found that many US sports reporters did not view Paralympic sport as legitimate. Golden quotes one American reporter who remarked about Paralympic athletes and the Games: "They can't compete on the same level as the Olympic athletes, so it's a bone they throw to them to make them feel better. It's not a real competition, and I, for one, don't see why I should have to cover it."¹⁷

In 2008, Ivo van Hilvoorde and Laurens Landeweerd wrote that "for many people in disability sport, the athlete is still a 'patient combating their limitations,' instead of an elite athlete with specific talents or virtuosity."¹⁸ This theme was taken up in a paper by David Purdue and David Howe titled "See the Sport, Not the Disability," which examines the tension between elite athletic competition and social perceptions of disability. While Purdue and Howe acknowledge that media coverage of Paralympic events is increasing, they argue that a Paralympian still tends to be presented as an impaired athlete rather than as an athlete (who, as it happens, has a disability).¹⁹

This was the perspective to which I had grown all too accustomed and that I expected to encounter at the 2012 Paralympic Games in London. What actually ensued there, and again during the 2014 Winter Games in Sochi, was in many ways a welcome change. The first surprise at the Games in London was the degree of public engagement. In comparison to the four Paralympic events I had attended in the past, the level of interest in London from local fans seemed extraordinary. In particular, I reflected on the sparsely attended Paralympic Games I witnessed in 1996 in Atlanta, where the gigantic Centennial Olympic Stadium held only several hundred spectators. In London, I sat with eighty thousand.

The television coverage in London was also exceptional, with Channel 4 showing more than 400 hours of coverage, 150 of it in prime time. One exceptionally memorable late-night talk show on Channel 4 featured hosts with disabilities interviewing athletes about sport and disability. In a recent conversation with Ian Troop, the former CEO of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am and Parapan Am Games, he and I reflected on this show, speculating that it may have helped to secure, or at least to encourage, a shift in societal attitudes toward disability.

Even though television coverage of the London Paralympics was better than it had been for prior Games, criticism ensued. IPC president Sir Philip Craven requested that the word *disabled* be dropped from Games coverage.²⁰ David Howe, a former Canadian Paralympic athlete now living in the United Kingdom, lamented

that Paralympians are still viewed as “others” and as “supercrips.”²¹ Channel 4’s visually powerful “Meet the Superhumans” ad campaign—which included a television commercial that depicts Paralympic athletics training and competing, in the midst of which we suddenly see a bomb exploding, an ultrasound image and an anxious-looking pregnant woman, and a car flipping over on a highway—also provoked concerns.²² As a board member of the Canadian Paralympic Committee, I had participated in a similar discussion concerning two of our own promotional campaigns. One was our “Unstoppable” commercial, which shows an athlete with a prosthetic leg running on a track past scenes that trace the origins of his disability in a serious car accident, of the sort in which anyone could be involved. The second was CPC’s promotional campaign titled “Super Athletes.” The critics argued that Paralympic athletes should be portrayed not as victims of tragic circumstances who have managed to overcome their handicaps or, at the other extreme, as superhumans but simply as highly accomplished athletes.²³ In an analysis of *New York Times* coverage of the Paralympics, Jeremy Tynedal and Gregor Wolbring identified a similar pattern: athletes were stereotypically cast as “suffering entities,” on the one hand, or as “supercrips,” on the other.²⁴

In North America, meanwhile, criticism was based simply on the dearth of television coverage. NBC televised only 5.5 hours of the London Paralympics, with two of those hours broadcast after the Games ended.²⁵ In both the United States and Canada, the national Paralympic committees remained the official rights holders for broadcasting, since no private broadcasters were interested in purchasing the rights. Out of the twenty-seven nations that broadcast the Games, only in one other (Pakistan) did this situation exist. One might argue that the lack of interest on the part of North American broadcasters simply reflected a concomitant lack of enthusiasm of the part of sponsors, who were in turn reacting to what was predicted to be a low level of audience demand. In the UK, however, Channel 4 was able to attract more than fifty non-Olympic sponsors to bid on advertising slots for its broadcast, including Apple, Google, Kellogg’s, and Volvo.²⁶ Furthermore, Channel 4 has already secured advertising for the broadcast of the 2016 Paralympic Games in Brazil.²⁷

The unprecedented success of the London Paralympics evidently prompted North American broadcasters to rethink their approach. NBC’s coverage of the 2014 Winter Paralympic Games in Sochi ran to over fifty hours, which were also fully streamed on the US Olympic Committee website, and the network plans to broadcast close to seventy hours from Rio de Janeiro in 2016. As Gary Zenkel, head of NBC Olympics, pointed out, the increased coverage was made possible by the

relative ease with which the network was able to find sponsors. Although Zenkel admitted that comparative data from previous Games were sparse, he indicated that the viewing audience for Sochi 2014 was 40 percent higher than anticipated on NBC and 60 percent higher on NBC's cable network. "We have found a diamond in the rough with this amazing event," he enthused, "that is full of incredible human interest stories to tell."²⁸ While the result has been greater coverage of Paralympic events, Zenkel's reference to "human interest stories" is worth noting in light of the criticisms discussed above.

In Canada, meanwhile, CBC/Radio-Canada led the Canadian Paralympic Committee Broadcast Consortium in Sochi, providing more than 300 hours of multiplatform coverage including more than 90 hours of fully accessible TV broadcasts and more than 250 hours of digital streaming across all CPC broadcast consortium platforms.²⁹ An estimated 5.3 million Canadians tuned in to the English-language CBC broadcast during the first three days alone.³⁰ In addition, SendtoNews reported that its News Partnership Network "delivered 7.6 and 3.8 million broadcast impressions via CTV and Global Television, respectively, through the first days of competition."³¹ By the end of the Sochi Games, estimates were that at least 8.8 million Canadians, essentially one quarter of the nation's population, had tuned in.³²

Coverage of the London Paralympics in North American newspapers was also subject to critique. In a report focusing on persons with disabilities, Canadian senator Mobina Jaffer noted that during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Canadian newspapers ran 332 front-page stories about the Olympics and only 22 about the Paralympics.³³ A similar pattern was identified by Tynedal and Wolbring in their assessment of Paralympic coverage in the *New York Times* from 1955 to 2012.³⁴ The stark difference in the amount of coverage was not unique to North America, however. In an analysis of three New Zealand newspapers, Toni Bruce found that, although Olympians actually outnumbered Paralympians by a ratio of only six to one, papers carried forty-seven times more photos of the former. At the same time, Bruce discovered a striking difference. Most of the photos of Paralympians from countries other than New Zealand highlighted their disabilities—focusing on missing limbs, for example. When it came to New Zealand athletes, however, the photos portrayed the Paralympians as athletes first, with the focus falling on their power and precision—that is, on their athletic prowess.³⁵ If at least some Paralympians can be depicted as athletes rather than as "defective" athletes, this may be a sign of hope.

The fact remains, though, that the relatively scant coverage dedicated to Paralympians focuses, for the most part, on the disability or on how technology has enabled sport performance.³⁶ Unlike Greg Wells's popular study *Superbodies*, which was inspired by some of the amazing feats of able-bodied athletes during the Vancouver Olympics, discussions surrounding Paralympic athletes tend instead to emphasize the amazing feats of technology that help them to overcome their disability, rather than their exceptional physiological ability or their long hours of rigorous training. The focus on disability may in fact be purposeful, suggests Danielle Peers, a Canadian wheelchair basketball player who won a gold medal in Athens and is now completing her PhD at the University of Alberta. In an interview with the *Independent's* Peter Popham, Peers pointed out that Paralympic marketers have in fact "drawn from the specific structures, stories and techniques of the freak show." As she notes, although the freak show originated as fairground entertainment, the same spectacle of deformity resurfaced in the form of travelling medical shows, which often featured the same individuals. But, as Popham himself suggests, perhaps those who promote the Paralympics are merely "appealing to the same 'gawking' tendency when they focus on the 'tragic' bodies and back-stories of 'deformed' heroes, instead of their athletic achievements." As we saw earlier, both Channel 4 and the CPC aired commercials in which images of athletic performance are juxtaposed to scenes that associate disability with tragedy—tragedy that produces physical deformity. But, Peers asks, if Paralympians are athletes, then "why is that the most important thing you have to say about them?" She argues that this emphasis on physical difference may simply reinforce familiar attitudes and prejudices. "Focusing on bodies as the root of disability," she says, "is like seeing racism as a problem of skin color."³⁷

These criticisms may have been warranted, since reports of changes to attitudes toward persons with disabilities following the 2012 Paralympic Games are mixed. UK Paralympian Sophie Christiansen notes "a huge gap between how Paralympians are perceived and how the rest of the disabled community is seen." She suggests that the Games themselves may be partially to blame. "The public may assume they understand disability because of the Games," she says, but "they do not see the everyday lives of disabled people behind the scenes."³⁸ A UK-based study conducted by Scope, a charity focusing on disability, asked more than one thousand UK adults with disabilities about public attitudes toward disability. An overwhelming majority—81 percent—reported that people's attitudes toward them were not improving, and one in five believed that life had actually worsened in the twelve months following the Paralympic Games.³⁹ In a *Guardian* article, Ian Birrell

recognized this lost opportunity, suggesting that attitudes to disability “are so deep-rooted that the euphoria over the 2012 heroes could not spark a sea change. . . . Life remains difficult for a minority still segregated from the rest of society, the tide of intolerance strong.”⁴⁰ Journalists Peter Walker and Alexandra Topping confirm that British Paralympian success in 2012 brought celebrity status for some but did little for the daily life of members of the disability community.⁴¹

It is possible, however that the positive legacy of the Games is still to come. Tim Hollingsworth, CEO of Paralympics Great Britain, hopes that the lack of attitudinal change will be a generational challenge and that the positive implications of the Games have simply yet to emerge: “I hope we can look back at London as a real catalyst for change in young people’s attitudes towards disability. The way our athletes are treated as role models and heroes in schools has been one of the greatest positives to come out of London 2012.” Citing a survey conducted by the BBC’s *Newsround* in July 2013, Hollingsworth noted that over half of children aged eight to twelve “found the Paralympics more inspiring than the Olympics, while almost 70% said the Paralympics had changed their attitudes towards disabled people.” He also indicated that “the Parasport website, where people can find disability sports clubs, has had 800 more clubs registered since the Paralympics, and an increase in traffic of 300%.”⁴²

Other findings have likewise challenged the view that the 2012 Games had little real impact. In a UK government study conducted in 2014, 68 percent of Britons agreed that, among the general public, attitudes toward people with a disability had improved since the London 2012 Paralympic Games.⁴³ An August 2013 online poll, which surveyed 2,606 adults from all across the UK, detected a similar improvement in workplace attitudes: 39 percent of the respondents felt that their colleagues at work were more aware of disability, while 35 percent were of the opinion that, since the 2012 Games, people with a disability encountered fewer barriers with regard to work and promotion. All the same, 18 percent of those surveyed felt that “companies were less supportive of the needs of disabled people since the Paralympics.”⁴⁴ In short, it is not easy to measure how far the Games may have contributed to a permanent shift in attitudes.

Recognizing the power of the television and print media to shape attitudes, I and a number of my colleagues met one morning during the 2012 Games to discuss the question of what strategy the Canadian Paralympic Committee should pursue in order to develop the Canadian Paralympic movement. We identified seven potential options:

1. A focus on support from government or community-based institutions

2. Pity: asking for charitable support
3. Institutional guilt: comparing Paralympic sport to its better-funded and more visibly supported able-bodied Olympic peers
4. Inspirational messaging: emphasizing how much people with disabilities have overcome
5. Associative commercial: presenting disability as a good community brand
6. Indirect commercial: recognizing that people with disabilities, or their friends and families, buy stuff just like everybody else and therefore companies should market directly to this audience
7. Direct commercial: recognizing that we are all aging into disability of some form and that disability will thus become a growing market

The seventh strategy ultimately seemed to us the most promising. To varying degrees, the first four were becoming outdated. While the fifth and sixth approaches were still compelling, and might remain so for some time, we agreed that they would be rendered obsolete if the seventh option were pursued.⁴⁵

And it would appear that our instincts were right (or at least close to right). Since the 2012 Games, there has been a proliferation of companies using athletes with disabilities as spokespersons. A blog posted by the IPC presents several examples, some of which have already been noted, including Amy Purdy's Toyota commercial.⁴⁶ Another example, also showcased during the prime advertising Super Bowl slot, is Microsoft's commercial titled "Empowering Us All," which highlights the links between technology, innovation, and disability.⁴⁷ Craig Spence, IPC's director of Media and Communications, suggests that this newfound interest in having athletes with disabilities as spokespersons is a direct result of the 2012 London Paralympic Games: "Thanks to London 2012, Paralympic sport is now seen as sport, high performance sport that is practiced by some of the world's best athletes. London 2012 also helped encourage large corporations to realize the benefits of aligning their brand with para-athletes and para-sport."⁴⁸ In Canada, a recent example of this new alignment is Gatorade's use of sledge hockey in an ad in which several NHL players try their luck at competing with members of a Mississauga-based club.⁴⁹

In another advertisement, highlighted in an IPC blog, Guinness uses wheelchair basketball to help articulate the company's values of devotion, character, friendship, and loyalty.⁵⁰ Interestingly, the Guinness advertisement was created by BBDO, the same company that produced the Canadian Paralympic Committee's "Unstoppable" and "Super Athletes" campaigns discussed earlier. As was the case with these two

CPC commercials, the Guinness beer advertisement became the target of criticism. Blogger Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg listed five objections:

1. The unlikelihood that real friends would buy “expensive lightweight wheelchairs so that they can play basketball with their disabled friends”
2. The unlikelihood of real friends “learning how to use a manual wheelchair well enough to play basketball in it”
3. The fact that the one disabled person is “called out as an object of charity with ‘Next week, buddy!’”
4. The patronizing manner in which the person in the wheelchair is addressed as “buddy”
5. The fact that a disabled person becomes “an opportunity to show what fine, noble, humanitarian people” the other able-bodied men are.⁵¹

The media establishment, however, loved the advertisement, which again speaks to the complexities of communicating about people with disabilities. *Adweek* ran the headline “Guinness’ Wheelchair Basketball Ad Spun Circles Around Competitors in Q3,” while *Business Insider* proclaimed: “An Incredible New Guinness Ad Breaks the Industry Stereotype.”⁵² Again, the gap in perception points to the ambiguities of the message that has been communicated.

Ariel Schwartz, writing for Fast Company, also recognizes the growing convergence between disability and business. Schwartz profiles two companies—Altair, a product design and development company, and Eastman, a chemicals and plastics manufacturing supplier—that took up the challenge of creating “a series of concepts for next-generation blades” and together designed “a top of the line, premium set of blades that are fit for an Olympic or Paralympic athlete.”⁵³ In essence, these companies were using disability as a marketing opportunity—a means to demonstrate (and advertise) their technological prowess.

In 2014, CBC journalist Ioanna Roumeliotis reported on the growing convergence between business and disability. Products designed for disabled people can be good for everyone, she suggested. “The population of people with disabilities is the fastest-growing minority in the world when you include aging baby boomers. Globally, it’s about 1.3 billion people, a market roughly the size of China. Add their friends and family to the mix and the number doubles, to more than half the world’s population.”⁵⁴ This was the market that we reflected on during our breakfast conversation in London discussed earlier, and Roumeliotis reaffirms what we concluded. “We all have some kind of impairment at some time,” she notes. “Maybe we’re driving so we can’t put our eyes on the screen or we’re cooking and

our hands are filthy and we don't want to touch our phone. So making things that work without relying on all of our senses and all of our capabilities at all times is really helpful for the population at large."

At the same time, an oddly thin line exists between inclusion and exploitation. In 2014, Procter and Gamble featured a dad with a missing forearm in an ad for a dusting device known as the Swiffer in order to illustrate how easy the device is to use.⁵⁵ In 2015, Special Olympics athletes competed, for the first time, in ESPN's X Games, which showcase so-called extreme sports, while *National Geographic* named as its 2015 Adventurers of the Year Erik Weihe and Lonnie Bedwell, two kayakers who have a visual impairment.⁵⁶ While one can argue that such examples help to normalize disability, one can also argue that they represent cynical efforts to appear politically correct and to capitalize on the current hype surrounding Paralympic athletes.

The reality, then, is that mixed messages are rife. We seem to be struggling toward a new understanding, but we have certainly not achieved consensus regarding the most appropriate way to communicate about Paralympic athletes—or about people with disabilities in general. What is clear is that we are communicating about them more often. What is less clear is precisely what we are saying. In 2009, the Chicago 2016 Bid Committee created a video featuring Loul Deng of the Chicago Bulls and wheelchair basketball player Matt Scott.⁵⁷ "What is the difference between an Olympian and a Paralympian?" the video asked. The answer: "Nothing." This, I would argue, is the message that we must continue to communicate, in hopes that it will eventually sink in.

NOTES

- 1 For an excellent introduction to social perceptions of disability, see Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, *Exploring Disability*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2010).
- 2 Pistorius's notoriety stems in part from his struggle to gain permission from the International Association of Athletics Federations to compete alongside able-bodied athletes, despite objections that his prosthetic legs allow him an unfair advantage. In 2011, Pistorius successfully competed at the IAAF World Championships in Athletics, earning a silver medal in the men's 4 x 400 relay event. More recently, of course, Pistorius became the focus of media attention of a different sort, having been charged with murder and subsequently convicted of homicide in the shooting death of his girlfriend, Reeve Steenkamp, on 14 February 2013. For an analysis of his rise and fall, see David Smith, "Oscar Pistorius's Fall from Grace Forced South Africa to Reflect upon Itself," *The Guardian*, 21 October 2014.

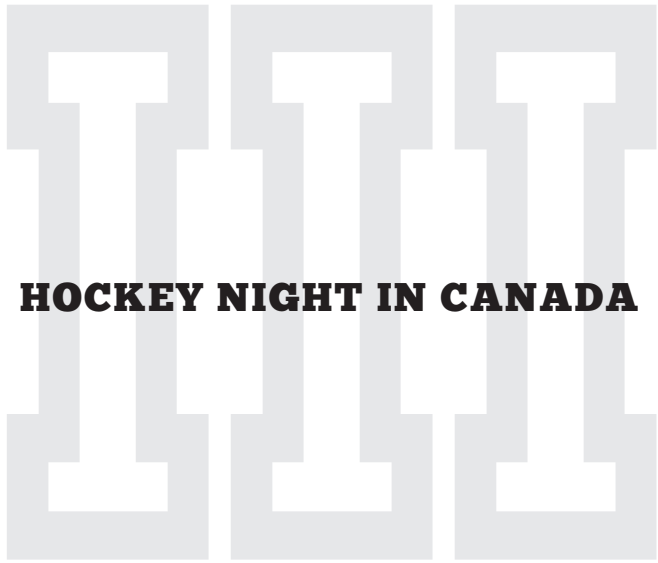
- 3 For further discussion, see David Legg, Claudia Emes, David Stewart, and Robert Steadward, "Historical Overview of the Paralympics, Special Olympics, and Deaflympics," *Palaestra* 20 (2004): 30–35.
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- 8 Rick Smith, "Target Is 'Down' with Down Syndrome: 5 Things Target Said by Saying Nothing at All," *Noah's Dad*, 2 January 2012, <http://noahsdad.com/target-down-syndrome/>.
- 9 Anne Lang, "Katie Driscoll Is Changing the Face of Advertising—with Special-Needs Models," *People*, 21 August 2014, <http://www.people.com/article/heroes-among-us-katie-driscoll-promotes-special-needs-models>.
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- 11 Again, for publicity, see "Paralympic Medalist Amy Purdy and Muhammad Ali Bring Voice to 'One Bold Choice' Toyota Camry Campaign," news release, *Toyota: USA Newsroom*, 23 January 2015; "How Great I Am," *YouTube*, 23 January 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjUfygo5mzw>; and "The Unstoppable Noah Galloway: From War to One-Armed Push-Ups on 'Ellen,'" *Men'sHealth.com*, 24 October 2014, <http://www.menshealth.com/fitness/noah-galloway-ultimate-guy>.
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HOCKEY NIGHT IN CANADA

10

HOCKEY, CONCUSSIONS, AND THE MEDIA

Tom Maloney

On 17 December 2009, the *Globe and Mail* reported that the brain of hockey tough-guy and fighter Reggie Fleming had been discovered in autopsy to be afflicted with a degenerative condition known commonly today simply as CTE, an acronym for chronic traumatic encephalopathy. While CTE had been found in football players, it had not been discovered in a hockey player, until Fleming.¹ The disease, neurologists at Boston University concluded, resulted from numerous concussions sustained from hits to the head.

The finding triggered the “concussion discussion” in Canada, as it related to hockey. While talk began slowly and cautiously, from the time of the Fleming discovery, no other subject pervaded the country’s attention so much as the concussion issue. It was prodded along by further CTE discoveries, by a sequence of nasty “head shots” in the National Hockey League (NHL), by testimonials of former players, and, most dramatically, by the head injury that Sidney Crosby sustained in a high-profile NHL game.

In this chapter, I review how a report about an unpronounceable medical condition found in a professional player from a bygone era fueled a debate that split communities and households apart across the country. As Canadians gradually, sometimes reluctantly, absorbed the information about concussions, a window opened into the long-undisturbed culture of hockey. Through traditional and

social media, including radio talk shows, television panels, and documentaries, Canadians debated the merits of changing the rules of the venerable sport to protect players from head injury, be they young or old, amateur or professional. Logical though such change may sound, it wasn't, and isn't, an easy conversation for this country to endure. Those who were imploring for reform were often shouted down by those wanting hockey to be left alone, and those wanting hockey to be left alone were slammed for their Neanderthal attitudes.

For media watchers, the challenges that the concussion debate presented to media outlets were riveting. Many outlets struggled with their level of engagement—especially, but not limited to, those with vested interest in the NHL's prosperity. Revenues formerly of the CBC and now of cable sports entity Rogers Sportsnet and to a lesser degree TSN, are highly dependent on the success of NHL broadcasts. Sports radio stations risked turning off their listeners with often complicated medical talk when many merely wanted to debate whether the Flames should trade Jarome Iginla, or the Leafs fire coach Ron Wilson? While the *Globe*, the *Toronto Star*, and others approached the topic of hockey concussion sporadically, some newspaper sports departments virtually ignored it until news broke—such as the NHL changing its rules or a player being lost to his team as a result of “upper body injury,” which had too often been the league's code for concussion. Perhaps the avoidance was due to the lack of resources required to report medical matters properly, or to editors' belief that their consumers preferred to see/read/hear about the games rather than a disturbing off-ice problem. During this period, Hockey Canada, the Calgary-based body that presides over the sport at the amateur level from coast to coast, was often mute on the issue in comparison to medical experts, some journalists, and many parents.

No matter, the combined forces raised concern to a degree that couldn't have been imagined prior to the Fleming discovery. Three years and three months after the revelation about Fleming, an Angus Reid poll of 2,017 Canadian adults found that 87 percent believed that hockey involved significant risk of head, neck, and brain injury; 88 percent supported elimination of body checking at the peewee level (ages eleven and twelve); and 67 percent of hockey parents knew of a player who had incurred a head, neck, back, or brain injury.²

This issue presented immense challenges for the sport at the major junior and professional levels, and for their fans. These leagues have marketed the violence of the sport for decades—Don Cherry's *Rock 'em Sock 'em* videos have been sold annually since 1989. Hockey is the only sport outside of boxing and mixed martial arts that implicitly endorses fighting as part of its business and game strategy.

Much like NASCAR spectators anticipating a crash, to this day fans rise to their feet as one when two heavyweights square off for a fight on the ice or a player gets smashed into the boards. But knowing what they know now, it is appropriate to cheer such violence?

“The problem with this century-old tradition is that it’s running up against reality,” wrote Bruce Dowbiggin, a sports media columnist for the *Globe and Mail*. “How can a league bent on eliminating head shots and concussions still pretend that punching someone in the head is consistent with safety?” Dowbiggin goes on to cite the responses of panel members on a Sportsnet *Insiders* broadcast. A former general manager of the NHL, Neil Smith, essentially denied the problem, claiming that concussions “rarely” result from punches to the head but are chiefly caused by high-speed impacts. Another former NHL executive, John Shannon, took issue with Smith. “Fighting is responsible for 25 per cent of concussions,” he said, but then went on to make the consent argument. “As distasteful as it may be to some,” he commented, fighting nonetheless involves “two willing combatants.” It also involves leagues unwilling to ban it. Instead, coaches deliberately kept fighters on their rosters, not only because fans seem to enjoy the spectacle but because the emotional charge of fights can serve a purpose. As another panel member, journalist Scott Morrison, pointed out, fighting is still commonly viewed as “a strategy, a momentum changer, a release valve.”³

No matter which side of the argument they adopted about body checking or fighting or hits to the head, parents and league executives alike ultimately realized that the reality of concussion had to be acknowledged. Parents began to ask whether they were subjecting their kids to unknown harm; fathers who had played hockey wondered about the long-term damage their own brains may have sustained during a lifetime of ignorance about concussion. Sherry Bassin, a long-time major junior hockey executive in Ontario, spoke at a seminar on concussion in Peterborough, Ontario. Held in the spring of 2012 and chaired by Ken Dryden, the event attracted parents, teachers, and coaches from the community. Bassin revealed that a player on his Fort Erie Otters team had been repeatedly concussed, yet when the Otters accepted the advice of three different neurologists to keep the player off the ice, the player’s parents reacted angrily.⁴ “That’s how much change is needed,” Bassin said.

A number of mileposts in the news chain kept the conversation percolating. Among them are the following:

- During the 2009–10 hockey season, a team of researcher led by doctors Paul Echlin and Charles Tator followed a pair of Junior C hockey teams for

fifty-two games. They reported that seventeen of sixty-seven players suffered concussions and that the teams were ill-prepared to diagnose and deal with the injuries. The doctors argued that the results of this study should be interpreted as symptomatic of a problem that affects the sport at all levels.⁵

- In March 2011, a second discovery of CTE was made, this time in the brain of a retired player from the modern era, Bob Probert.⁶ Marty McSorley, a long-time protagonist for the Edmonton Oilers and Los Angeles Kings, admitted to cognitive dysfunction such as short-term memory loss;⁷ corporations, politicians and Prime Minister Stephen Harper reacted publicly to an ugly hit by Boston's Zdeno Chara on Montreal Canadien Max Pacioretty⁸; and the NHL at its annual meeting of general managers instituted a tighter protocol for in-game concussion evaluation.⁹
- In the summer of 2011, active hockey players Derek Boogaard, Rick Rypien, and Wade Belak died, and speculation tied their deaths to head injuries sustained while playing hockey. Later that year, Boston University researchers announced that CTE had been discovered in Boogaard's brain.¹⁰
- In 2012, Hockey Calgary's twenty-four member associations debated and voted on a proposal that would have banned body-checking at the peewee level. The vote had been prompted by an earlier study showing peewee players to be three times more vulnerable to concussion in a league that permitted body checking, compared with a league that banned it.

If the Fleming case and subsequent media reporting about concussive injuries in the NHL hadn't been sufficiently provocative, a head injury suffered by Sidney Crosby forced awareness on even the willfully ignorant.¹¹ During the "Winter Classic" on 1 January 2011, a game played outdoors in Pittsburgh, Canada's most famous player crumpled to the ice when David Steckel, then with the Washington Capitals, hit him from the blind side with his shoulder near the end of the second period. Despite being obviously staggered by the collision, Crosby returned to play the third period. Four days later, in Tampa, the captain of the Penguins suffered another blow to the head from Viktor Hedman of the Lightning. Still, the Penguins put him on the team plane to Montréal with the intention of using him in the ensuing game against the Canadiens. But he did not play that game. Rather, due to severe concussion symptoms, Crosby returned to Pittsburgh on a private plane for further evaluation.

He then plunged into the mysterious, frustrating, dark fog of post-concussion syndrome. Three hundred and twenty days passed, followed by a short-lived return to league play. Ultimately, he would play a total of only twenty-eight games over a two-year span. Had we known then what we know now, with league concussion

protocol now stiffened by formal NHL regulation, one wants to believe that Crosby would not have played that third period, would have sat out the game against Tampa Bay, would not have been put on the plane to Montréal. We know what we know, in part because of Crosby's injuries. His absence from the game put a famous face on the CTE discoveries in Fleming and Probert and gave the microphone to medical professionals who had been desperate to be heard on the dangers of concussion. For years, their warnings had gone unheeded.

Sidney Crosby's corporate sponsors value him for his capacity to command attention as the sport's leading player with the boy-next-door persona. People listen to him. However, during his recovery, Crosby and his family resisted invitations to bring youths, parents, and the hockey community at large inside the recovery process, either by communicating through traditional media or via social media vehicles such as Twitter or Facebook. In public, he provided little information, speaking only hesitantly and diplomatically about the NHL's need to better safeguard its players. By being open, he could have been exponentially more effective than academics with their research data, doctors with their warnings, even hospitals with their neurological autopsies.

What Canadians weren't told was that Crosby had suffered his first concussion as an eleven or twelve year old when playing a game of wall ball in Halifax, according to his words quoted in a Pittsburgh newspaper blog published four years prior to his 2011 concussion.¹² Charles Tator, a neurologist at Toronto Western Hospital, became the country's leading educator during this concussion awareness period, once taking on Don Cherry, the CBC *Hockey Night in Canada* commentator, with a highly publicized critique.¹³ When told of Crosby's prior experience with concussion, Tator responded in an email to me on January 6, 2012: "Hopefully, that is all he had prior to the Steckel shoulder-to-head attack. The blow fell on 'prepared ground.' And that is the problem—the brain does not go back to normal each time."

Revelations such as Tator's came to be both craved and feared as the concussion debate rolled out—are some individuals genetically predisposed to concussion? Once concussed, is a person more liable to be concussed again? How long does recovery take? Does one ever fully recover? Triggered by the Fleming case and propelled by Crosby's concussion issues, the *Globe*, as just one example, published more than two hundred articles about sport-related concussion in a three-year span as news unfolded. The public wasn't certain what to make of it all. Canada's national game, a sport ingrained in its culture and its history, seemed to be coming under attack as its greatest player went into a shell. In February 2011, Roy MacGregor wrote in the *Globe and Mail*:

It is a great game, but it surely needs some work.

The problem is that head shots have become the global warming of hockey, a polarizing issue that pits the disbelievers against the believers, with no results to show for all the braying back and forth.

Hockey Night in Canada, with its vast array of old-school thinkers, has become Fox News. The mainstream media, with their editorials demanding action against head shots, have become Al Gore.

So nothing ever seems to get done.

The loudest shouting has come from the naysayers. . . .

The quieter voices are more numerous, but have gained little. The NHL did bring in a specific rule against blatant headhunting, but still lags far behind other team sports when it comes to offering protection for vulnerable brains.¹⁴

Before Bob Probert died of a heart attack at age forty-five in July 2010, he had become fascinated by the news from the United States about CTE being found in the brains of dead National Football League players. He told his spouse that hockey players needed to come forward along with their football-playing brethren. Indeed, Probert donated his brain to Boston University, and on 2 March 2011, the *Globe* reported findings of CTE in that brain.¹⁵ The Fleming discovery had produced simultaneous awe and disregard. This one lit a fuse in the country.

Hundreds of readers posted comments to the *Globe's* online article about Probert. Radio stations across the country, along with television sportscasts, reported the findings. Looking back on the seminal reaction, it's possible that a great many athletes could relate to Probert on a certain level. While he was an elite tough-guy, an enforcer with considerable technical skills, he also symbolized the testosterone element prevalent throughout hockey, seen in the pro game and the backyard rink.

That male spark plug motivates one player to ram another player into the boards, to fell an opponent with a thudding check, to drop the gloves for a bare-knuckles fight, to forearm-smash an opponent's head—and, more profoundly, it also motivates the victim of such violence to get up and continue playing as though he had suffered no damage. After getting knocked silly, the first instinct of a player is to take the next shift, to attend the next practice, to play the next game. Until the Probert discovery, no one even thought about stopping the player from doing so.

Now people were wondering how their behaviour in sport was affecting or had affected them, their friends, their relatives, and their offspring. Many of them had been jammed head-first into the boards too, or felled by a fist, or had a stick

jammed against their heads. Because concussions are also sustained in other sports including football, basketball, and soccer, the discussion veered outside the hockey zone. Immediately in the wake of the Probert news, the *Globe* published an article about a forty-nine-year-old male named David Greenaway who'd suffered multiple concussions as a nonprofessional football player.¹⁶ In an interview, he cited the sudden attention being paid to youths and to NHL players, but asked rhetorically: What of the hundreds upon hundreds of former athletes who had moved on from competitive sport and kept with them the legacy of the concussions sustained while playing? "What about Dave?" he asked.

The online *Globe* article generated another hundred comments. One writer, under the name of "anonymous74," encapsulated the concerns expressed privately to doctors with a highly personal post:

I'm a thirty-seven-year-old male who has played competitive contact sports my entire life. In my childhood, I was knocked unconscious from blows to the head three times, resulting in concussions. I receive numerous other undiagnosed concussions as well, I am sure. As an adult, I continue to play contact sports and have suffered two more concussions in the last five years. I have also suffered from depression my entire life, but the depression has been much worse in the last five years, largely because I lost my wife six years ago. [. . .] However, reading in this article that there might be a connection between concussions and depression really makes me wonder if my struggles with depression are not limited to the grief I feel over losing my wife. My history of concussions could very well be a factor, and one I wish I could explore further.

Another, calling himself "Laughing Lodro," wrote:

The article resonated with me because it is around my teen years, when I played football at a serious level, that I can pinpoint significant changes in my behaviour, my personality and in my academic achievement. I had developed an extremely poor attention span, was more apt to "feeling down," lacked impulse control and was quite drawn to stimulating behaviours (drinking, smoking pot, misbehaving).

These sorts of contributions inevitably drew rapid-fire responses from the leave-it-alone faction, the traditionalists. A commenter pen-named "johnnyleroux" wrote, for example: "What a load of crap. I've never heard so much whinin' and complainin' in all my days! These posts are haunted by sissies. Take your hits like a man and move on. You've probably suffered more brain damage just watchin' television and drinking artificially sweetened drinks."

Male machismo has been the lifeblood of hockey from the dawn of the sport. Its voice is heard today in beer league dressing-room banter (in a mono-sex atmosphere immune from workplace harassment guidelines), in the fathers' voices yelling "encouragement" to their sons from the stands at those peewee games, in the primal roar of a crowd rising as one when a fight breaks out during a NHL game. That's simply how it has been, and perhaps how it always would have been. A senior league player died in Ontario after hitting his head on the ice, dropped by a fist. Nothing changed. Youths, their spinal cords more vulnerable as teens, were paralyzed after being pushed into boards. Nothing changed.

Then along came the spectre of concussion, the veritable cold shower. People had to learn about it, had to talk about it. Ken Dryden, the Hall of Fame goaltender, had refused a couple of invitations to write about the sport for the *Globe*, but the concussion issue spurred a change of mind, and he has since become the face of reform. He began writing after the Fleming case but before Crosby went down. Ten days after the news about the discovery of CTE in Probert's brain, in a 12 March 2011 *Globe* article headlined "Head Shots Should Be History," Dryden wrote that fifty years from now, without meaningful action toward prevention, our prolonged ignorance of the concussion issue would be likened to the period when cigarette smoking was not considered hazardous to health. "The brain weighs about three pounds," he wrote.

It floats inside a boney skull, surrounded by spinal fluid, not quite in contact with the skull. Except when the head is jarred.

Then, the brain moves, ricocheting back and forth, colliding with the sides of the skull, like a superball in a squash court. With hard-enough contact, the brain bleeds. And the parts inside it—the neurons and pathways that we use to think, learn and remember—get damaged.

Why would we ever have thought otherwise?

Why would we ever have believed that when the dizziness goes away, everything goes back as it had been before?

The *Globe* submitted Dryden's first three articles to the National Newspaper Awards for consideration, and he was named a finalist in the 2011 sports category. To support the nomination, I asked him to explain what had eventually drawn him to the keyboard. He replied:

I wasn't intending to write anything . . . I was still an MP, we had a probable election coming up, and I wasn't much interested in writing about hockey anymore. I felt I had nothing more to say. But I kept seeing all the concussions of NHL players, and maybe more than that, reading the obituaries of

football players, in particular Bobby Kuntz who had been one of my favourite players for the Argos. How these players seemed to be dying younger than most people die, and how they had spent their last years in the living death of dementia. I thought all this was more serious than what I was hearing. So I sat down in front of my screen and tried to find a way of putting things that might hit home. I wrote how we all look back on the past and shake our heads at certain things—slavery, women having not even basic rights, cigarette smoking—and wonder about people of that time, “How could they’ve been so stupid?” But also knowing that fifty years from now, people will look back on us the same way. About what? In sports, I thought, it will be about head injuries. All those big bodies colliding at high speed: how could they/we have been so stupid?”¹⁷

In an article for *The New Yorker* magazine on the subject of CTE detection in football players, Malcolm Gladwell stated that the debate at the core of the research is whether brain injury “is incidental to the game of football or inherent in it.”¹⁸ The question was equally applicable to hockey, and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman responded to it implicitly in that inflammatory month of March 2011. A tighter concussion-evaluation protocol was introduced at a meeting of the league’s general managers in the days after news of the Probert discovery broke. Data collected over a two-year span and presented at the meeting demonstrated that 44 percent of concussions had been sustained from legal hits, 26 percent from accidental hits, 17 percent from illegal hits, and 8 percent from fights, leaving 5 percent undetermined.¹⁹

“This notion that the players have no respect for each other, and they’re going around hitting each other in the head on a regular basis, and that’s what’s causing all the concussions just isn’t accurate,” Mr. Bettman said. “There’s no one single thing causing concussions. There is no magic bullet to deal with this. I know that it’s an emotional, intense subject, particularly for our fans. We get it. But dealing with this issue is not something you can do whimsically or emotionally. You really have to understand what’s going on.”²⁰

To eradicate testosterone-fueled violence—that unchecked *Mad Men* culture—from the game would be to alter its very nature, or at least the nature of the game that sells tickets. In youth hockey and recreational leagues, however, the argument wasn’t complicated by the business of hockey. It was reported that coaches were teaching kids to turn their backs, to exploit the “STOP” patch stitched to the backs of minor-league jerseys as a defensive tactic: Marty McSorley said: “It has to be addressed.”²¹

Indeed, at the recreational level, with the danger of concussion as a prism, the culture of the sport became open to kitchen-table discussion. Hockey moms became empowered, perhaps for the first time, as they questioned the violence that is characteristic of, if not endemic to, the sport. Those who love the sport for its speed and fluid play and deplore the head-hunting and the fighting—they got a voice too.

Social media became a conduit, going beyond reports in the traditional media about NHL incidents to relevance at the community level. What happened to Johnny last night? What did the referee do? Will the league suspend the offender? What are they saying?

During the spring of 2012 in Calgary, as Janice Paskey discusses in her chapter in this volume, a debate about eliminating body-checking at the peewee level was waged, largely online and at local association meetings. It split the city. Hockey Calgary president Todd Millar led the group in support of a ban. University of Calgary research had shown that in a league where body-checking was allowed, peewee players were three times more likely to be injured and four times more likely to sustain a concussion compared to a league in Québec in which body-checking was banned.²² On the other side of the debate, some parents argued that their kids would be placed at a disadvantage in tournaments against teams from leagues that allowed body-checking as a matter of course. They threatened to move their kids out of the jurisdiction if the proposal passed. These parents complained about Hockey Calgary becoming dictatorial, and ultimately, they won. In a secret vote, the twenty-four member associations voted against the proposal, leaving peewee-level body-checking at status quo.

Three months after the vote, it was discovered that Millar's passion about the issue had been expressed in a personal blog, written in the midst of the debate: "There are so many morons in this game that can't understand that, by simply changing a simple rule, you will save the well-being of eleven and twelve-year-olds. Children's safety should come before any of the moronic arguments I have heard." When a local newspaper reported those words, the city erupted and Millar resigned from a position he had held for seven years.²³

In 2012, Andrea Winarski of Markham, Ontario, calling herself part of a burgeoning national movement of hockey moms, launched a Facebook petition with the goal of ending body-checking from bantam age on down, at all levels. She noted that pediatric associations in Canada and the United States had been calling for such bans since 2000, without success. The tension between reformers and traditionalists remained persistent in the conversation in social media. From the time

of the Fleming story, Winarski ran headlong into the stone wall of that ingrained hockey culture: hockey is just fine as is, injuries happen, the game will take care of itself. “You should see some of the comments on my Facebook,” Winarski told *Globe and Mail* writer Roy MacGregor. “I’ve been called a p-u-s-s-y and a lot worse than that.”²⁴

Even so, the tide shifted, gradually, over time. Commentator Mike Milbury, of CBC’s *Hockey Night in Canada*, at one time personified the resisters. As the NHL pondered rules and changes to mitigate the increasing occurrence of concussions, Milbury decried the coming “pansification” of hockey during a broadcast and insulted reformers at the community level as “soccer moms.”²⁵ While the backlash from gay advocacy groups may have been predictable, not so foreseeable was the negative feedback from viewers toward his seeming endorsement of the sport’s unchecked, reckless violence.²⁶ Milbury would change his stance. When New York Islanders forward Trevor Gillies attacked Minnesota’s Cal Clutterbuck viciously in March 2011, Milbury called for the league to suspend Gillies permanently, saying that sort of hit has no place in hockey. Gillies received a ten-game suspension.

Meanwhile, as an extension of the debate about hockey violence, people demanded medical education about concussion. Traditionally, coaches at all levels of the sport had simply waited for athletes to “let the cobwebs clear” before getting back on the ice. Long-term effects were thought to be restricted to boxers, who had exhibited symptoms associated with Alzheimer’s. Now, the media reported that repeated concussions in hockey and other sports could also cause dementia and depression, especially when the recovery process was cut short. Individual patient records had been left incomplete over the years, with doctors not always understanding what they were dealing with; neither players nor their doctors could be specific about numbers of concussions players had sustained. Those who had suffered concussion while playing hockey as youths and adults now wanted medical guidance about the long-term consequences, minor-hockey and school coaches needed to know how to detect and deal with concussion, and parents became increasingly concerned for their kids’ welfare.

Doctors responded to the demand for information, often through the media, but bedside manner in the case of concussion amounted to dishing out some frank news about the state of the science. People were informed that there is no treatment for concussion, that nothing eliminates symptoms completely. Experts admitted that concussion research is in its infancy relative to research into cancer prevention and cure.

Others began to fill the information gaps. Former player Keith Primeau, a victim of four documented concussions, co-founded the educational website Stopconcussions.com. Dr. Charles Tator founded ThinkFirst and SportsSmart Injury Prevention programs. Dr. Paul Echlin assembled academic studies for a dedicated website. Ken Dryden began chairing all-day seminars in Peterborough, Guelph, Calgary, and other cities. Just as doctors say medical research about concussion is in its infancy, the discussion in this country is far from over. Dryden recently wrote:

People now know that concussions are a big problem, and that they, and others, don't know as much as they need to know. Doctors and researchers don't; coaches, players, parents and sports officials don't. They know that the number of concussions is not because of a stretch of bad luck that will pass, but is instead an on-going problem. They aren't sure whether their sons or daughters, grandsons or granddaughters should play hockey or football. They're worried and they don't know what to do.²⁷

At the Peterborough seminar chaired by Dryden, eighteen-year-old Laura Young spoke emotionally about the lingering, maddening effects of a third concussion sustained while playing hockey. She had to take a year off from school. Former pro hockey player Scott Wasson opened up about taking a dozen concussions and about the misery inflicted on his family due to related depression, anger, and the medication required to deal with the headaches. His kids love sports, he said, and yet he wonders whether it's wise to let them play. In Peterborough, the Youth Sports Concussion Program was established to give standard concussion management guidelines to primary care providers and specialists and to provide information about concussion through a dedicated website.

Two years after being concussed, and three years after the Fleming discovery, Sidney Crosby made an about-face, declaring himself ready to take on the role of lead guardian. In February 2013, *Globe* writer Roy MacGregor quoted Crosby calling for player safety to be recognized as a prime directive.²⁸ He said responsibility rests with everyone associated with the sport, from parents of kids playing Timbits to NHL executives. "I think it starts when you're younger," Crosby said. "That's definitely where you learn all your habits and all the things that you're going to grow up and do. But that being said, I think the NHL is obviously what everyone watches, so there's got to be a balancing act there." He emphasized that the high visibility of the league in Canada casts players as role models on the ice, and thus, the manner in which they conduct themselves influences play at all levels: "That's what all the kids and all the young players are trying to play as—that's what they're watching."

The conversation about concussion in hockey opened the sport to inspection. Attitudes changed. Canadians still embrace the game above all others. But in order to protect those who play it, they wanted a say in how it's organized and legislated.

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11

THE HOCKEY CALGARY BODY-CHECKING VOTE

Colliding Views

Janice Paskey

He said he had had a headache for four years. There was an audible gasp from the audience as this handsome teenager, once a promising hockey player, described his concussion symptoms to a crowd in Calgary.

Yes, the headache was always there, he replied when queried. Every day. His interviewer? The famous ice hockey player, lawyer, and politician Ken Dryden. It's not often you can draw a parallel between Ken Dryden and Oprah. But here he was: the hulking one-time goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens, on stage in a comfortable armchair, interviewing athletes facing him on comfortable couches—the TV lights so bright, however, that some of these athletes winced, and for good reason. Each one detailed his or her concussion experience, and the bright lights still bothered some of them.

In a calm voice, Dryden drew them out. If they appeared shy, he helped them along with their story. Did you have symptoms? Was there something you could have done differently? How does this concussion affect you now? The interviewees were three male hockey players (two teens, one pro), downhill skier Cary Mullen, and Kristina Groves, the Olympic speed skater, but at this April 2013 presentation hockey talk dominated.

Most hockey injuries are due to a practice called body checking which is defined as “a player’s attempt at gaining the advantage on the opponent with the use of the body. Checking results when two opposing players collide while skating in opposite directions or when positioning and angling allow the checker to use the force of the body to gain the advantage.”¹ It is the leading cause of concussions among minor hockey players.

Since 2011, Ken Dryden has become the celebrity face of concussion awareness in Canada. This was one of many of his “concussion-awareness nights” across the country. In the preceding chapter in this book, former *Globe and Mail* sports editor Tom Maloney writes about persuading Dryden to write for the *Globe*. Finally, Dryden relents. The issue is too important to let the opportunity pass. So he writes, and writes. He morphs into a muted talk show host for road shows like this one in Calgary, which kicks off a major head-injury conference. It’s all very civilized, but then hometown NHLer Jim Peplinski strides onto the stage. The rough-and-tumble former Calgary Flames player hugs Carolyn Emery, whose research reports that Alberta’s peewee players have almost the same concussion rates as NHL players. Peplinski’s energy occupies the stage—he’s a member of “Team Dryden,” but he cuts through the polite demeanour of the proceedings. As Hockey Canada’s Paul Carson and Hockey Alberta’s Rob Litwinski detail how their associations are “board driven,” and the boards don’t want to remove body-checking for kids, Peplinski goes on the offensive: “Do we need more evidence? The medical community has done its job. They don’t need to prove themselves to anyone, anymore.” People clap. He continues: “Society underestimates the risks of these contact sports. The money completely fogs people’s minds.” In a swoop, Peplinski takes on the issue of hockey body-checking in his hometown, the epicentre of an exceedingly nasty amateur sport incident: the Hockey Calgary body-checking vote of 2012.

I was part of that vote, and this chapter is about that debate. In Alberta, at the time of the Calgary vote, body-checking began with peewee players—eleven and twelve year olds. Based on injury evidence, Hockey Calgary spearheaded an effort to limit the practice among minor hockey players. The organization needed members (mainly hockey parents) to agree. Calgary’s debate was playing across the nation as new knowledge about concussions butted up against a rejection of “wussifying” the sport and possibly making elite players less ready for the big leagues.

From 2008 to 2012, I was a voting member on the board of directors of a small 550-player minor hockey association in Calgary. Ours was one of the twenty-four associations that formed Hockey Calgary, which oversees competitive minor hockey, as well as girls’ hockey and recreational hockey (a no-practice, no-body-checking

league). My time on the board of directors coincided with Hockey Calgary's bid to limit body-checking for eleven to fourteen year olds throughout the 2011–12 competitive season, an effort that culminated in a June 2012 vote at Hockey Calgary's annual general meeting. The vote drew national media interest.

The contentious experience of sitting at a boardroom table with other parent volunteers trying to decide how our association would vote ("for" or "against" body-checking for eleven to fourteen year olds) was an interesting case study in the disconnect between the communication of peer-reviewed medical evidence and the belief systems of some parents. Sadly, it's about utter nastiness, too.

"Mom, I want to play hockey." Like many, I got into hockey as a parent. My children have played minor hockey in Calgary for a decade. The eldest is also a teen referee, and my husband is a volunteer head coach. Hockey is the most popular winter sport in Canada for children ages five to fourteen. Some 570,000 play the game competitively, according to Hockey Canada. It is the third most popular sport in the nation, after soccer and swimming.²

Unlike soccer and swimming, hockey players see more avenues to make money. Only a teeny weeny percentage succeed, but hope reigns eternal. This is the "fog" that Peplinski refers to, and it feeds into body-checking, which is considered a key skill needed to "make it" at elite and professional levels. University scholarships are a financial lure as well. Hockey writer Ken Campbell points out in *Selling the Dream* that all the money spent paying for everything that gets a player scholarship ready (team fees, clothing, personal trainers, travel, camps, all of which can cost \$200,000 or more, he writes) often undermines the financial gain of a scholarship. And, Campbell argues, think of it this way: universities offer a series of four one-year contracts, not a four-year ride. Play the World Juniors? Hockey Canada gets \$21 million. The players? They get track suits.³

It's not just the money that differentiates male competitive hockey; it's also body-checking, which is not allowed in girls' leagues, though girls can play alongside boys in minor hockey, and some do. This is a gender issue that puts boys at greater risk than girls and demands further examination.

The practice of body-checking is introduced early in a young hockey athlete's career, sometimes at nine or ten years of age at the atom level, but most likely at eleven or twelve at the peewee level. In Québec, it is a bit later, at thirteen. The age at which body-checking becomes part of the game is a hockey demarcation line. In 2011, registrants who signed up for Calgary's recreational hockey league were asked why they joined the league. The most common response for peewee- and bantam-level players was to avoid body-checking.⁴

Tension and an impetus to change started building in Alberta in 2009. The *Globe and Mail* began covering autopsy findings of pro-athlete brains (football and hockey), and concern about brain damage mounted. I was surprised to find years of research urging caution, and in 2010 in Calgary, even more persuasive evidence emerged from a credible hometown source—Carolyn Emery, an epidemiologist, physiotherapist, and professor at the University of Calgary. She had also been a volunteer coach in my hockey association. Because Québec didn't have body-checking at the peewee level and Alberta did, Emery and her team of researchers compared Québec and Alberta players. The results provide one of the most-cited figures on the subject: there were three times (300 percent) more game-related injuries for Alberta kids like mine (including severe injury and severe concussion).⁵ This added support to other studies that showed body-checking to be the leading cause of ice hockey injuries.⁶

Emery was interviewed widely about her study. Since the University of Calgary falls within my hockey association's boundaries, I was asked by the University of Calgary to be a parent voice when the study came out. I chose my words carefully as I didn't want my son to suffer discrimination from coaches who might question the toughness of a twelve year old. I talked to several media outlets that reported my comments about "concern."⁷ This position wasn't popular at home: my son liked body-checking. As sports writer Roy MacGregor would later say, if you want to eliminate body-checking, you'll also need to persuade the players, many of whom enjoy the physicality of the game.⁸

Neurologists like Toronto's Michael Cusimano argued persuasively that children shouldn't body-check until they can legally consent. That's not the reality, so the decision falls to parents. Warnings about body-checking for child hockey players extend back decades in research literature. Minor hockey associations weren't communicating that research much. Indeed, Hockey Canada didn't publicize some of its own research on body-checking risks.

In 2006, Paul Carson and Stephen Norris wrote a report on body-checking for Hockey Canada, in the course of which they reviewed some 150 articles. These included a position paper prepared in 1991 by the Hockey Development Council Coaching Committee of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (one of the forerunners of Hockey Canada), which recommended that body-checking be removed from the peewee category (twelve to thirteen years) and introduced in bantam (fourteen to fifteen years). The committee's rationale: "The Canadian Amateur Hockey Association Coaching Committee believes the primary focus of minor hockey to be the encouragement of participation, development of the individual both in technical skills and the person, to effect long-term participation and

enjoyment of the sport.”⁹ Carson and Norris found that this recommendation had been ignored for a decade and called this omission “a serious indictment of the current state of affairs.” The authors added: “It seems obvious that despite a wealth of information identifying the problems of overly zealous incorporation of ‘senior’ level hockey characteristics at minor hockey levels, the ground swell of emotional decision making and misaligned attitudes coming from coaches, parents, and officials has overridden reality and resulted in an infrastructure that arguably hampers or impedes hockey development.”¹⁰

According to one of the authors, this report was never tabled at a board meeting or made public. In 2011, the landscape shifted further because of Sidney Crosby. Concussions hobbled the Olympic gold medal star and captain of the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2011, and Crosby missed months of play in the National Hockey League. Hockey Calgary that year decided to do something that was either courageous or outrageous, depending on your point of view: they attempted to eliminate or limit body-checking in competitive minor hockey.

At the June 2011 annual general meeting, Hockey Calgary’s membership resolved to establish a subcommittee to review player safety and body-checking. That same month, Hockey USA changed its body-checking rules nationwide. It eliminated checking in peewee hockey and delayed it until bantam, one age group older. In contrast, Hockey Canada deferred to local and provincial organizations to take the lead on body-checking rules for youth.

In the fall of 2011, Hockey Calgary’s body-checking subcommittee told our minor hockey board of directors that it was looking for members. We could propose a candidate from our league, who would write a paragraph about why he or she wanted to participate. This request came at the same time that we were evaluating and fielding teams and getting managers in place. Just launching a minor hockey season is a colossal undertaking for volunteers. There are ice times to negotiate, coaches and team managers to recruit and train, referees to get trained and organized, policies to be reviewed, police checks for coaches to complete, a website and Facebook pages to update. There were a zillion deadlines for this and that. None of us leapt to participate in more night-time meetings when we were already working so hard to get the season underway. I found out a year later that we did put a name forward, but our parent candidate was not chosen. According to the body-checking subcommittee’s final report, nine members from seven associations met fourteen times. They heard from people like Carolyn Emery and Paul Carson.

From early on in our discussions at the board level, it became clear that most people had fairly set views about body-checking. Hockey volunteer boards tend to

be dominated by parents of higher skill-level kids who are more invested (financially and emotionally) in the sport than those at lower levels. Many board members felt that elite or soon-to-be-elite male players needed to body-check to advance their planned careers. Body-checking was an institution to be defended.

It was common for board meetings to be attended by many volunteers who were not board members; they often weighed in on issues, and their opinions were given equal weight to voting members. Body-checking was one of the many issues that we faced that year. The discussions were long, rollicking, and, frankly, often frustrating. Most board members were not reviewing the medical data, nor could they be persuaded to do so. The key points on injuries were communicated to an unreceptive audience. I heard one parent scoff: "You can make numbers say anything." Another father just rolled his eyes at me when I'd speak in favour of voting to remove body-checking. Many would just dismiss the evidence altogether. No process for deciding our vote was established. How to move forward?

Hockey is seductive because boys and girls begin playing at the cute age of four or five in a league known as Timbits. In a stroke of genius, the Tim Hortons restaurant chain sponsored an entire league, named for its donut holes (who doesn't love a Timbit?), of players who are in what many consider the innocent glory years of hockey. I think it's unlikely that Tim Hortons, or any other business, would step up to sponsor older age groups, when kids are colliding and experiencing the risk of significant concussion and injury.

I began to read about body-checking because of the Hockey Calgary vote, which caused me to look more critically at our family's experiences. In 2011, my eldest son was twelve, in the seventh grade, and a second-year veteran of body-checking. That all medical studies show that body-checking leagues have substantially more injuries than non-body-checking leagues seems a moot point when the season begins. Either you're in, or you're out. He was in. "Just go to rec hockey," was the dismissive answer I got from Hockey Calgary when I expressed concern about body-checking. Maybe, but consider the facts from a child's perspective. By the ripe old age of peewee, an eleven-year-old hockey player can be six years into the sport. These players are accustomed to try-outs, being tiered to ability, playing in their community with friends from that community and competitively with many people they know. To leave that familiar system for a league that doesn't have practices or tier to ability isn't a light decision. Change is hard. Hockey Calgary would find that out.

So it's a bit of a shock watching a child traverse through Timbits, novice, atom, and into peewee, where body-checking becomes a part of the game. Depending on the maturity of the opposing team, the game can be benign or brutally rough. There

are kids on the ice who can't get up after a hit. Teenage referees are left to control the action and take abuse when a player is hurt, and they occasionally get hurt themselves. I watched and wondered . . . all that knocking to the head. Kids crying. Ambulances arriving at arenas. Not at every game, but also not infrequently. I listened to the arguments at our hockey board level. Some saw it as the way the game is played, and others were concerned about injury. Many thought that "education" was the answer, or that Hockey Alberta should take the lead.

My boys liked the game and we loved our league, so we stayed. In my son's first year playing peewee, his coach gave iTunes gift cards to kids who stepped up to checking. My son was aggressive, though small. (Studies suggest that smaller kids are at greater risk of injury.)¹¹ I saw him lying flat out on the ice many times. We made one trip to ER to be assessed for a head injury sustained in a hockey game. He tried to make it through the next school day. He couldn't. What struck me when I arrived at the school wasn't the pale clammy skin of my own kid, or how he covered his eyes to shield them from light, but the sight of another junior-high boy in a chair, bent over and throwing up in the wastepaper basket. He'd been body-checked in a hockey game the night before, too. Was he in worse shape? Who knows? That's the mystery of possible concussions. We don't know. Their young and developing brains? Better not to think about it.

When my youngest began playing peewee level, he'd complain that his head hurt after games. His head would be smashed into the plexiglas or the boards, or would hit the ice after a check. From the dark of the back seat on the way to the arena one night came a sombre small voice: "I'm afraid out there." Yet he continued to play, learned "to give a check and take a check," as the motto goes. From the stands, I saw him line up a player like a shark with prey and drill him into the boards—a nice clean hit by hockey standards. Admittedly, I was kind of proud. This was the game. My son stood up for himself and his team in the accepted way. Not a bad life lesson, minus the idea that he was learning to take and inflict physical pain. I was a hockey mom discomfited. No helicopter parent could help her kid on the ice and maybe that was a good thing, but was this the way to manhood? Besides, a few girls still played with them. The boys had a code of not hitting the girls, and so I told myself: thousands of kids play this game, and they are largely okay, right?

At the minor hockey board meetings, I began to make mental notes that ran contrary to the bravado of some hockey parents who insisted that this was the way the game had to be played. Dryden says that the history of the game shows much longer shifts per player and fewer collisions in the past. Rarely did I hear injuries discussed or medical evidence considered. There seemed to be a tension with some

ill-defined, sinister motives of Hockey Calgary (to be honest, what could those be, other than player safety?). I saw tension between remarkably different realities: the medical world was telling hockey players and parents one thing, while the hockey world had an alternate story. One was evidence based, and one was not.

How do we change our minds about something? Perhaps it's by reading evidence or having direct experience, such as sitting in an ER with your child. I noted that on my block in my neighbourhood over one season, three of the four peeewee hockey players sustained body-checking injuries, despite playing at lower levels of the sport. There were two concussions (one severe) and one broken arm. I also noticed the actions of the three physicians who lived close by. One didn't permit her kids to play hockey ("too many lives ruined," she said), one transferred his son out at the level when body-checking began, and the third told me, "One concussion and we're done." I talked with a few dads in our league who played elite hockey at university and pro levels. They'd all quit hockey because of concussions: one had lost his ability to practice his profession but had kept that quiet. Yet their kids played contact hockey. I began to take note. Were we all bad parents?

Hockey Calgary moved the issue forward by posting medical evidence on its website and consulting with parents, players, and officials. In January 2012, as the subcommittee on player safety was underway, Hockey Calgary released the results of a survey of attitudes toward body-checking, conducted by an external firm. There were 3,805 responses, and 3,609 of them were from parents of children currently enrolled in hockey programs in Calgary (97.4 percent were parents of boys; 61.7 percent were fathers, and 38.3 percent mothers). Almost half of these "Current parents"—42.3 percent—said they had considered withdrawing their child from hockey because of body-checking. Hockey Calgary wrote: "The results of this survey indicate that there is an appetite for change among 'Current parents' with regards to body checking in minor hockey (72.5 percent)."¹²

Important to understanding why body-checking for kids continues is understanding the marked difference in attitude, revealed this survey, between parents of players in elite leagues and those in community competitive and recreational leagues. Only 15 to 19 percent of respondents from elite teams (including Royals, Buffalos, Southside, and Northstars) said that they would reconsider whether to allow their child to play hockey because of body-checking. In other leagues, such as my own, 47 percent said they had reconsidered allowing their child to play. Among those who'd already left contact leagues for noncontact hockey or recreational hockey, the percentage rose to 52.7.¹³

The online survey also asked:

If the introduction of body-checking in minor hockey was delayed until after peewee, what would happen? Choose all that apply:

- improved skills
- safer
- left behind

All those from elite teams voted that they would be “left behind,” but the other minor hockey league respondents said the game would be “safer” or they would “improve skills.”¹⁴ I think it’s fair to say that the rhetoric in favour of early body-checking was driven by a minority: parents with kids in elite leagues, and those who aspired to them.

Our association of about 550 players also wanted to capture other members’ views. None of us were statisticians. In the end, we used Survey Monkey. I can’t find a record of the number of respondents or a print copy, but we were told that the results suggested that a bare majority—51 percent—wanted the status quo and the rest favoured limiting body-checking in peewee hockey. Other associations had multiple surveys and town hall meetings to discuss this topic. We did not have a formal vote of the members on the issue, but I suspect that if we had, I may have been the only one to vote in favour of banning or limiting body-checking. Our president was trying to stickhandle a lot of anger and stay in the neutral zone.

Next, our association needed to decide how to vote at the Hockey Calgary annual general meeting. Hockey Calgary allowed our hockey association two votes (one vote for every fifteen teams), so our president suggested that we split the vote. One vote would represent the yeses and the other the nos. This seemed like a logical solution.

In March 2012, Hockey Calgary published its subcommittee report. It recommended removing body-checking from the lower levels of peewee, bantam, and midget hockey. This would allow players with a desire to progress in hockey to learn the skill of body-checking but reduce risk for others. The subcommittee also identified the following barriers to change:

1. Body-checking is part of the game
2. Concerns regarding the disadvantage for the development of the elite player? (no evidence that delaying body contact affects this development negatively)
3. Concern regarding a greater risk of injury in older players starting to check versus younger players (evidence shows that the risk of injury does not increase substantially in older players and the risk of concussion does not increase)

4. Rock 'em, Sock 'em mentality—celebrating big “hits” and fights in hockey culture
5. Parent dreams of the NHL
6. Media—although a media review indicated that media messaging is for the most part on target with the scientific evidence.¹⁵

The subcommittee recommended eliminating body-checking at the lower levels of peewee and bantam hockey. Hockey Calgary then rewrote the peewee motion completely to eliminate all peewee body-checking entirely for “player safety.” This angered some associations, who claimed that the rewriting did not respect the subcommittee’s work.

How would we vote? Our own association’s solution to represent our members was also falling apart, because on 24 May 2012, we were informed that Hockey Calgary decided we couldn’t “split the vote.” This would place pressure on our association to vote entirely one way or the other and not allow us to represent what was perceived as a split on body-checking within our membership. Our meetings were contentious but I believe I was the only one of six board members who publicly stated a desire to limit body-checking. Concerns were raised about playing out-of-town tournaments against teams who body-check and about player advancement to more elite leagues. Tension picked up as the vote neared. The *Globe and Mail* quoted our president: “I’ve never heard the [minor hockey] presidents yell or berate each other as much as they have over this issue,” said Grace Lane, president of the Westwood Minor Hockey Association. “There is a lot of emotion. People are very passionate on both sides of the issue.”¹⁶

A flurry of emails from some hockey association presidents made the rounds, and some discussed a media strategy to counter Hockey Calgary’s “propaganda.” Some members saw the medical evidence on the Hockey Canada website, as well as a survey and media interviews, as propaganda. In May 2012, for example, one community hockey president wrote in an email to others:

I too had a conversation this past week with a [name of association] member who is a former member of Calgary’s sports media. He recommends that we become more proactive in the media as well and has also offered to come to our meeting to advise us. He has connections with Global TV, FAN 960 and with QR 77 and can get us on each or any of those outlets. We also have a senior editor of the [Calgary] *Herald* in our association and have access to that forum as well. While my emotional initial gut reaction was to just blindsides HC at the AGM, in reality that can’t happen

for me as I'm going to have to let our members know how we'll be voting before the AGM.

Another hockey association president responded:

I also spoke with a buddy who is a reporter in Calgary about strategies on how to deal with the press. He would be happy to come and speak with us. One of the things he does is train RCMP officers on how to respond to reporters and some of the common pitfalls that they will run into. Given some of the concerns discussed at the last meeting and the HC propaganda machine working at full speed I expect there to be a lot of press coverage. And if we do what we are planning, reporters will be all over us. If we think there is merit in this I can ask him to join us next week as well.

Emails between associations continued, but some were in support of the Hockey Calgary motions. On 20 June 2012, Dave Makarchuk, chair of the Trails West Hockey Association, wrote a lengthy email to minor hockey association board members in which he advocated voting yes to the two motions to limit checking. In relation to player safety and liability, he cited the "Duty to Care" in Volunteer Alberta's mandate. He implored:

If your association plans to vote against motion 1, we sincerely hope that you have aggregated sufficient data and rationale that is at least as credible, if not more so, than the safety data that Emery et al have collected and the Development research and data that USA Hockey and others have published. Even if you have member surveys indicating majority support to reject motion 1, you likely owe your members the Duties of Care and Prudence to save themselves from making a bad uninformed decision.

The debate was heated. I was tiring of the lengthy discussions about the safety of largely well-off kids who play hockey. Our president, Grace Lane, communicated the association's position in the media. "Personally, I'd like to see a more holistic approach," Lane said. "Giving kids an option by having a development league in rec hockey that doesn't have hitting, but does have a chance for kids to develop their skill set, that would be better."¹⁷

At Westwood's June AGM, Lane called for an open roll call to see how the votes were cast. That motion was voted down overwhelmingly. Lane later told me that Westwood had split its secret vote to represent the interests of our members.¹⁸ The vote was held in secret so that no one would know exactly how each representative voted. The Hockey Calgary motion to eliminate some body-checking was defeated, endorsing the status quo. The matter was referred on to the provincial and national

hockey authorities: “Our members have asked us to talk to Hockey Alberta and Hockey Canada,” said Hockey Canada’s communications director, Christina Rogers. “We have sent letters to both. It is now up to Hockey Alberta to address the issue and determine if delaying body-checking until the Bantam level is something the province wants to enforce.”¹⁹

In September 2012, the president of Hockey Calgary resigned after a personal blog post was discovered in which he had referred to parents who opposed banning body-checking in peewee hockey as “morons.”²⁰ The medical community, however, kept moving forward and communicating. In December 2012, the Canadian Pediatric Association issued a position statement on body-checking and youth hockey. It backed the Hockey Calgary motions but extended them to all boys in non-elite leagues, stating:

Clinicians who see young hockey players in their practice should offer the following advice:

- Girls and young women should continue participating in non-body-checking leagues.
- Boys should play in recreational/non-elite hockey leagues that do not allow body-checking.
- Elite male players should play in hockey leagues that introduce body-checking later, when players are thirteen to fourteen years of age (bantam level) or older.²¹

As I was finishing this chapter, a stunning announcement was made: on 7 May 2013, in a letter to members, Hockey Alberta announced that its board of directors had voted to eliminate body-checking for peewee players, citing player safety. Hockey Canada then followed, on 25 May 2013, with a resolution at its AGM to also eliminate body checking at peewee level and below. Hockey Alberta says that it will continue to develop player safety strategies. The University of Calgary is continuing its research on sports injuries. All the same, these decisions meant that thousands of teens (at bantam, midget, and junior C level) would still play with body checking and in violation of medical advice. They also meant that female athletes would still be considered more worthy of protection than males.

My last bit of volunteer duty was to weigh in and try to stop a nasty exchange on our hockey association’s Facebook site between a mom whose kid had been concussed and a father who was furious that his kid wouldn’t be body-checking.

They mutually “unfriended” each other.

NOTES

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12

GOODBYE, GORDIE HOWE

Sport Participation and Class Inequality in the “Pay for Play” Society

Richard Gruneau

In the introduction to a major policy document in 1970, the late John Munro, then minister of Amateur Sport for the Trudeau-era Liberals, stated:

We must face the fact that the opportunity for involvement in sports and recreation is extremely unequal between the socioeconomic classes in our population. . . . It's only fair, just as a dash in a track meet is only fair, that everyone has the same starting line distance to run. Unfortunately . . . the sports scene today resembles a track on which some people have twenty-five yards to run, some fifty, some one hundred, and some as much as a mile or more.¹

Forty-two years later, Roy MacGregor told me a story about a comment made to him over lunch by the legendary former director of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and Hockey Canada, Murray Costello.² “There will never be another Gordie Howe,” said Costello. He didn’t mean that we’d never see another player as skilled or as effective on the ice as Gordie Howe. He meant that the days of young men from working-class families in rural Canada going on to succeed in the National Hockey League are over. If a young male player these days isn’t from a family with enough resources to pay for power skating lessons, summer clinics,

expensive equipment, and travel for league games and tournaments, his chances of making it to the pros are slim.

I begin with these two quotations because of their dissonance. As far back as the early 1970s, Canadian sports policy declared an intention to level the playing field by removing barriers to participation in sport.³ Over the past forty years, there have been notable improvements: funding for athletic training and coaching and economic support for high-level athletes, a partial reduction of barriers to participation for girls and women, and the creation of somewhat greater opportunities for Canadians from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as for Canadians with disabilities.⁴ Still, Costello's blunt prediction invites us to consider whether there has been any similar headway in reducing barriers to sports participation faced by Canada's lower socioeconomic classes.

Some useful research was undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s that provided an early glimpse into this question. For example, research on athletes who competed at the 1971 Canada Winter Games and on elite tennis players in the mid-1970s points to the fact that a significant majority of competitive athletes at the time had parents who were highly educated; worked in professional, managerial, and skilled technical occupations; were of European ethnic origins; and were overrepresented in the top 25 to 40 percent of Canadian income earners.⁵ Similar research on the social backgrounds of national team athletes undertaken in the mid-1980s found even more pronounced patterns of socioeconomic exclusiveness.⁶ There is nothing to suggest that higher-level sport has become more accessible in the twenty-five to forty years since these studies were conducted. On the contrary, I would argue that the higher levels of sport in Canada today are less accessible to the lower classes than ever. Furthermore, considerable research over the past twenty years suggests clear patterns of class exclusivity, even at the lowest levels of sports participation. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine some of these data to outline the scale of class inequality in Canadian sports participation and suggest some reasons why participation in organized sport is more out of reach for most Canadian families than at any time since the end of the Second World War.

SPENDING MORE BUT PARTICIPATING LESS: WHO GETS TO PLAY?

A Conference Board of Canada national survey in 2004 reported that Canadian households spent an estimated \$16 billion on sport in 2004, representing 2.2 percent of all consumer spending and 1.2 percent of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP).⁷ However, more interesting is the fact that household spending on sport

grew significantly after 1996, when it was only 0.9 percent of GDP. The average “active” Canadian family in 2004 was paying \$1,963 per year in sport-related expenses for both adults and children, a third above the amount spent a mere eight years earlier.⁸ Over the next decade, family spending on children’s sport alone grew to an average of just under \$1,000 per child, while expenses for families of “serious” athletes in 2014 reached an average of \$1,657 per child.⁹ In some sports the averages can be even higher. For example, in hockey, the cost of registering a youth player and buying equipment can easily exceed \$3,000 a year. On some highly competitive teams, when extra training, travel, and tournaments are added, the costs can run as high as \$10,000.¹⁰

However, while consumer spending on sport increased markedly between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, the percentage of adult Canadians, children, and youth who report being involved once a week or more in sports has *decreased* since 1992. According to information provided by Statistics Canada’s General Social Surveys (GSS), approximately 45 percent of adult Canadians reported “regular weekly involvement” in sport in 1992, compared with only 28 percent in 2005 and 26 percent in 2010—a 19 percent drop in the reported national adult sports participation rate over an 18 year span.¹¹ The same surveys note that in 1992, 64 percent of Canadian children between the ages of eleven and fourteen, and just over 75 percent of those between fifteen and nineteen, reported participation in some form of sport at least once a week. However, by 2005, the overall rate of reported active sports participation had declined for eleven to fourteen year olds to 55 percent. For Canadian youth in the fifteen- to nineteen-year-old category, the sports participation rate declined to 60 percent by 2005 and to 54% by 2010.¹²

EXPLAINING DECLINING ADULT SPORTS PARTICIPATION

Among the adult population, the gradual decrease in sports participation from the early 1990s to the present appears to be explained by several factors, the most obvious of which is Canada’s aging population. In 1991, individuals over the age of sixty-five made up only 11.6 percent of the Canadian population; by 2010, that percentage had grown to more than 14 percent.¹³

Because older Canadians tend to participate in sporting activities at a lower rate than younger Canadians, the aging population partially explains the drop in participation in sports. However, the evidence of increasing economic pressures on Canadian families over the past thirty years is more striking. For example, between 1984 and 1994, the number of families in which one or more of the wage earners

was involved in “moonlighting” increased by more than 50 percent, and that rate appears to have increased into the 2000s.¹⁴ When adult Canadians were asked in the 2010 GSS about factors that limit opportunities for sport participation, approximately a third commented that they simply lack the time they used to have.¹⁵

A recent Conference Board of Canada study covering seventeen countries gave Canada a “C” grade on economic inequality and emphasized the extent to which income inequality in Canada has worsened over the past twenty years. From 1990 to 2010, the richest group of Canadians increased its share of total national income from 36.5 percent 39.1 percent, while the poorest and middle-income groups lost ground.¹⁶ Along similar lines, Statistics Canada reported that, in 1982, the median income of the top 1 percent of Canadian tax filers was seven times higher than the median income of the other 99 percent—whereas, by 2010, the median income of the top 1 percent had grown to be about ten times the median income of the other 99 percent.¹⁷ The Bank of Canada added to this economic snapshot by presenting data showing a dramatic upward swing in the household debt-to-disposable income ratio of Canadians over the past thirty years.¹⁸ Canadian families are working harder and carrying more debt than ever. The cost of servicing that debt takes away from other expenditures, unless one happens to be in the highest echelons of Canadian income earners. Life in the middle and lower echelons of the Canadian class structure seems increasingly characterized by a state of precariousness—carrying large personal debt while working multiple jobs, living on social assistance, underemployed, rarely employed, or never employed. Sports participation under these circumstances is a distant concern for many people in the face of the day-to-day realities of paying the rent and feeding themselves and their families.

To be fair, some of the rate of decline in adult sports participation revealed in Statistics Canada General Social Surveys between 1992 and 2010 can also be explained by the definition of “sport” used in the surveys, which emphasized competitive activities.¹⁹ “Non-sporting” activities such as recreational walking, hiking, and gardening are thus not included in the data, and yet it is precisely these sorts of less physically demanding (and often inexpensive) activities that many Canadians turn to as they age. On this issue, it is enlightening to contrast the 2005 data, which depict a 17 percent drop from 1992 in sports participation, with data collected in the Canadian Health Surveys of 1998 and 2005. When less structured forms of physical activity—such as walking, hiking, or gardening—are added to participation in recognized “sports,” there is an increase in physical activity levels: from 46 percent of Canadians reporting regular involvement in physical activity in 1998 to 51 percent

in 2005.²⁰ This upward trend continued to be evident in 2010, as 52 percent of adult Canadians reported regular participation in physically active leisure activities.²¹

Still, whether one considers participation in more traditional sports or in physically active recreation more broadly, the research on participation rates by adults suggests a consistent pattern of increasing exclusiveness. This is particularly evident for sports participation by Canadians with differing levels of education and income. For example, the 2004 Conference Board study showed that 46.7 percent of Canadians with a university degree or certificate were likely to be active participants in sport, in contrast to only 16.7 percent of those Canadians who had not finished high school.²² Similarly, in 2004, participation in sport was more than twice as high for Canadians with family incomes in excess of \$100,000 than for families with incomes below \$40,000.²³ The 2010 GSS revealed a slight decline in sport participation (from 2005) in households earning over \$80,000 per year. However, the rate of sport participation by higher income families was still approximately five times greater than that reported by low income families.²⁴ Of course, these broad patterns are complicated by the inclusion of other aspects of social differentiation and inequality that are intertwined with differences in education and income. For example, women continue to be underrepresented in Canadian adult sport in comparison to men, as are Aboriginal adults and individuals who don't speak English as a first language.²⁵

MAPPING AND EXPLAINING CHANGING YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

Only fragmentary data for children under the age of fifteen are currently available in the Statistics Canada GSS update for 2010. Nonetheless, results from the 1992 and 2005 GSS include useful information on youth participation, rates from age five through the late teenage years.²⁶ A summary of these changes is provided in table 12.1. Several trends are evident from the data in the table. First, at the national level, there is a significant drop in the reported sport participation rates of boys at every age level between 1992 and 2005. The trend is most notable in the fifteen to nineteen age group where there is in which participation dropped of 19 per cent between 1992 and 2005. More recent GSS data indicate that rates of participation for fifteen to nineteen year old boys remained relatively steady between 2005 and 2010. The overall drop in reported participation rates for boys, across all years, is 13 percent. The patterns of declining rates for girls seem less striking, especially in the younger age ranges. The overall drop in reported participation for girls aged five to nineteen

is 6.7 percent, just over half the drop for boys. Furthermore, rates of reported sports participation for girls in the five- to ten-year-old range between 1992 and 2005 stayed relatively constant, with a slight reduction that is not statistically significant. There is some reduction in participation between 1992 and 2005 in the eleven to fifteen age range, although, again, it is smaller than the drop for boys of similar ages. Similar to the boys, the biggest drop in participation between 1992 and 2005—approximately 12 percent—occurs in the fifteen-to-nineteen age range. More recent data on active sports participation by girls in this age range reveals a further 13 percent drop in reported participation between 2005 and 2010.²⁷

Table 12.1 National participation rates in youth sport, 1992 and 2005

	Boys		Girls	
	1992	2005	1992	2005
5–10 years	60%*	52%	45%	43%
11–14 years	74%	62%	54%	48%
15–19 years	87%	68%	63%	51%
All (5–19 years)	73.6%	60.6%	54.0%	47.3%

* Percentages refer to the total number of survey respondents.

Source: Compiled from General Social Survey data in Fidelis Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada*, 2005 (Ottawa: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, 2008); and Warren Clark, “Kids’ Sports,” *Canadian Social Trends* 85 (Summer 2008): 54–61.

Like the data on reported adult participation, these national averages require closer analysis. An obvious point is the extent to which national reported participation rates in sport for children and early teens may be influenced by the reduction of youth demographic groups as part of the aging of the Canadian population. In 1991, children under the age of fifteen made up 20.7 percent of the Canadian population—a figure that, by 2005, had shrunk to 17.6 percent.²⁸ This drop has been offset somewhat since 2005 by larger numbers of families with children among new immigrants. However, participation rates in sport tend to be lower than national averages among children of new immigrants, especially in families where English is not the first language spoken.²⁹

In addition, a number of less traditional sport and game activities that are not included in the categories of Statistics Canada surveys have grown in popularity in

recent years: for example, paint balling, inline skating, parkour, ultimate frisbee, mixed martial arts, and a variety of new “roller sports,” such as street long-board riding. At least part of the reduction of youth and teen participation in more traditional sports may be due to the growth of new recreational alternatives. While only scant socioeconomic research has been conducted on these activities in Canada, with the exception of mixed martial arts, there appears to be a strong connection between these “new” sports and other patterns of largely middle-class, white, and masculine consumption.³⁰

There has also been increased competition for the time of children and teens, with accompanying economic costs, coming from the revolution in digital media that has swept across Canadian society since the early 1990s, and especially in the past decade. The amount of time spent watching television has declined among Canadian youth since the early 1990s, but this has been more than offset by increasing time spent using cellphones and smart phones, computers, and/or gaming consoles.³¹ A national study by the World Health Organization conducted in 2001–2 found that more than 80 percent of Canadian youth in grades 6 to 10 were spending over two hours per day in front of a computer screen or television.³² This study reported that it was not uncommon for some Canadian youth to spend as much as four to five hours per day in front of a television or computer screen, not including time spent texting or Internet surfing with mobile phones. Furthermore, in a world where cellphones and other electronic devices have become a “necessity,” children, adolescents, and teens are incurring new additional costs.

Still, as is the case for adult participation, rates of sports participation for children and youth are strongly shaped by a complex array of intersecting factors associated with class, ethnicity, race, gender, education, and income.³³ Notably, GSS data have shown a consistent and sometimes dramatic income bias in youth and young adult sport participation over the past twenty years.³⁴ In 2005, for example, adult Canadians whose annual household income was in excess of \$80,000 were more than twice as likely to participate in sports as those whose household income was less than \$30,000.³⁵ Similarly, 63 percent of children from families whose household income was \$80,000 or more took part in sports, compared to only 43 percent in families whose income was under \$40,000.³⁶ The survey also shows that the children of parents with higher levels of education are far more likely to participate in sport than children of parents with lower levels of education. Trussell and McTeer’s analysis of secondary data on sports participation in the 1998–99 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth reinforces these findings:

Children's participation in organized sport was most strongly predicted by household income and parent's education. The higher the household income and parent's education, the higher the child's participation in organized sport. Income was the strongest predictor, suggesting that the financial demands associated with organized sport can create inequity in Canadian children's opportunity to participate in organized sport.³⁷

The authors note a similar pattern in participation in "informal" sporting activities, although they suggest that the association between income, education, and sports participation is somewhat weaker.³⁸ The point is that national survey data on children's sport mirror the socioeconomic biases evident in the national data on sports participation by adult Canadians. Because the pattern of relationships between income and participation is so strong, we can reasonably infer that declining rates in sports participation among children from less affluent Canadian families contribute disproportionately to the drop noted above in national rates of sports participation for both boys and girls aged five to nineteen years old between 1992 and 2005. Tony Hernandez and his colleagues note the gap in sports participation between high and low income earners in the 2005 GSS and argue that there was "an alarming shift" in declining participation rates in the fifteen to nineteen and twenty to twenty-four age categories between 1998 and 2005.³⁹ In these age ranges, sports participation rates among high-income Canadians appear to have held steady, and may even have increased, since the early 1990s, while participation rates among lower-income groups have fallen off dramatically. This trend among youth and young adults is echoed in results of the GSS in 2010, which reported steep decreases in sports participation across all ages in Canadian families with incomes of less than \$20,000.⁴⁰ In other words, *more children, youth, and young adults from families in the Canadian lower classes are likely to have dropped out of sports since the early 1990s than children from families found in the higher echelons of the Canadian class structure.*

Gender differences provide an important sidebar to any consideration of this trend. Since the end of the Second World War, girls and young women from low-income families, often including members of marginalized ethnic and racial groups, have been chronically underrepresented in Canadian sports. There has also been a consistent underrepresentation of boys and young men from marginalized ethnic or racial groups in many sports. However, from the 1950s through the 1970s, young men and boys from working-class families had a significant presence in sports. For example, a 1976 study of the social backgrounds of Canadian professional hockey players showed a strong presence of players from families in which fathers were employed in professional or managerial positions. Yet, at the same time, over 60

percent of players came from families in which fathers worked in occupations related to farming, fishing, or logging, in semi-skilled manufacturing jobs, or in unskilled labour.⁴¹ Few families in similar circumstances are likely to send a player to the pros today.

Household composition, access to training and competitions, and the workplace involvement of parents are further indicators of youth sports participation, although these indicators are also often closely intertwined with factors such as income, ethnicity, race, gender, and family structure. In a world where Canadian family structures are changing and traditional two-parent families are on the decline, youth sports participation continues to be higher in two-parent families than in single-parent families. However, the gap in participation by children from dual- and single-parent families tends to be less in the case of boys than in the case of girls.⁴² Women lead most single-parent families, and the fact that income levels are typically lower for women than men following separation and divorce has a significant impact on children's recreational choices.⁴³ Work and child rearing leave very little time for much else and there are immense pressures on family budgets in single-parent families, and especially in female-supported single-parent families. Such circumstances pose often-insurmountable barriers to sports participation.

This tendency is in direct contrast to the situation in high-income, two-parent families, where there tends to be less pronounced differences in rates of participation in youth sport between boys and girls.⁴⁴ An exception is noted in the 2010 GSS data which indicate a drop in sports participation by girls and women from higher income families, between 2005 and 2010, while participation by boys and men from high income families has increased.⁴⁵ The accessibility of sport can also include a range of additional factors. For example, travel requirements for sports competitions often requires access to a car in many parts of Canada, pushing participation further out of reach for many families. In addition, there appears to be a strong socialization effect such that children's organized activities mirror the priorities of their parents. In 2010, 90 percent of families in which one or more of the parents were involved in sports as either direct participants or administrators, children were active participants as well.⁴⁶

THE CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT OF CANADIAN PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

There are three related phenomena that have made sports less available than ever to Canada's lower classes. The first, as mentioned earlier, is the increasing financial

pressure faced by the Canadian middle and lower classes over the past twenty years and by the growing gap between rich and poor in Canada. The second is the spiraling cost of sports themselves. The third is related to a series of dramatic changes in Canadian society that are transforming community sports clubs and undercutting the abilities of municipalities and the public school systems to offer cost-effective sporting activities for children from less affluent families. These trends are also associated with the growth of private sector provision of sports training and coaching and a changing economy that has seen an erosion of facilities in many smaller Canadian population centres.

The Professionalization of Community Sports Clubs

Community sports clubs, or local volunteer sporting associations, which often work in loose partnerships with municipal recreation departments, continue to be fundamental to the Canadian sport system. In 1998, 19 percent of Canadians (aged fifteen and over) sampled in the GSS reported belonging to a sports club, a local community league, or another local or regional sport association. Between 1998 and 2005, the percentage of Canadians involved in club and/or league sport stayed relatively constant, with only a minor decrease from 19 percent to 18 percent, despite the much greater drop-off in participation discussed earlier in this chapter.⁴⁷ However, volunteering in sports clubs and organizations appears to have increased during this time. In 2005, more than two million Canadians volunteered their time as administrators or helpers in sports clubs or organizations, up 18 percent from 1998.⁴⁸ The upward trend in volunteering in sports organizations continued between 2005 and 2010.⁴⁹ This trend appears to run counter to a broader trend in all Canadian voluntary associations—declining rates of volunteering, concomitant with increasing hours that remaining volunteers devote to their volunteer activities. It has become harder to get people to volunteer their time, with the result that fewer volunteers have to work harder to maintain established programs and levels of service. Indeed, Paul Jerbala noted that in 2000, a mere 25 percent of volunteers in Canada put in 73 percent of the total volunteer hours in the voluntary sector and that a growing number of volunteers preferred to give money rather than time.⁵⁰

How can we explain the increase in the number of volunteers in Canadian community sports clubs and associations between 1998 and 2010 when evidence shows that participation in the Canadian voluntary sector as a whole declined during a similar period? How do we reconcile the increased level of volunteering in sport with the fact that sports organizations themselves continue to say they are “desperate” for volunteers? Jerbala reports that just over a quarter of sports organizations

sampled between 2000 and 2003 continued to report a net loss of volunteers, the highest reported loss of all nonprofit organizations in the Canadian voluntary sector. Similarly, 58 percent of Canadian voluntary sports organizations said they were having difficulty retaining volunteers and planning for the future.⁵¹

The answers to these questions are complex and require a more detailed analysis than can be provided here. Still, there is enough evidence available to suggest some plausible explanations. First, community sports clubs and associations typically face greater challenges today than they did in the early 1990s. Many clubs operate in a climate of substantially heightened expectations from sports participants and parents, as well as from larger regional, provincial, and national associations. Furthermore, most of the larger clubs and associations in Canada now run programs well beyond their traditional sporting season. Programs lasting ten or eleven months are increasingly common. In addition, many clubs and associations now have substantially larger budgets than even in the recent past, requiring higher levels of professionalism and accountability. Sports clubs and associations are also subject to growing demands for higher-quality coaching and facilities at all times of the year.⁵²

These factors raise the cost of providing programs and often create a need for additional volunteers. They also create new layers of administration in clubs and associations that were comparatively easy to administer twenty years ago. For example, the increasing attention paid by provincial and national sporting associations to long-term planning, player and coach development, promotion, event management, and financial and legal issues has created pressures for parallel levels of professionalism at the community level. The implementation of a national coaching certification program in Canada in the 1980s has been an important element of these pressures toward professionalism. Clubs have sought out certified coaches, and many clubs have set certification targets that need to be met by parent volunteers. This necessitates additional record keeping, as well as the organization of certification courses at the local level. In the face of all of these combined pressures, a growing number of the larger sports clubs and associations in Canada are moving away from an older model of casual volunteerism toward a more formal administrative model similar to that of small businesses or larger nonprofit NGOs.⁵³

Such changes create insatiable demands for volunteers, and especially for those who have the necessary time, skills, and qualifications to manage more complex levels of program development, planning, and administration. Recent increases in volunteers in Canadian sports clubs and organizations have simply not been enough to meet demand, especially in rapidly growing sports such as soccer. Recruitment to higher-level administrative positions, in particular, has not matched the growth

seen in volunteer coaching, and there are ongoing shortages of volunteer coaches with higher-level coaching certification. Many sports clubs and associations still struggle to find enough volunteers of any kind to run their programs, let alone volunteers with sufficient levels of commitment, free time, or qualification.

There is also considerable anecdotal evidence suggesting that much of the increase in volunteering in sport over the past decade has been limited to areas requiring relatively low time commitment, such as coaching very young children or coordinating part of a competitive team or league. When sports administrators claim that it is more difficult than ever to recruit qualified volunteers, they most often mean recruitment to the coaching or administrative jobs that require a heavy commitment and are more technically demanding. Accordingly, many clubs and associations, especially the smaller ones, are forced to rely heavily on a very small core of “super-committed” volunteers. When these volunteers finally get burned out or retire, it is extremely challenging for the clubs and associations to find volunteers to replace them.⁵⁴ In this sense, the trends in sports clubs and associations are consistent with trends affecting the voluntary sector as a whole.

This is one of the main reasons why some sports clubs have opted to create paid positions to undertake activities once undertaken almost exclusively by volunteers. Compared to other areas of the voluntary sector, such as health and welfare organizations or religious organizations, the use of paid employees in sporting clubs and associations has been, and continues to be, comparatively small.⁵⁵ Still, over the past two decades, there has been an undeniable trend in community sports clubs toward hiring more employees, especially in technical areas such as coaching and athletic training. Hiring professionals in these areas, or increasing the number of professionals, not only adds to expenses; it also has a tendency to further escalate expectations among the club or association membership and elevate the professionalism brought to training and to athlete development.

Paid coaches and trainers, often on part-time salaries, have a vested interest in expanding existing programs and in designing new programming in ways that reinforce club members’ perceptions of the value of the paid professional’s work. In that way, a part-time position just might become a full-time job. Since the early 1990s, Canadian universities have produced a substantial number of physical education and human kinetics graduates who have opted to pursue careers as professional trainers and coaches rather than moving into the public school system. The result is a growing labour market in these fields, with an accompanying set of entrepreneurial pressures. Furthermore, over the past twenty years, there has been a substantial growth of professionalized private sector sports training facilities,

sports schools, and academies that sometimes compete with voluntary organizations or add supplementary services to them. This adds to the escalation of professionalizing forces in voluntary sports associations.

Once a community sports club or voluntary association begins to go down the road toward professionalism in coaching and training, it is unlikely to turn back. This trend has promoted a sea change in parent expectations. Long-time coaches frequently note that, over the past decade especially, parents of young athletes have come to expect greater knowledge from youth sport coaches than was once the case.⁵⁶ These pressures are felt most strongly on high-level, competitive “select” teams where many parents expect that certified coaches will have at least a rudimentary knowledge of seasonal planning, of how to periodize training, and of how to conduct proper warm-ups for injury prevention. Parents have also come to expect high-level youth coaches to have an understanding of some of the principles of sport physiology, biomechanics, and sport psychology, in addition to the teaching of skills specific to certain sports.

Parents who become volunteer sports administrators often carry these expectations with them into the boardroom. More notably, the expertise now required to administer community sports clubs and organizations favours people who already work in professional and managerial occupations and who have enough flexibility, or seniority, in their work to devote a considerable amount of time to volunteer sports management. At the highest levels of sport administration in Canada, this trend was already evident as early as the mid-1970s. Research on samples of executives in national sports organizations at that time indicated that the percentage of executives with university educations rose from approximately 49 percent in 1955 to 75 percent in 1975, in contrast to 7 percent of Canadians with this level of education in 1960 and 10 percent in 1971.⁵⁷ Similarly, whereas approximately 37 percent of the fathers of national sports executives sampled came from families with a parent in a professional, managerial, or skilled technical occupation in 1955, just over 46 percent of national sports executives in 1975 had fathers in these occupations.⁵⁸ More recently, there is evidence of this sort of affluence bias has been seen across the whole range of Canadian voluntary sports organizations. For example, in 2004, Canadians in the \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year bracket were three times more likely to volunteer in sporting organizations than people in the under \$20,000 per year bracket. Canadians earning \$100,000 per year or more were five times more likely to volunteer in sports clubs and associations than low-income Canadians.⁵⁹ Similarly, in 2010, coaches in Canada were five times more likely to come from families with annual incomes of greater than \$80,000 than from families earning less than \$20,000 per year.⁶⁰

The intersecting pressures of rising expectations in coaching and administration, longer and more varied programming, larger budgets, better financial accounting, understanding of liability issues, and the need to work with both local governments and, sometimes, sponsoring organizations not only complicate the jobs of volunteers sports executives; they also create new facility and training “needs.” Sports clubs and organizations across the country feel that they need more facility time—ice time, field time, gym time, and so on—and members often want access to higher-quality training and competition facilities (e.g., outdoor artificial turf, indoor venues offering winter training for summer sports, venues offering summer training for winter sports, etc.). At the higher competitive levels, coaches who are more professionalized want athletes to commit to additional training, including cross-training or strength training, and to more travel in search of higher-level competition.

The growth of these new “needs,” in an atmosphere where committed and qualified volunteers are often hard to find, can create additional pressures on a club’s administrative and financial resources. Programs such as holiday and spring-break camps, additional specialized skills training, off-season training, tournament hosting, or regional development competitions increase the workload and require additional qualified personnel. The growing trend toward paid coaching in many sports clubs runs parallel to a less immediately noticeable growth in contract positions in areas such as registration, scheduling, public relations and sponsorship, and website design and maintenance. These three trends—the hiring of paid coaches, the contracting out of formerly volunteer administrative activities, and escalating costs necessary to meet perceived new “needs” for training and completion—are developing unevenly in different sports and in different regions across the country, but their impact is subtly reshaping the way in which many of the larger community sports clubs and associations operate. Along the way, sport participation is continually pushed further away from Canada’s lower classes.

The Turn to Sport as a Strategy of Community Economic Development

The professionalization of community sport in the past twenty to thirty years has also been influenced by a dramatic set of economic changes that have been affecting Canada since the early 1980s. A destabilizing global deflation from 1973 to 1975, matched with high levels of public debt in virtually all Western nations, shook public confidence in the ability of governments to meet the economic challenges of the late twentieth century. At the same time, emerging digital technologies were opening up opportunities for innovation in a wide range of fields including

computing, software development, media production, security, design, and advertising. These technologies created new areas for economic growth and promised more “flexible” alternatives to the rigidities of centralized industrial workplaces.⁶¹ The drive for flexibility in production was accompanied by a belief among conservative groups that solutions to the economic problems of the early 1980s could be solved by clearing away obstacles for economic growth, not only on a regional and national scale but internationally as well. The result was a sustained push from business-friendly political parties to decrease levels of political regulation in economic life in order to reduce the cost of doing business and open up new markets. This push for deregulation was often accompanied by intense lobbying for cutbacks in government expenditures matched with tax reductions to create an impetus for increased consumer spending.

These events created conditions for an extraordinary expansion in the 1980s and 1990s of “cultural industries” associated with publishing, film, television, music, the Internet, advertising, and design. The scale of this transition is striking. For example, in Canada, between 1971 and 2001, the “cultural sector labour force” grew by 160 percent, compared to a growth of 81 percent in the overall labour force.⁶² Accompanying this, the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement in the late 1980s and the subsequent North American Free Trade Agreement precipitated an economic shift that saw many traditional industrial and manufacturing jobs leave the country for other parts of the world. This occurred in conjunction with a reduction in stable large-scale employment in manufacturing industries due to new approaches to flexible production now made possible by computerization and robotics and necessitated by a more segmented and discriminating consumer market. In this context, as traditional industrial employment rates eroded, new pressures and financial hardships challenged the older Canadian middle and working classes. Additionally, cities and communities across the country were forced to consider less traditional forms of economic production. For many cities and communities, the production of “events” emerged as an area of economic activity that began to rival the more traditional making of things.⁶³

Changes in the global economy in the emerging world of flexible accumulation hit Canada’s single-industry resource towns especially hard.⁶⁴ From the 1960s through the 1970s, many of these towns had well-developed sports facilities—often built and heavily subsidized by the town’s major industry—that created opportunities for young athletes, many of whom were from working-class families. Some of these clubs—like the legendary Ocean Falls swim club in British Columbia or the Trail, BC, track and field club—produced Olympic athletes in large numbers. The

collapse or shrinkage of these towns is, perhaps, a comparatively minor influence on broad patterns of sport participation across the country, but it has certainly contributed to the reduction of opportunities for sport participation by Canadians from lower-class families.

By the late 1980s, with resource industries and manufacturing eroding in many parts of Canada, the cultural economy was increasingly seen as a viable area of economic growth, even in Canada's larger cities. This provided new incentives to host highly visible sporting attractions, such as professional hockey, baseball and football teams; Indy-car races; the Pan-American Games; the Commonwealth Games; and the Winter Olympics. An "event-driven," tourist, and service-oriented approach to economic development rippled from the largest cities down to Canada's regional cities, smaller towns, and municipalities. In some instances, this led to a reevaluation of community sport, not so much with respect to its value for cultural citizenship or health but more with respect to its potential for economic development as a cultural industry. It is in this sense, for example, that Kamloops, in south-central British Columbia, has worked over the past fifteen years to rebrand itself from a former "mill town" to "Canada's Tournament Capital."

In sport, so-called world class events such as major professional sports or the Olympics are in short supply and carry significant financial risk. Even prominent second-tier events such as the Grey Cup or the Commonwealth or Pan-American Games are far beyond the financial means of most Canadian communities. Still, there are many inexpensive regional and national events, such as national youth sport championships or big international youth tournaments, that civic boosters believe can help to fill local hotels and keep cash flowing to local retailers and restaurant owners. For that reason, civic boosters have an interest in promoting such events heavily, and over the past twenty years, this has helped to integrate even comparatively low competitive levels of Canadian sport more tightly into the media, hotel, and travel industries. At the same time, sports organizations—always desperate for funds—have become increasingly reliant on big club events (such as tournaments) as sources of revenue. Some of these events, such as the well-known Québec International Pee wee Hockey Tournament, have been in existence for many years. But the trend in nearly all sports is for the growth of more and bigger sporting events, including events at the adult and masters levels. This trend partially explains why the proportion of active Canadians (that is, Canadians who regularly engage in sports) who participated in tournament competitions grew from 36 percent in 1998 to 39 percent in 2005 and to 41% in 2010.⁶⁵

Larger sports clubs and associations have become integrated into cultural economies in two significant ways: first, by providing a pool of unpaid labour necessary for the provision of a popular social service, or set of events, that represents an aspect of economic consumption (sporting equipment and clothing; the use of cars to travel to games, matches, or events; restaurant meals while travelling, etc.), and second, through the growing tendency toward paid employment for coaches and trainers, as well as through the contracting out some of the club's administrative work. In Canadian communities today, some of the larger nonprofit sports clubs and associations, with thousands of registrants or members, operate on an economic scale similar to small businesses. As these clubs and organizations become professionalized, they often opt to develop higher-profile competitive programs in order to add to—or in some instances, to replace—an earlier commitment to a more cost-sensitive approach to community recreation.

The Erosion of Public Funding and the Growth of Privatization

Socioeconomic barriers to sports participation have also been influenced by a set of political changes beyond more localized trends affecting sports clubs and associations and by the increasing costs of sports equipment and facilities. For example, Canadian municipalities have generally been committed to offering affordable recreational sport programs of different types, but over the past twenty years, municipalities have seen more and more costs offloaded onto them by provincial governments. This has made revenue generation a source of greater concern for municipalities, making it more difficult for local sport and recreation departments to justify the scale of subsidies necessary to make sport participation available to less affluent Canadian families. This has occurred alongside increasing demand for newer and higher-quality training facilities, such as multiple-use swimming pools, tennis bubbles, and artificial turf.

In the early postwar era, there was substantial public investment in Canada in “war memorial” pools and arenas, as well as in new tennis courts, baseball diamonds, and grass playing fields. In the mid-1960s, another boom led to the construction of numerous publicly subsidized “Centennial” pools and arenas and to another round of growth in the construction of playing fields. There has also been more recent federal investment in community sports facilities through the infrastructure works plans of the 1990s and the economic stimulus policies of 2009–10. Still, in many instances, these investments have involved cost-sharing arrangements that have required large municipal expenditures. Today, municipalities across Canada still subsidize the cost of arenas, baseball diamonds, tennis courts, and playing fields.

However, the price tag for newer “higher-end” or “value-added” facilities has taken off at the very moment when municipal budgets have reached a crisis point. In many communities, spending large amounts of public money on sports facilities challenges the will of municipal politicians, unless the expenditures can be justified as part of a broader logic of community economic development.

To meet the high cost of upgraded pool and arena facilities, equipment for training, or artificial turf playing fields, many communities have moved toward increased “user-pay” approaches to facility construction and use. Today, users are being asked to contribute to the building of these facilities or to pay more for access to them than was the case twenty and thirty years ago. In addition, new types of partnerships have formed between municipal governments, voluntary sports clubs and associations, and, sometimes, private sector providers. The success of these partnerships varies widely, but in many communities, they are now viewed as the only way in which expensive new facility developments can move forward. Such partnerships typically commit community clubs and associations to substantial fundraising and often to substantial debt. The result is a trend toward increasing quality in sporting facilities along with greater opportunities to stage sporting events. But a parallel trend of escalating expenses for both municipalities and facility users represents a slow decline in the ability, or the willingness, of municipalities to subsidize the cost of sports in Canadian communities.

Somewhat similar trends can be seen as a result of the erosion of funding directed toward the public school system, especially in situations where municipalities and schools share facilities. By the late 1990s, school boards across the country were struggling with funding freezes or cutbacks and had begun to implement or to raise fees for public access to school facilities and programs. For example, Donnelly and Kidd note that in Ontario between 1998 and 2002, the number of schools charging for community use increased by 119 percent.⁶⁶ In addition, in 2002–3, user fees for access to school facilities were being charged by 94 percent of Ontario secondary schools, up 21 percent from 2000–2001. In Toronto, one consequence of this was a 43 percent drop in the number of outside community groups using schools between 1998 and 2002. A survey in 2002–3 found that 45 percent of high school physical education programs in Ontario were charging user fees and that user fees were charged in 78 percent of school sports programs.⁶⁷ A decade later, increasing costs for access to school facilities and increasing user fees for sports programs have simply become a fact of life for parents and students.

Furthermore, the decaying infrastructure of school sports facilities that were built during the baby-boom era has created a need for massive reinvestment that

can't easily be accommodated within public budgets. These multiple factors have created a cost spiral such that school sports programs are constantly facing challenges of fundraising, increasing the advantages of schools in affluent communities. For example, in Ontario in 2001–2, Donnelly and Kidd report, the top 10 percent of schools raised the same money as the bottom 79 percent put together.⁶⁸ The development of user-pay specialty “sports academies” within the public school system is one strategy that many school boards have adopted to raise revenues. In one sense, these schools make high-level sport participation more available within the public schools system. But with “tuition” costs that can run in excess of \$350 per month, these sports academies simply represent another face of the privatization of both Canadian education and Canadian sport. If postwar school sports programs in Canada once played an important role in subsidizing sports opportunities for children, adolescents, and teenagers, they are much less likely to do that in today's “pay-for-play” society.

CONCLUSION

I began this chapter with two contrasting quotations: the optimism and commitment to “fairness” in John Munro's declaration in 1970 of a new sport policy and Murray Costello's recent pessimistic assessment that “there will never be another Gordie Howe.” I have presented research suggesting that Costello's pessimism is well warranted. Significant social class differences continue to affect Canadians' sport participation. These class differences disproportionately involve Aboriginal Canadians, many single women, members of immigrant families, and Canadians with lower income and education levels, from both white and non-white racial groups. But most significantly, these disparities are anchored in a widespread decline over the past twenty years of the economic well-being of Canadians from a wide variety of backgrounds. This economic deterioration stems from broad economic, political, and social changes far removed from the world of sport. In this regard, it shouldn't be surprising that the increasing gap that has grown in Canada over the past twenty years between rich and poor has implications for understanding today's falling rate of sport participation. A substantial part of the falling rates of reported sport participation between 1992 and 2010 can be explained by a noticeable withdrawal from sport participation by middle- and lower-class Canadians, and *especially* by males from lower-class families. The issue here is more complicated than the fact that Canadians in middle- and lower-class families simply began to have less time and less money. The increasing financial pressure faced by many Canadians over the

past twenty years is accompanied by a complex set of intersecting factors that have pushed the cost of sport participation higher and higher. Sport in Canada today has been reshaped significantly by substantial reductions in various forms of “public” subsidy, either by volunteers, governments, or schools. The professionalization and privatization of sports organizations, the integration of sport into community economic development, and redirections of government expenditures has led to the gradual expansion of a “pay-to-play” philosophy.

It is interesting to see that the most recent national sport policy document, presented in 2012, continues to suggest that inclusivity in sport is a major policy principle, albeit in a less dramatic manner than in 1970. The policy document repeatedly emphasizes a commitment to ensuring that “opportunities are provided for persons from traditionally underrepresented and/or marginalized populations to actively engage in all aspects of sport participation, including leadership roles.”⁶⁹ I would suggest that in terms of the effect of class inequality on sport participation, all Canadian sport policies, including that of 1970, have been complete failures by any standard. There has never been much political will to even begin to consider how the challenges of class inequality affecting access to sports might be met. This is one reason why there has been virtually no consideration—in politics or media, or among sports organizers themselves—of the many contradictions in Canadian sports policy, with initiatives and policies in some areas having the unintended consequence of making sports more and more economically exclusive.

For example, I have argued elsewhere that, since the late 1980s, substantial public expenditures on major sporting events or on specialized spectacular facilities have had the effect of directing revenues away from areas such as schools and local municipalities, which have always played an important role in partially subsidizing the cost of sport participation. The more public money Canadians invest in such events and in the kind of sport system that supports them, the more out of reach sport will be for the majority of Canadians. In the coming years, when Canadians communicate about sport, we will have to decide whether equalizing opportunities for Canada’s socioeconomic classes really matters. If it does, addressing the problem will involve much more than the production of platitudes in national sport-policy documents about striving for “fairness” or “level playing fields.”

NOTES

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- 3 See Munro, *A Proposed Sports Policy for Canadians*.
- 4 On improvements in these areas, see *Canadian Sport Policy 2012* (Ottawa: Sport Information Resource Centre, 2012), <http://sirc.ca/resources/csp/canadian-sport-policy-2012>. On increases in programs for athletes with intellectual disabilities, see Special Olympics Canada, *Long-Term Athlete Development for Athletes with an Intellectual Disability* (Toronto: Special Olympics Canada, 2007), <http://www.specialolympics.ca/resources/long-term-athlete-development-model/>.
- 5 Richard S. Gruneau, "Class or Mass? Notes on the Democratization of Canadian Sport," in *Canadian Sport: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Richard S. Gruneau and John G. Albinson (Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley, 1976), 106–41; Gerald Kenyon, "Factors Influencing the Attainment of Elite Status in Track and Field," in *Post-Olympic Games Symposium: Proceedings* (Ottawa: Coaching Association of Canada, 1977), 163–69.
- 6 Beamish, "Persistence of Inequality."
- 7 Michael Bloom, Michael Grant, and Douglas Watt, *Strengthening Canada: The Socio-economic Benefits of Sport Participation in Canada* (Ottawa: Conference Board of Canada, 2005), 9.
- 8 Ibid., 8.
- 9 CIBC–KidSport, *Helping Our Kids Get Off the Sidelines*, July 2014, <http://cibccommunity.com/CIBCKidSportReport.pdf>, 21.
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- 11 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010: Research Paper*, February 2013, http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2013/pc-ch/CH24-1-2012-eng.pdf, 14. GSS results on sport participation are also discussed in Tony Hernandez, Ida E. Berger, Christy Brissette, Norman O'Reilly, Milena Parent, and Benoît Séguin, "Sport Participation in Canada: A Longitudinal Cohort Analysis," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Administrative Sciences Association of Canada, Halifax, 24–27 May 2008 (available for download at <http://ojs.acadiau.ca/index.php/ASAC/article/view/919/802>). For information about the methodology employed in these surveys, see *The General Social Survey: An Overview* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2013).
- 12 Data compiled from Warren Clark, "Kids' Sports," *Canadian Social Trends* 85 (Summer 2008): 54–61; Fidelis Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005* (Ottawa: Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, 2008); and Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*.

- 13 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 14.
- 14 Statistics Canada, "Multiple Jobholding, by Age," <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-222-x/2008001/section1/l-age-eng.htm>.
- 15 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 71.
- 16 Conference Board of Canada. "Income Inequality," January 2013, <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/details/society/income-inequality.aspx>.
- 17 Statistics Canada, "High-Income Trends Among Canadian Taxfilers, 1982–2010," *The Daily*, 28 January 2013.
- 18 Allan Crawford and Umar Faruqi, "What Explains Trends in Household Debt in Canada?" *Bank of Canada Review*, Winter 2011–2012, 3–15.
- 19 For the purpose of the GSS, Statistics Canada defined "sport" as an activity that "involves two or more participants engaged for the purpose of competition" and is governed by "formal rules and procedures" and "requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills, and a high degree of difficulty and effort." Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 8.
- 20 Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*, 9, 17.
- 21 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 15.
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- 25 On the influence of gender, ethnicity, and region on sports participation, see Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 26–29; on Aboriginal participation, see *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples' Participation in Sport* (Ottawa: Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005), <http://sirc.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/newsletters/archive/marcho8/feat1.cfm>.
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- 34 See Clark, "Kids' Sports"; Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*; and Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*.
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- 36 Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*, 33.
- 37 Trussell and McTeer, "Children's Sport Participation in Canada," 115.
- 38 Ibid, 121.
- 39 Tony Hernandez et al., "Sport Participation in Canada," 61.
- 40 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 23.
- 41 Barry McPherson, "Factors Influencing the Attainment of Elite Status in Hockey," in *Post-Olympic Games Symposium: Proceedings* (Ottawa: Coaching Association of Canada, 1977), 170–77.
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- 43 See Wendy Frisby, Colleen Reid, and Pamela Ponc, "Leveling the Playing Field: Promoting Poor Women's Health Through a Community Development Approach to Recreation," in *Sport and Gender in Canada*, 2nd ed., ed. Philip White and Kevin Young (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2007), 121–36.
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- 45 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 23.
- 46 Ibid., 37.
- 47 Ifedi, *Sport Participation in Canada, 2005*, 11.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 52.
- 50 Paul Jerbala, "Sport, the Voluntary Sector, and Canadian Identity: Learning from the Voluntary Sector Awareness Project," discussion paper prepared for the Sport Matters Group, December 2006, <http://sirc.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/newsletters/archive/mid-mar08/documents/S-1043044.pdf>, 7.
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- 59 Bloom, Grant, and Watt, *Strengthening Canada*, 4.
- 60 Canadian Heritage, *Sport Participation 2010*, 53.
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- 63 Useful summary discussions of this point can be found in Timothy A. Gibson, *Securing the Spectacular City: The Politics of Revitalization and Homelessness in Downtown Seattle* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004); and Mark Douglas Lowes, *Indy Dreams and Urban Nightmares: Speed Merchants, Spectacle, and the Struggle over Place in the World Class City* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).
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13

CULTIVATING DISTINCTION THROUGH HOCKEY AS COMMODITY

Peter Zuurbier

Sport is made in order to speak the human contract.

Roland Barthes

For many, if not most, Canadians, hockey is far more than just a game. Most years, from early autumn until early summer, ice hockey is everywhere in Canada. In particular, the professional version holds a prioritized space in Canadian consciousness. What began as a Saturday night ritual that captivated the home arenas, living rooms, and local pubs of generations of Canadians has grown into a multi-billion dollar, multi-media industry.

Hockey inspires countless allegories and myths among Canadians. It commands the attention of the country and has become a means of negotiating the Canadian experience. The game has become an extremely powerful source of cultural currency as a key source of national identity. Good and bad, many Canadians see land, country, and themselves in the sport, and, perhaps as a result, the game has taken an increasingly prominent role in the national conversation. Issues such as women's rights, the public funding of professional and amateur hockey arenas, increased scrutiny on player safety, bullying, violence, and acceptance based on

issues such as sexuality and ethnicity are among the many discourses surrounding hockey that seem to hold a mirror to a number of aspects of contemporary Canadian society.

Roland Barthes's vast body of work includes one brief discussion of hockey in Canada. In 1960, Hubert Aquin, a Québécois writer and filmmaker commissioned by the National Film Board of Canada, worked with Barthes to write the script for a documentary on five national sports that included hockey in Canada. It was titled *Le sport et les hommes*.¹

Before the project, Barthes had been unfamiliar with hockey. His first experience with the sport occurred when he spent ten days in Montréal early in 1961, where an uncut version of the film was made available to him for viewing.² Perhaps inspired by having arrived in Montréal in January, the heart of a Canadian winter, Barthes largely focuses on the sport as a myth used by Canadians to negotiate existence within the brutal elements that are intrinsic to Canadian climate and geography.

"What is national sport?" Roland Barthes asks, answering: "It is a sport that rises out of the substance of a nation, out of its soil and climate. To play hockey is constantly to repeat that men have transformed motionless winter, the hard earth, and suspended life, and that precisely out of all this that they have made a swift, vigorous, passionate sport."³ Barthes immediately picked up on the mythic foundation of the sport, Canada's realization of modernity through the command of nature in the pursuit of leisure. The consequence is a deep alignment between sport and nationalism within Canadian culture, where the pleasurable pastime is arguably the most prominent source of Canadian pride.

Playing the game in rinks, backyards, and streets across the country is one way many Canadians individually and collectively, actively engage hockey as fans. But watching the professional and top international games on television or its online equivalent has taken precedence in the discussions that resonate throughout the pubs, schoolyards, workplaces, and homes of Canadians, as well as online through social media, chats, forums, and comment sections.

Throughout hockey's trajectory, from its early development as a leisurely pastime, to an organized amateur game, to a crowd-driven spectacle professional sport, the passion of fans has motivated the growth of the game both commercially and culturally. Hockey's origin as a fan sport comes from its earliest days, when teams were assembled from the best members of a particular community. In their definitive work on hockey and Canadian culture, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, Richard Gruneau and David Whitson write:

“Cheering for the home team . . . meant cheering for teams that were likely to be composed of family, friends, or at least acquaintances. It could be credibly claimed that the quality of a performance said something about the community that produced it—not only about the skill levels of its players but also about the character of its people.”⁴ This is obviously no longer the case. Players now are bought, traded, and evaluated as commodities, with little if any consideration to where they are from. Yet among fans a similar semblance of civic pride remains.

As with most other team sports, the experience for hockey fans often largely hinges on the success of their favourite teams and stars. Fans who follow winning teams with excellent players can find the motivation behind their participation in this success and whatever aura of association it bestows. Barthes writes: “Everything happening to the player happens to the spectator. But whereas in the theatre the spectator is only a voyeur, in sport he is a participant, an actor.”⁵ Hockey fans spend a considerable amount of time, money, and energy to express themselves as fans. Whether this affects the outcome or not, each game fans share in the triumphs and tragedies of those on the ice, celebrating or suffering in unison.

Fans watching hockey are at different times affiliated with a variety of groups, including the immediate people they’re watching the game with, the others watching in the same location, friends and colleagues with whom they talk hockey, any hockey-related online or offline communities they may participate in, the cities and regions represented by teams or players, and the country itself. The vast and ever-growing array of opportunities for fan participation has opened up the space for more and more fans to express these individual and collective identities in more and more ways. Discourses of fandom are constantly taking new shapes and perspectives. Difference between fans is celebrated as the harmonized uniqueness of each individual fan’s participation that makes up the collective ritual of fandom.

Barthes’s perspective on hockey in the documentary was unique in that it was his very first exposure to hockey. As such, outside of his instinctive mythic alignment between sport, climate, and country, many of Barthes’s observations on the game seem to be misplaced. His lack of understanding of the basic conventions of hockey is expressed within the content of his discussion. For example, Barthes’s commentary on missed shots betrays his inexperience when he writes: “A failed goal is not only a defeat, it is virtually a wound, intense as a pistol shot.”⁶ If Barthes had been more of a hockey fan, he would likely have quickly realized that few shots actually end up as goals, so each miss is at best a temporary defeat, certainly not comparable to a gunshot wound. For most fans, this is common knowledge, so Barthes’s words expose his lack of perspective. A similar dynamic is shared among

almost all hockey fans, most of whom divulge far more about themselves than merely the teams and players they support, through the ways that they present themselves as fans.

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of habitus offers a compelling theoretical lens through which to explore the motivating forces that surround the creation and maintenance of individual identity within the communal rituals of hockey fandom. Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus in *Distinction*, a book that explores social dynamics within the class structures of France.

A concept based in the embodiment of class identity, habitus involves the ordering of performances of identity at both conscious and unconscious levels. As a critical lens, habitus unravels the discriminating logic of culture, the unseen structures that reinforce existing class differences. Bourdieu writes: "Habitus is constructed as the generative formula which makes it possible to account both for the classifiable practices and products and for the judgements, themselves classified, which make these practices and works into a system of distinctive signs."⁷ For Bourdieu, the notion of habitus outlines the collective reproduction of existing class distinctions by individuals from different classes.

Though traditional class divisions are not necessarily an urgent issue in contemporary Canadian society, there are varying forms of social stratification that seem to be growing more pronounced. Problematizing the symbolic reproduction of existing separations provides a means of critical interrogation of the prioritized role enjoyed by hockey in Canadian society. Hockey's stature as a cultural institution mystifies its role as a collection of corporate concerns that situate consumption at the foundation of rituals of hockey fandom and Canadian identity. Demystifying these rituals as forms of embodied consumption through habitus encourages a moment of reflexivity surrounding the fervent consumption of the hockey commodity.

Discourses of hockey fandom are the field on which habitus is constituted by fans in the ways in which they consume the game and represent themselves as fans and in the specific aspects of the game that allure them. Habitus is expressed through individual participation in the collective the rituals of hockey fandom. Fans both actively and unknowingly differentiate themselves while simultaneously cheering for the same teams and players. In Canada, these rituals are usually regarded as traditionally and intrinsically Canadian, meaning that participation in them is often regarded as a reflection of national identity. But any participation is negotiated through consumption, which is celebrated as a measure of loyalty. Bourdieu writes: "Each consumer is confronted by a particular state of the

supply-side, that is, with objectified possibilities . . . automatically classified and classifying, rank-ordered and rank-ordering.”⁸ Consumption is reified throughout the discourses of fandom, and consequently the same financial considerations that shaped Bourdieu’s work on class distinction play a considerable role in defining the identity of hockey fans.

Pierre Bourdieu discusses sports in *Distinction*, recognizing different sports as exclusive to certain classes on the basis of their economic and social position. Bourdieu writes: “To understand the class distribution of the various sports, one would have to take account of the representation which, in terms of their specific schemes of perception and appreciation, the different classes have of the costs (economic, cultural and ‘physical’) and benefits attached to the different sports,” including “immediate or deferred ‘physical’ benefits (health, beauty, strength)” as well as “economic and social benefits (upward mobility etc.).”⁹ In considering sport as whole within his larger discussion of habitus, Bourdieu situates it as a discourse that shapes, and is shaped by, the class body. People of different classes have differentiated physical types based on the type of labour they perform, which along with other social and economic factors play a role in determining interest and participation in specific sports. Bourdieu applies the same principle to audiences of sport, too, since, as we saw with Barthes, merely following the action of many sports involves certain situated knowledge, conventions, and levels of propriety that can make them class-exclusive.

Bourdieu did acknowledge that some sports appeal to a cross-section of classes but argued that they enjoy them for different reasons. Bourdieu writes: “Because agents apprehend objects through the schemes of perception and appreciation of their habitus, it would be naive to suppose that all practitioners of the same sport (or any other practice) confer the same meaning on their practice or even, strictly speaking, that they are practising the same practice.”¹⁰ This is indeed the case traditionally in Canada, where the strength in cultural currency enjoyed by hockey is a result of its establishment as a space where the virtues and vices of the whole range of Canadians meet. As Gruneau and Whitson write: “The game has variously been a form of backyard play, a type of ‘civilizing’ amateur sport, an opportunity to drink and gamble, a source of profit, and a community symbol. Moreover, these different uses of hockey have often blended together in complex ways.”¹¹ Hockey is unique in Canada as one of its few near-universal cultural signifiers, so the reasons to participate are unique to each person.

Those who grow up in Canada get used to the prominent place hockey holds in conceptions of contemporary national identity, but hockey fandom also offers

an inviting, inclusive space for new Canadians, whether they ever play or not. The game is one of the rare instances in which Canadians openly display the traditional notions of nationalism that are found in most other countries. Developing as a hockey fan becomes akin to developing as a Canadian for many, and participation in the rituals and discourses of fandom plays a significant role in developing national identity, for individual and country alike.

At the same time, the field of hockey fandom has its own underlying structures that qualify and demarcate the situated knowledge that makes up cultural capital. Bourdieu feels that there are three types of capital: economic, social, and cultural. Each one feeds into the other, as economic capital is translated into social and cultural capital, which work together to return the favour through reinforcement and enhancement. Discourses of hockey fandom provide an example of the conversion between these forms of capital, as the situated knowledge fixed around consumption represents a form of cultural capital among hockey fans and, by extension, many Canadians. Together, conversations on hockey between fans that begin in the lead-up to pro games, carry on into the commercial breaks and intermissions, and then follow the game, when fans share and compare their own critiques and analyses of the game action, all provide opportunities to develop and measure cultural capital. Since habitus is a manifestation of identity that is often overwhelmingly shaped by an individual's consumption, fandom as a life-style can be seen as a product of cultural capital that is embodied in the habitus of hockey fans.



Fundamentally for hockey fans the game can be seen as a levelling force, since there is only one difference that matters: the separation between the professional players competing and the rest of us sitting there watching the competition. Presumably most spectators are fans, everyone equal in that they are not playing. The mythic framing of hockey within Canadian culture constructs the relationship between the professional players and their fans mostly as one of intense admiration and aspiration. Barthes writes: "Every moral value can be invested in the sport: endurance, self-possession . . . courage. The great players are heroes, not stars."¹² If sports can be seen as the predominant culture industry of the early twenty-first century, then players are the contemporary *matinée* idols.

One of the results of the reverence for talented hockey players is that the experience of actually playing hockey rationalizes itself as the highest and most esteemed source of knowledge within discourses surrounding the game. When hockey is up

for discussion, deference is paid to those who played, and gradations of experience and achievement form the perception of a hierarchical structure. This logic is affirmed by Canadian hockey media, the tastemakers, gatekeepers, and knowledge bearers for most fans. Televised broadcasts, the primary gathering place for most hockey fans, consistently feature a rotating cast of former pro players, coaches and executives as commentators. Their purpose is to fill content spaces between the range of commercial promotions by using their perceived expertise to contextualize important events in the game for the fans watching along. Bourdieu writes of “the viewpoint of the ‘practitioner,’ past or present, who, as opposed to the mere consumer, the ‘hi-fi freak’ or armchair sportsman, recognizes a form of excellence which . . . is but the extreme limit of competence of the ordinary amateur.”¹³ By virtue of their longstanding high-level involvement in hockey, former pros are seen to understand the nuances of the game at a greater level of abstraction, with their on-ice experience providing an ideal complement.

This logic applies to everyone who participates in discourses of hockey fandom. From professionals to current amateur and leisure players, the unique knowledge developed from the experiences of playing is typically considered the most esteemed attribute of *habitus* among hockey fans. In the same way that the retired pros are considered authoritative on television, anyone who has played organized ice hockey is understood as having a superior understanding of the game when compared to those who have merely watched hockey. As a literal embodiment of their fandom, amateur players are considered brothers- and sisters-in-arms with their professional counterparts, if only from a distance. The time and energy committed to learning and actually playing hockey ensure a more exclusive perspective on the game, even among fans. The convention appears logically and rhetorically unassailable by anyone with less or worse experience or achievement, and it represents one of the key social shaping functions of *habitus*.

Since hockey experience is shaped through a person’s economic background, it can be seen as a distinguishing practice that becomes a form of social administration, an accepted structure that rationally sorts and categorizes fans for comparison against each other. The prioritization of hockey experience becomes a symbolic reinforcement of existing economic difference because of the barriers put forth by the cost of participation. Organized hockey for even the youngest children is prohibitively expensive, and it trends in the direction of ridiculously expensive as players approach and enter adolescence. Those who show real talent and even a glimpse of developmental potential require a substantial investment that is untenable for the majority of Canadian families. Elite talent is not the only requirement as a

player climbs the ranks of organized hockey: financial considerations add to the exclusive quality of continued participation.

Together, the variety of fees, the ongoing travel and year-round supplemental training, the nutritional demands, and the expensive equipment that requires regular replacement are simply too much. The discriminating effects of the costs associated with children's and amateur hockey are very real. As Richard Gruneau points out in the preceding chapter, basic equipment and registration costs are around \$3,000 per child every year. For more talented players who show the potential for college and professional levels, the extra costs associated with training and travel can run over \$10,000 each year. Unfortunately, regardless of talent, dreams of playing in the "Big League" are completely unobtainable for most, and the opportunity to merely play hockey is simply not there for many. Families with the means to have their children play, keep playing later into life, play at the highest levels their talents allow, and refine their skills and bodies to do so hold an inherent advantage in the knowledge economy within discourses of hockey fandom.

As well as dictating the rules of engagement, economics also have a direct relationship with the fans' consumption of the actual game action, making it another manifestation of habitus. Primarily this occurs through physical proximity to the pros, where closeness to the professional game assumes higher levels of esteem by association. The closing of proximity occurs in a few ways. First, most hockey fans would contend that the best way to enjoy the game is to have the best view of the action and that the best way to have the best view of the action is to be as near as possible to it. This would seem to oppose Bourdieu's notion of the distanced gaze of the aristocracy, since watching the game live could be seen to involve "a surrender to immediate sensation" as fans experience the action directly.¹⁴ But actually the unmediated gaze of live hockey may require a high amount of cultural capital for hockey fans to discern the action. With no assistance from the editors and announcers, the eye must know where to look if it is to follow the action. The absence of mediation in the live experience emphasizes what Bourdieu refers to as "the refusal of what is easy in the sense of simple and therefore shallow, and 'cheap,' because it is easily decoded and culturally 'undemanding.'"¹⁵ Watching the pros ply their trade without mediation from the camera—the ability to choose what to see up close, the sounds, the smells, the ability to almost touch the action, the value of participation derived from presence—provides the most esteemed cultural capital. The perspective is reified as being as close as possible to the game outside of actually playing.

The only challenges to the superiority of the live perspective are attempted through the reification of other forms of consumption around the game, which

offer their own distinguishing functions for those excluded from being at the game in person. Qualities of consumption such as the display on which hockey is watched and the location where it is watched (outside of the arena) become attempts at overcoming the gap opened through the perspective afforded by the live experience.

In addition, the closing of proximity as a projection of habitus within discourses of hockey fandom does not occur only spatially. Since professional hockey has been constructed to appear as the most authentic version of the game, any type of consumption that closes the gap between the pros and fans is reified as possessing the most esteemed character. Debates over authenticity are a function of a culture so thoroughly commodified that certain aspects are reified as authentic, but only in opposition to others that are not. As a culture industry, professional hockey has inverted notions of authenticity to suit its heavily commodified version. Those with the economic resources are able to afford the “authentic” experience of owning the exact same jerseys, skates, sticks, and equipment that the professionals use. They can afford similar regimented, performance-targeted diets and can employ similar training practices. Fans with the means can get closer to the action in every way, and their habitus reflects as much.

For the majority of fans, though, proximity may be temporarily overcome through varying forms of consumption, but their relationship with hockey is overwhelmingly mediated by the gaze of the television apparatus. The televised game is a series of images and sounds, recorded by a multitude of cameras and microphones, that are then chopped up and edited together into an assembled, game-like narrative. The production of the hockey broadcast changes the perception and points of emphasis within the game action, and the limitations inherent in the subjective perspective of the camera’s lens shape the entire body of knowledge for the fan who watches the game on TV.

Consuming hockey through media requires negotiating the surplus of content surrounding each game at some level, which for many fans often completely overwhelms the on-ice action. Umberto Eco describes this phenomenon as “sport cubed.” To Eco, sport is an athletic game played between individuals. When the game shifts into a performance for others, it becomes “sport squared.” Eco saw sport squared tending toward commodification, writing: “Sport squared (which involves speculation and barter, selling and enforced consumption) generates sport cubed, the discussion of sport as something seen. This discussion is in the first place that of the sport press, but it generates in turn discussion on the sports press, and therefore sport raised to the *n*th power. The discussion on the sports press is

discourse on a discourse about watching others' sport as discourse."¹⁶ Fans whose cultural capital as hockey fans has been constructed through television and online consumption are likely to be far more aware of sport-cubed discourses. Their perspectives and dispositions are typically largely shaped within the discussions and debates going on within sport cubed.

The excess of sport-cubed media grows while the same number of teams plays the same number of games with the same number of players, almost every year. The on-ice action can only help but face some measure of marginalization up against the range of supplemental content offered. The discussion of game action, the discussions around the game action, the discussion around the discussions around the game action, discussions surrounding the discussions on the discussions . . . It never ends, and it all take place at once, layering on top of itself. Together sport cubed creates a media-inducted tautology that is all completely self-reifying and not particularly relevant outside of itself, except that the resonance it shares with its massive audience of fans is so powerful.

Today, forget just watching the game in person. There is a growing range of both regional and national 24-hour television networks dedicated to sports in both regular and high definition, and each game is streamed online as well. There is one team-dedicated station—Maple Leafs TV—with others undoubtedly on the way, as well as sports-talk radio stations in every major city. There are official team and individual player websites, as well as sites owned by traditional sports media, that offer extensive coverage of hockey, and also unending non-official pro-hockey-themed sites. Comment sections at the end of individual pieces of content have become spaces for vigorous debate between fans. YouTube videos, podcasts, blogs, and message boards allow fans to express themselves and interact with others. This is to say nothing of the non-stop, instantaneous social media world, which fans, teams, and sports-media sites, as well as their personalities, all participate in in different ways and to varying degrees. More and more, even individual NHL players are beginning to embrace roles in the social media universe.

Together, the incredible mass and range of always available professional hockey-related media content forms a self-perpetuating hockey "media ghetto" (to borrow a term coined by David Taras). More than an echo chamber, the hockey media ghetto is an enclosed and completely self-referential territory that fans can explore infinitely while remaining completely encapsulated in the spectacle of professional hockey, with little to no exposure to the world that lies outside that discursive space. Fans enter the media ghetto of hockey fandom and don't really ever have to leave, with the few exceptions of when actual, tangible realities interrupt.

Despite the negative connotations that may be associated with its name, the media ghetto is also the locus of fan activity, the space where individual and collective fan discourse is constantly (re)shaped. It is the sphere of fan activity that provides a growing portion of the content that supplements the game action. The media ghetto accommodates the casual fan who may only have a passing interest in anything more than the game scores, as well as the many fans who engage hockey with varying levels of intensity. It provides a range of means for entering, spending time, and engaging in the rituals of fandom as each fan sees fit. Bourdieu writes: "The agents only have to follow the leanings of their habitus in order to take over, unwittingly, the intention immanent in the corresponding practices, to find an activity which is entirely 'them' and, with it, kindred spirits."¹⁷ For most fans, participation in the media ghetto to some degree is almost inescapable. The evaluations and impressions, the rumours, the rumblings, the grumblings, the hot stove, the hot seat, draft prospects, trade targets, and overall team strategies related to the next game, the next week, and the next few seasons frame the majority of discussions. Together, the media ghetto reappropriates all of it in building and maintaining a discursive framework for hockey fans that encourages them to foster an increasingly deep association, with more meaningful self-identification as fans offered in return.

Sport cubed grows as its media content continually beckons new fans to enter the fray, form allegiances and opinions, and engage in the rituals and discourses of fandom in their own particular way. For fans, the space for creativity and individual expression within the hockey media ghetto increasingly plays as important a role as the media content in framing and developing discourses of hockey fandom.

Consequently, although playing hockey may become more exclusive, and the experiential knowledge it creates may continue to grow in prominence in its perch above the fray of the media ghetto, the opportunities for new fans to entrench themselves in the game and use it as a means of identification, without ever picking up a hockey stick, has never been greater. Truth be told, for a large portion of fans, regardless of financial constraint, actually playing hockey is of little to no interest. The fan perspective that prioritizes sport-cubed discourses over experience establishes its own forms of cultural capital, ones based in abstracted knowledge accrued from the hockey media ghetto, even if the game itself is only involved at a very base level. Bourdieu describes the phenomenon as one in which "the pursuit of exclusiveness has to be content with developing a unique mode of appropriation. Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration—these are some of the strategies for outflanking, overtaking

and displacing.”¹⁸ These fans look to develop new, unique types of knowledge that allow for the creation of new means of distinction. This allows the fans watching televised hockey a means of bridging the proximity and participation gap through new rituals of fandom.

The thirst for hockey consumption by many impassioned fans cannot be satiated by the on-ice action or the subsequent sport-cubed discourse that surrounds it. These fans create all sorts of alternate value from the game by reappropriating the on-ice action for their own purposes. Fans are turning individual events and player performances into raw data and reconstituting them in ways that involve the final score in only tangential ways. The development of this type of cultural capital requires abstracted knowledge that may not involve much financial cost but that takes an enormous commitment of time and energy to create and sustain. These types of cultural capital are negotiated in a growing range of ways, including video games that get more and more hyperreal and interactive every year; fantasy sports, office pools, and opportunities to gamble on outcomes in ways that are both legal and illegal; new statistics, measures of performance, obscure personal facts about athletes; and fascination with odd events or phenomena surrounding the game. Growing numbers of books, periodicals, documentaries, and academic works explore hockey and individual phenomena within it in exacting detail. Even hockey cards are still being collected. All fan-related activities provide discursive spaces where abstract knowledge is constructed with the intent of layering perceptions of complexity, consequence, and ultimately value onto what is, in reality, a three-hour sporting contest that occurs sporadically throughout the week almost every winter.

While consumption can be seen to inadvertently shape the habitus of hockey fans through situated knowledge, it can also have more direct implications in performances of economic stature that extend discursive boundaries of cultural capital into more traditional consumptive practices involving products and services. The most obvious way for hockey fans to present themselves as such is through the adoption of their team’s logo and colours. Supporting a specific player, team, country, or era by choosing to wear a jersey, T-shirt, hat, or accessory is often an overt expression of fandom, especially with the availability of both contemporary and retro merchandise in a variety of styles. Wearing logo-branded clothing represents a clear, public display of habitus. For dedicated fans, these products offer an opportunity to actually embody the discursive space they inhabit.

The logo quickly becomes commodified as a way of signifying many fans’ financial stature. Currently, the official jersey worn by the players while playing can be

purchased for about \$320. A replica that looks close but isn't the same costs about \$170. Despite the deepest of aspirations, either jersey requires too prohibitive a cost for many. For them there is a T-shirt with the logo painted on the front, as well as the player's name and number on the back, for about \$30.¹⁹ The disparity in the price of the products is signified in their perceived quality, which becomes reified as *habitus*, a measure of commitment to the team and/or player by the fan.

The reappropriation of logo through consumptive practices has its limits, though. In terms of public display, there appears to be a somewhat inverse relationship between overt performances of fandom and esteemed *habitus*. For example, most people think that fans who get a team's logo tattooed onto their body or cut into their hair, or those who attend games in costume or paint their face or body, look and often, in fact, are silly.

In contrast, fans at live games who do not outwardly display their fandom through their attire are typically performing a lesser level of support. Some fans don't like to dress up; others arrive at the game directly from prior engagements. For whatever reason, the comparative lack of enthusiasm by these fans leads to a disruption the conventions of fandom: wearing normal clothing to the game, when everyone else is wearing team-themed clothing. Pro hockey arenas in Canada are full of thousands of people wearing their team's logos and colours: it is one of the more visible rituals of hockey fandom. The mass show of consumption is done in solidarity with the players, and in some places participation is sacrosanct, especially for the more important games. Even though many fans cannot afford even a T-shirt, the cost of entry plays an exclusionary role in ensuring that only fans with at least some money are allowed inside. Even in refusal, then, the choices of clothing by fans can represent a powerful display of *habitus*, as it speaks to the purpose of their participation.

This isn't exactly scientific . . . but if you imagine a home game for many of the Canadian teams, think of the back, the upper-tiered seats where all manner of team-themed T-shirts reign supreme. Now, move closer to the ice: all you see is jersey after jersey. But once you get to the luxury boxes and toward the best seats in the arena, the ones closest to the ice, the look of the crowd often changes as jerseys become dots within a more conservatively dressed group of fans.

Those who attend hockey games dressed in a suit and tie are in fact dressed in uniform: their own. The prohibitive cost of top seats for pro hockey games means that those up front are often the recipients of corporate-purchased tickets. Professional hockey games are the intermission entertainment of their professional lives in business, the opportunity to create social and cultural capital using their

economic means. The absence of logos on their bodies isn't as representative of a lack of priority on the team and players as it is of a deeper level of priority that lies elsewhere. Suits and ties at hockey games are mostly worn by the people whose job it is to be there, whether that is players, coaches, executives, journalists, or the businesspeople.

Moving back up through the stands past the suits, the next major group are the season-ticket holders, who are some of the most passionate fans of their teams and players. The devotion of season-ticket holders is expressed through their high-levels of consumption around the team. These fans group themselves together in their united passion and also in their ability to pay premium prices in advance for seats to each of the forty-one home games that occur almost each season. Win or lose, these fans have committed to their team through a considerable amount of time and money. For this reason, they can claim possession of a more esteemed habitus within discourses of hockey fandom, since they are economically invested stakeholders in the success of their favourite players and teams. The financial commitment from season-ticket holders and any sacrifices made in its name are seen as markers of more virtuous, authentic, or intense fandom. At the same time, the social benefits for season-ticket holders are matched by a responsibility to the continued maintenance of their cultural capital, making the experience something between a party and a duty. Win or lose, showing up and consuming become a lifestyle choice that takes precedence.

Intermixed with the season-ticket holders are the fans who are willing to pay a premium for tickets to individual games. Precious few seats in the arena offer ideal views of the whole ice, and the most comprehensive view comes from television. Fans commodify themselves at live games by paying increasing increments to experience the game collectively. The reified exclusivity of live participation becomes the primary justification for increasing ticket costs as the high-definition, surround-sound, live-recorded, home-viewing experience becomes more enticing. Flaws inherent in watching live are commodified as benefits in the gradations of seat sections and sightlines offered.

The higher reaches of the stadiums are commonly filled with fans who are only able to attend the odd game in person. The reason for this could be limited interest, but often it is related to constraints surrounding the time and/or expense associated with the level of engagement of regular ticket holders. The experience that others in the arena may take for granted is treasured by these fans. Bourdieu writes: "Though there are cases in which the dominant function of the practice is reasonably clearly designated, one is practically never entitled to assume that the different

classes expect the same thing from the same practice. . . . The class variations in sporting activities are due as much to variations in perception and apprehension of the immediate or deferred profits they are supposed to bring.”²⁰ Watching live offers a rare escape from sport-cubed discourses, an opportunity to temporarily close proximity with the players they revere and to develop the perspective that can only come from watching the best of the best in person. For those who can manage only the odd game in person, the game is often a special occasion, a time for celebration, which is why they are frequently the most lively members of the crowd.

The official pro hockey season may end when the Stanley Cup is awarded, but the media ghetto offers a permanent season for fans, where the offseason brings forth fresh sport-cubed discourse surrounding team and player improvements. The permanent season is always available, and it constantly updates itself with new opportunities for consumption. A new season is almost always around the corner, and the expectation is that fans will continue consuming without fail, to keep up with the knowledge and appearances required to maintain their habitus. Inherently understood is the risk of falling behind for anyone who doesn't keep up the pace. In the same way that season-ticket holders cannot give up their seats for a year and then get them back, fans of hockey discourse within the media ghetto cannot miss a news cycle without losing their grip on cultural capital.

As the prominence of the media ghetto and sport-cubed discourses for hockey fans becomes more pronounced, the web they weave around fans has become even denser. Specifically, the Toronto Maple Leafs, far and away the most popular and valuable professional franchise in all of hockey, is owned by MLSE (Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment), a conglomerate of two of Canada's largest media companies: Rogers Communications and Bell Canada. The seemingly unlikely union between otherwise rivals provides both companies with an enormous amount of relatively low-cost content that can reach across their ever-growing media landscape.

With the exception of a few ancillary beneficiaries, all of the consumption by the fans of the Maple Leafs of their favourite team ends up in one place. From the impossible-to-find game tickets, to the overpriced beer, food, and merchandise, to the other costs associated with attending live games, to the additional fees for specialty sports channels on television that broadcast the games and supplemental content, to the array of advertising and sponsorship revenue they generate from their assortment of media entities, to the data fees associated with watching games and consuming content online and on the go, to the Maple Leafs-branded bars they own: all of that money ends up in one place. Consequently, encouraging

increased consumption of the Maple Leafs and everything around them, no matter how abstracted—opening the tent and inviting as many fans as possible inside—is the name of the game.



Sports, hockey or otherwise, are metonymical of life in profound and exciting ways. If, as Barthes writes, sport does indeed speak the human contract, then it does so in the discursive shape of a game. The game between the players on the ice has rules and conventions, as does the competition for differentiation between fans. Both require a sort of expertise rooted in cultural capital, and success is only measured against oneself and the others who are involved.

The purpose of this piece is to unravel some of the fundamental structures and conventions of the game that goes on between fans while they watch professional hockey. Bourdieu writes: “Because those who take part in a game agree on the stakes, at least sufficiently to fight for them, one may choose to emphasize either the complicities which unite them in hostility, or the hostilities which separate them in complicity.”²¹ The habitus of hockey fans is shaped through complicity, but it is a complicity customarily established through the mild hostility of friendly competition. The different practices of fans function to fix the qualification and stratification of fan identities around consumption. In this way, the uniquely Canadian celebration of consumption at the heart of the discourses and rituals of hockey fandom increasingly appears to be drawing parallels with more traditional forms of exclusion. Distinction occurs through the privileging of experience that sits at the base of cultural capital within hockey fandom. Within this logic, the habitus of hockey fandom is realized as symbolically reinforcing social stratification through economic divisions.

Hockey fandom more and more seems to be reappropriated into the traditional means of the economic and cultural distinction that Bourdieu discusses. The lens of habitus, applied to the discourses and rituals of hockey fandom, highlights and reinforces the essential role that consumption plays in the development of individual identity as hockey fans and, to a large extent, as Canadians. Bourdieu writes that, with lifestyles like fandom, “the dialectic of conditions and habitus is the basis of an alchemy which transforms the distribution of capital, the balance-sheet of a power relation, into a system of perceived differences, distinctive properties, that is, a distribution of symbolic capital, legitimate capital, whose objective truth is misrecognized.”²² This misrecognition occurs in Canada through the uncomfortable

alignment between hockey fandom and Canadian identity that is created through consumption.

The cultural industry of pro hockey and the myths of hockey that enrapture Canada's national consciousness are one and the same. These myths foster one of the few commonly understood forms of Canadian identity. In fostering traditional notions of nationalism, hockey fans can participate in their own way while feeling part of a larger whole. Consuming hockey is uniting Canadians old and new. An appearance on CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* remains one of the most significant junctures in the rite of passage for every young Canadian pro, the moment every child is supposed to envision as he or she provides play-by-play to their own empty-net exploits. At the same time, the deepening commodification of the game and subsequent costs surrounding both professional and organized amateur hockey are constraining opportunities and types of engagement for fans. Hockey games on television are progressively being moved to specialty channels, which have extra costs associated. Online broadcasts require lots of bandwidth, and often access is subscription based. The last bastion of free access to professional and international hockey seems to be AM sports radio, which is obviously not *watching* the game at all.

As the costs associated with hockey grow, it is important to remember that the heavily commodified version of hockey reifies itself and mystifies fans into believing that this version of hockey is superior. Perceptions of cultural roots between hockey and Canada may appear to almost entirely surround the professional game and top international competitions, but the popularity of the game truly finds its basis in active participation, not passive, contemplative observance. The rivers, ponds, backyards, community rinks, gymnasiums, fields, and streets where the game was born and raised are largely still around, and a little space and enthusiasm are often more than enough to inspire a game at a moment's notice.

Transcending the commodified game involves challenging the logic of fandom, problematizing habitus and the symbolic reproduction of the false hierarchy of values projected by the spectacle of professional hockey. Beginning this process involves reclaiming the non-professional game through actually playing. Physical benefits of exercise aside, shinny and street hockey take little preparation, or coordination; costs are often minimal, and basic equipment (sticks, nets, and skates) can be shared among participants. Unorganized hockey provides a strong measure of experiential knowledge development, encourages inclusivity and camaraderie, and offers an opportunity to engage the game for fun's sake.

In playing hockey among themselves, fans can independently manifest the deep relationship between sport, land, and nation that lies at the foundation of the mythic

association between sport and country. Bourdieu writes: “Appropriating ‘nature’. . . presupposes a culture, the privilege of those with ancient roots.”²³ Since Canada does not really recognize its origins, perhaps the appropriation of nature that occurs in playing hockey is attempting to do the reverse. Perhaps Canadians are attempting to use hockey to establish the foundation of what will eventually become ancient roots. Canadian culture and the myths of hockey that are projected, imagined, and realized within discourses of hockey fandom can be seen as ways of attempting to set roots down. But if this is indeed the case, then we as Canadians need to consider what we want these roots to grow into as we cultivate them.

NOTES

- 1 For a discussion of the film project, see Scott MacKenzie, “The Missing Mythology: Barthes in Québec,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 65–74. The text of *Le sport et les hommes* was eventually published under the same title by *Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal* (2004). It subsequently appeared in English, in the translation of Richard Howard, under the title *What Is Sport?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).
- 2 MacKenzie, “The Missing Mythology,” 69.
- 3 Barthes, *What Is Sport?* 45, 47.
- 4 Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), 67.
- 5 Barthes, *What Is Sport?* 59.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 7 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Routledge, 1984), 170.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 223.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 209, 211.
- 11 Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 27.
- 12 Barthes, *What Is Sport?* 49.
- 13 Pierre Bourdieu, “Sport and Social Class,” *Social Science Information* 17, no. 6 (1978): 830.
- 14 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 486.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Umberto Eco, “Sports Chatter,” in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 162.
- 17 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 223.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 282.

19 For a full tour of NHL merchandise, see <http://shop.nhl.com>.

20 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 223.

21 Ibid., 316.

22 Ibid., 172.

23 Ibid., 281.

14

HOCKEY ART AS VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Insights from Oral Culture

Chaseten Remillard

When I began researching this chapter, I called my father—a former goalie for a rural Alberta hockey team—to ask whether he had any suggestions about where to start. He responded with one word: “Masks.” He then proceeded to sketch the history of the goalie mask, from Jacques Plante to Ken Dryden, punctuating his account with recollections of his own experiences. After our conversation, I looked into goalie-mask art and came across the painting *Legends of the Mask*, by Glen Green, a realistic depiction of five legendary goalie masks suspended against a black background (see figure 14.1). Looking into the emptiness of those eyeholes, I couldn’t help but imagine my father’s eyes staring back at me.

My father’s response and my experience of *Legends of the Mask* clarified for me that much (if not all) of what I know about hockey is premised on some form of direct experience, some embodied encounter with the game. My father’s history of the mask—from Plante to Dryden—could never be separated from his experience of wearing a mask, just as my knowledge of the game was linked to my own experiences and those told to me by friends, coaches, and family members. My father’s story clarified another important point about my hockey knowledge: it has been largely gained and transmitted through informal communication. That sports culture is an informal and oral culture—something maintained through “watercooler

and barroom arguments and personal conversations”—has been observed before.¹ But what does this tell us about how Canadians communicate through hockey art?



Figure 14.1 Glen Green, *Legends of the Mask*

In chapter 3 of his now classic work, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982), Walter Ong argues that, in primary oral cultures, the “restriction of words to sound determines not only modes of expression but also thought processes.”² He goes on to outline a number of characteristics of communication within oral cultures, which collectively constitute what he calls the “psychodynamics of orality.” In oral cultures, words must necessarily serve as mnemonic aids. As Ong puts it, “You know what you can recall,” and, in the absence of written texts, words must enable people to remember.³ Words are, in particular, the vehicle not only for the transmission of abstract cultural values but for the acquisition of practical knowledge, or “know-how.” At the same time, oral communication remains intimately bound up with concrete objects. Ong writes that “oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld,” that is, to the world of everyday experience.⁴ Within the oral culture that surrounds sport, hockey art would appear to serve much the same function as do words in oral societies. The question is, then, whether hockey art has more in common with cave paintings than with the *Mona Lisa*.

THE MNEMONIC FUNCTION

One of the most important functions of communication in an oral culture is to preserve collective memory. Since oral cultures lack the means to record information

in written form, they rely instead on the spoken word to retain and transmit important information. As Ong points out, “To solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns.”⁵ Formulaic phrases or statements, rhyme and rhythm, repetition, antitheses, and alliteration are among the devices that help to preserve words, and hence information, in memory. Sayings such as “Red in the morning, the sailor’s warning; red in the night, the sailor’s delight” or “Divide and conquer” serve to communicate practical wisdom, while formulas such as “the clinging vine” or “the sturdy oak” remind us of key information.⁶ To Ong’s examples, one could add more recent expressions such as “lefty-loosey, righty-tighty” or, in the context of hockey culture, epithets such as “Sid the Kid.”

Although Ong does not concern himself with visual means of communication, mnemonic formulas need not be restricted to linguistic expressions like those above. As visual studies critics have made clear, picturing practices can also be mnemonic. Indeed, visual theorists Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, and Kevin DeLuca and Anne Teresa Demo have each outlined how images help us to remember important events and people, perhaps even more easily than linguistic statements.⁷ These visual mnemonics represent subjects in consistent ways and so function as a form of collective memory.

For example, for *Remember the Goal*, painter D. R. Laird used the famous photograph of the 1972 Henderson goal as a visual model. Keeping the players in the same poses, he depicted adults as children and the professional rink as a backyard pond, framed by snow-covered trees and bushes. For the viewer, Laird thus creates both a visual replay, of the original Henderson goal, and a mental replay—the recollection of personal experiences of playing shinny hockey. When the iconic content of the photograph is transposed into everyday life and the characters are changed from famous hockey players to ordinary children, the historic photograph, which documents a distinct event that occurred in 1972, becomes a visual mnemonic formula that enables viewers to forge a connection between that event and the everyday experience of playing hockey outdoors. In other words, concrete, personal experience becomes a vehicle through which the larger history of Canadian hockey is transmitted.

One can find examples of the use of visual replay as a mnemonic device in the art of goalie masks as well. Jacques Plante, Hockey Hall of Fame goaltender who played for the Montreal Canadiens from 1953 to 1963 and won six Stanley Cups with the team, is generally considered to be the first goalie ever to wear a mask, although his masks were undecorated. In Glen Green’s *Legends of the Mask* (figure 14.1), Plante’s

iconic mask is the first on the left. Gerry Cheevers is commonly credited with the first decorated goalie mask, and his famous “scar face” or “stitches” design, which originated after he was hit in the face with a hockey puck, is often cited as inspiration for more elaborate mask art. Recalling that Cheevers would add more stitches to the mask every time a puck hit it, Ron Hextall noted, “When he started putting the stitches on, people took note, it wasn’t just to protect your face. It was a piece of art.”⁸ From such humble beginnings, the tradition of hockey mask decoration has graduated to an art form. Although beautifully ornate, mask designs are typically extensions of team logos or visual expressions of personal nicknames. On 19 February 2011, however, the Montreal Canadiens and the Calgary Flames played an outdoor Heritage Classic game, and Carey Price, the goaltender for the Canadiens, commissioned a special mask for the event. The new Price mask, designed by David Arrigo, depicted Jacques Plante wearing his mask.

Unlike the more purely decorative masks, the mask that Price wore for the Heritage Classic functioned as a visual mnemonic formula in much the same way as Laird’s *Remember the Goal*. Interestingly, the Price mask, while clearly referencing Jacques Plante, combines features of both Plante and Price. As Price explained in an interview, the eyes and mouth on the front of the mask reproduce Plante’s features, but the ears and wisps of hair on the side of the mask are based on a photograph of the side of his own head.⁹ This mask on top of a mask creates a hybrid, one that literally put Price into the place of Plante. In so doing, the mask enlivened the memory of Plante in the embodied and lived play of Price, just as the children in Laird’s painting revive the memory of the Henderson goal through their play.

In *Oral History Theory*, Lynn Abrams points out that memory is best understood as precisely this process. Memory, she writes, is “the calling up of images, stories, experiences and emotions from our past life, ordering them, placing them within a narrative or story and then telling them in a way that is shaped at least in part by our social and cultural context.”¹⁰ This definition of remembering makes clear that memory is a bridge between personal experience and cultural knowledge. Those watching Price play while wearing the Plante mask are not only reminded of one of the Canadiens’ most revered players but also of the team’s glorious history.

Another example of how hockey art functions as a mnemonic formula is Tim Lee’s *Untitled (No. 4, 1970)*, a photograph that shows the artist suspended horizontally in midair, arms and legs outstretched. The image has been cut in half, with Lee divided at the waist, his legs in the left panel and his torso, head, and arms in the right panel. Each half of the image is enclosed in a heavy white frame, and the two are hung so that a stretch of white wall intervenes. The background of

the photograph is also white, and Lee is dressed in black. At first sight, the image resembles an act of levitation, and, in contrast to Laird's *Remember the Goal*, in no apparent way does it reference hockey: there are no hockey sticks, no pastoral setting, no skates, no ice, no puck.

Although more subtle and abstract than the work of Laird, Lee's work also remembers a very specific goal, however. Lee's horizontal posture, accompanied by the references to "No. 4" and "1970" in the title, provide the viewer with both a visual and a verbal mnemonic, alluding to one of the most famous hockey goals ever recorded on film. On 10 May 1970, Bobby Orr, who wore number 4 for the Boston Bruins, scored an overtime winning goal against the St. Louis Blues. The goal was remarkable for two reasons. First, it won the Bruins the Stanley Cup, their first since 1941. Second, Orr flew into the air a split second after the goal, his arms and legs outstretched, his body nearly perfectly horizontal. Ray Lussier captured the moment in a photograph, and that photograph remains one of the most iconic hockey images of all time. Just as Laird reassembles the formal components of the Henderson goal into the everyday setting of ice pond hockey, Lee, too, remembers the distinctive element of the Orr goal, concretizing that moment through his own experience and body. In this way, Lee himself becomes the vehicle of cultural memory.

ART AS APPRENTICESHIP

In primary oral cultures, the acquisition of knowledge is closely associated with the interpersonal. As Ong argues, knowledge is conceptualized through a process of "assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings."¹¹ In such cultures, people learn "by apprenticeship—hunting with experienced hunters, for example—by discipleship, which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear."¹² Even in written cultures, however, immediate, "hands-on" learning is often the best way to master a new skill. In the case of hockey, communicating practical knowledge may simply involve an experienced player explaining the rules, describing specific strategies, demonstrating specific manoeuvres, and so on—a process akin to an apprenticeship. But hockey art can also function to communicate practical knowledge, in that it often depicts exemplary actions on the part of hockey's most skilled practitioners. Hockey art teaches us what it means to be a hockey player, but it does so in part through the concrete illustration of "best practices," that is, by forging visual links between a particular identity (hockey player) and the actions, the "know-how," associated with that identity.

The relationship between hockey and the elaboration of national identity is well-trodden ground, and much of the study of hockey art has accordingly centred on hockey as a myth or metaphor for the nation.¹³ Viewed from this perspective, hockey reflects conventional ideals and values, functioning as a “mystic writing-pad,” a blank slate on which all that is, or that can be, “Canadian” is endlessly inscribed.¹⁴ Such interpretations of hockey and, by extension, hockey art are both appealing and compelling. Indeed, I have often thought about the cultural significance of one of the most ubiquitous visual hockey artifacts ever to circulate within the Canadian public sphere, the five-dollar bill created for the 2001–6 Canadian Journey series. The note features images of children playing hockey that “capture the spirit and beauty of the Canadian winter.”¹⁵ An image of Sir Wilfrid Laurier appears on the front of the bill, which also features a quotation from Roch Carrier’s story “Le chandail de hockey” (“The Hockey Sweater”), in both English and French. The quotation reads: “The winters of my childhood were long, long seasons. We lived in three places—the school, the church and the skating rink—but our real life was on the skating rink.”¹⁶ When these images are taken together, the bill seems to make an iconographic statement of national unity, one that looks past differences of language and culture and instead finds commonality in those most quintessential of Canadian experiences—hockey and winter.

Yet, despite such benign and bucolic images, hockey is, and always has been, a rough sport, a characteristic that Michael Robidoux sees as fundamental to the role of hockey in the formation and expression of national identity. According to Robidoux, “hockey enabled Canadians to display qualities that have been valued in patriarchal relations: stoicism, courage, perseverance, and proficiency. The singularity of the game and the manner in which it was played were critical for a young and disparate nation to have as its own.”¹⁷ As hockey evolved into a modern, pan-Canadian sport, through the formalization of rules and governance structures, a patriarchal ideal of masculine identity founded on physical strength and dominance became entrenched in the society. Symbolically, hockey came to represent the masculine Canadian “cycle of life,” in which “the boy becomes a man, the player a fan, a coach, a father, a player again—and the game goes on.”¹⁸ As national ideology, hockey thus expresses a deeply patriarchal world view, one that is premised on “father-son bonding and bloodline.”¹⁹ Indeed, as Jay Scherer and Lisa McDermott argue, the association between this idealized masculine identity and the sport of hockey has become so deeply ingrained in the Canadian national consciousness that it can function as a political strategy. In particular, Scherer and McDermott trace the political rebranding of our former prime minister, Stephen Harper, as a “proud hockey Dad.”²⁰

In this interpretation, hockey art is reductive, its focus falling on the creation of iconic images that ignore the tensions and complexities of lived experience (including, of course, the somewhat inconvenient fact that women also play hockey). However, hockey does not simply serve to reinforce normative values. Robidoux opposes the modern form of the game, with its standardized rules and system of leagues, to what he calls its “vernacular” tradition, that is, the informal hockey of everyday life, localized, loosely organized (if at all), and unruly—the “road/ball/pond hockey in which people engage in variations of the game of hockey in unspecified locales, with unspecified participants in terms of age, number, gender, and skill.”²¹ While Robidoux acknowledges that “hockey was used ideologically to express national sentiment,” he argues that “its value as a vernacular entity was equal to, if not greater than, its symbolic value.”²² The distinction between hockey as official national sport and hockey in its vernacular expression entails a shift in perspective that can be useful to our understanding of hockey art. Considered from the point of view of ideology, hockey art seeks to inspire a sense of reverence: in our capacity as viewers (and spectators), we assume a passive role, admiring idealized images of male identity from which we remain at a distance. Considered from the point of view of vernacular tradition, however, hockey art communicates a different form of identity, one grounded in immediacy and in practical knowledge and skill. Far from simply perpetuating the masculine ideals enshrined in the imagery of hockey, this perspective reminds us that gender is socially constructed.²³

Consider, for example, Anthony Jenkins’s *Games Faces*, a series of portraits of hockey stars such as Mario Lemieux, Guy Lafleur, and Mark Messier (see figure 14.2). The series is interesting in that Jenkins uses a Wayne Gretzky tabletop hockey game as his canvas. Taken together, the images in the collection display precisely the type of ideal masculine identity described by Robidoux: the portraits are of “stoic, courageous, and physically dominant” men.²⁴ The “official” pantheon of hockey remains clearly gendered. However, the rendering of the portraits on a working tabletop hockey game reminds us that hockey exists in vernacular forms as well. When the medium, the tabletop game, becomes the focus of analysis rather than the portraits themselves, *Game Faces* suggests a different sort of hockey identity, one that is based on participation—on the actions through which one acquires the ability to play. Viewed from this perspective, the portraits are not mere static images. As their medium of execution suggests, the esteem granted to these men is founded on the merit they have earned through the dedicated practice necessary to hone their skills. In other words, the traits worthy of respect and emulation are not inherent qualities of the male sex; rather, they are the traits that enable someone

to acquire expertise. From the point of view of the vernacular, the message is less “Be men like these” and more “Play like this.” This shift changes the focus of hockey art from the symbolic expression of gendered ideals to the realities of apprenticeship—that is, from ideology to know-how.

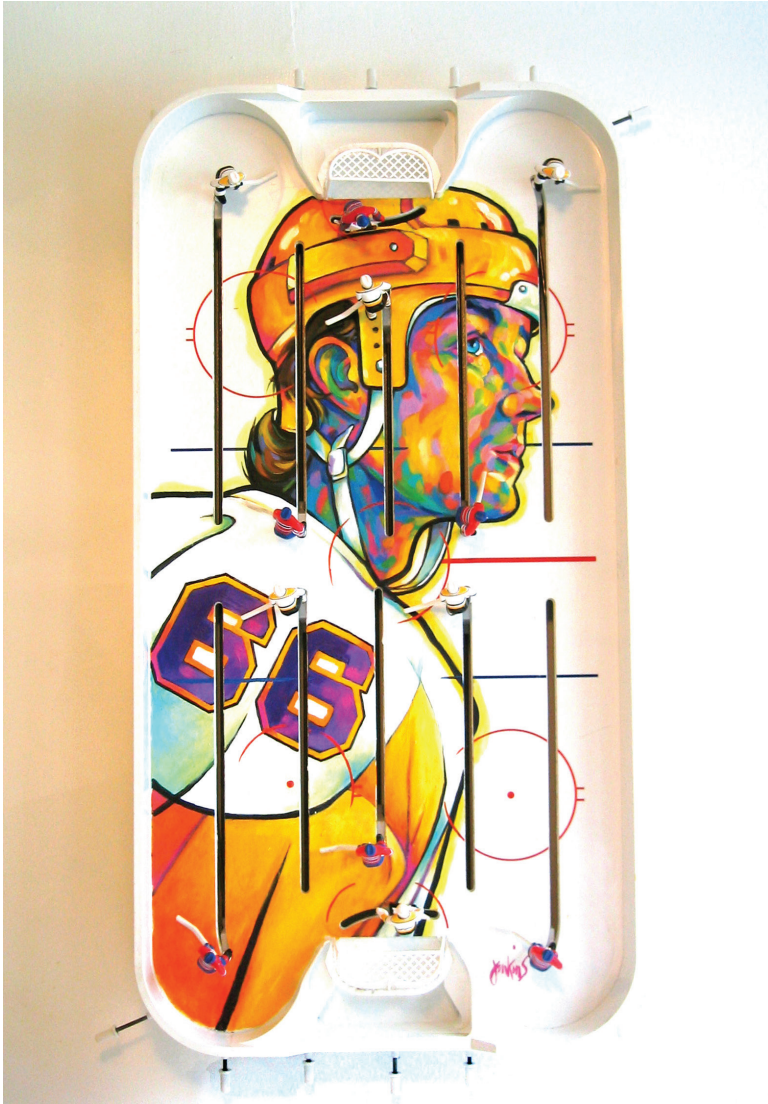


Figure 14.2 *Super Mario* (2004), Anthony Jenkins's portrait of Mario Lemieux, in his *Game Faces* series

Ong also argues that oral cultures “tend to use concepts in situational, operational frames of reference that are minimally abstract in the sense that they remain close to the living human lifeworld.”²⁵ In other words, oral communication is grounded in the concrete. “An oral culture,” he writes, “simply does not deal in such items as geometrical figures, abstract categorization, formally logical reasoning processes, definitions, or even comprehensive descriptions, or articulated self-analysis, all of which derive not simply from thought itself but from text-formed thought.”²⁶ As Ong points out, oral cultures are far from primitive or unsophisticated. But in oral cultures concepts are typically expressed in relation to specific, concrete phenomenal realities: meaning is embodied rather than abstracted. I would argue that hockey art also resists meanings premised on abstract thought. This does not mean that hockey art cannot convey abstract ideas. To focus on those ideas, however, is to dismiss the situational, operational, and concrete nature of hockey art, which amounts to a failure to recognize an important component of the art.



Figure 14.3 Jean-Pierre Gauthier, *Nul/Flirting with the Puck* (2008)

For example, in his kinetic sculpture, *Nul/Flirting with the Puck* (see figure 14.3), Jean-Pierre Gauthier suspends two hockey sticks from the ceiling. Each stick is equipped with an automated motor such that it makes gentle and constrained swings at a suspended puck, which remains just out of reach between the stick blades. Each

stick is also outfitted with a camera to record the action from the point of view of the stick. The endless commencement of an invisible game is then broadcast on three monitors.

This kinetic sculpture is certainly abstract and ambiguous, allowing for a range of interpretive possibilities. However, the sculpture is premised on the most basic, concrete, and recognizable components of hockey: a stick and a puck. Rather than working from the concrete to the abstract, the sculpture takes the abstract and makes it concrete. The sculpture strips hockey of the cultural, economic, social, and political meanings ascribed to it by ideological or symbolic readings and instead situates the meaning of hockey in the mechanical interaction of stick and puck, the material core of the game. Gauthier thereby defines hockey as an essential operation in the same way as the non-literate Russian peasants interviewed by A. R. Luria defined cutting tools through their operation. In Ong's paraphrase, "If you are a workman with tools and see a log, you think of applying the tool to it, not of keeping the tool away from what it was made for."²⁷ Indeed, *Nul/Flirting with the Puck* suggests that if you are a hockey player and see a puck and a stick, you think of applying the stick to the puck, not of keeping the stick away from what it was made for.



Figure 14.4 Craig LeBlanc, *Please Use Me* (2004)

Another striking example of how hockey art communicates primarily through concrete objects is Craig LeBlanc's sculpture *Please Use Me* (see figure 14.4). This simple sculpture consists of a plain hockey stick that sits with the tip of its blade on a white block, its butt end resting against the wall. The blade of the stick is stencil-cut with the phrase "PLEASE USE ME" in large white letters. The motionless stick, with its mute command, elegantly suggests that hockey derives its meaning from concrete practice. A hockey stick is made to be used, and its static existence in the museum display is unsettling, seemingly even for the stick itself. The emphatic statement of purpose carved into the blade expresses what is already known: the stick carries no meaning without its utility. *Please Use Me* does not make an abstract statement of myth or metaphor, nor does it make a statement about the division between art and life. Instead, it reminds the viewer that without the concrete practice of the game, there would be no stick and no hockey.

CONCLUSION

At the outset, I proposed that Ong's insights into the characteristics of communication in an oral culture can shed light on the nature and functions of hockey art, especially given that much of sports culture is transmitted through informal and oral channels. To close, it is only fitting to consider another characteristic that Ong associates with communication within an oral culture: conservatism (or traditionalism). "Since in a primary oral culture conceptualized knowledge that is not repeated aloud soon vanishes," he explains, "oral societies must invest great energy in saying over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages. This need establishes a highly traditionalist or conservative set of mind that with good reason inhibits intellectual experimentation."²⁸ Innovation is not unknown. A narrator telling a story will, for example, introduce new elements, with the result that "there will be as many minor variants of a myth as there are repetitions of it, and the number of repetitions can be increased indefinitely." All the same, "the formulas and themes are reshuffled rather than supplanted with new materials."²⁹ In much the same way, hockey art appears to have a limited capacity to express novel thought.

Indeed, many theorists of sport culture lament the apparent inability of sports art to generate academic attention and to be received and thought of as art. They blame the dominant distinction between popular and high culture. In response, defenders of sports culture and sports art have argued that this characterization is largely a result of disciplinary bigotry and not a reflection of the formal characteristics of sports art. The difference between art and sports art, in other

words, is one of snobbish reception. As Mike O'Mahony phrases it, "What, therefore, might be at issue if . . . a representation of sport is encountered in an arena that conventionally posits an alternative set of values or concerns; namely an art exhibition?"³⁰ In response to this question, he suggests that when sports art is situated in a receptive context otherwise reserved for high art, sports art becomes appreciated as high art and functions accordingly. The art does not change but its capacity to be art does.

I suggest quite the opposite—at least in part. Hockey art is difficult to recognize as high art because of the three central characteristics of hockey art that I have outlined: the mnemonic function of hockey art, which drives remembering by creating a synergy between personal lived experience and larger hockey culture; the manner in which hockey art transmits particular "know-how" and supports apprenticeship practice; and the reliance of hockey art on concrete material artifacts more than on abstract representations. These characteristics limit the ability of hockey art to satisfy a central expectation of much of high art: to unsettle larger societal and cultural concepts. Much like oral tradition, hockey art resists iconoclasm. A short comparison of Chris Hanson and Hendrika Sonnenberg's *Zamboni* (see figure 14.5) with Marcel Duchamp's classic Dadaist work *Fountain* illustrates my point succinctly.

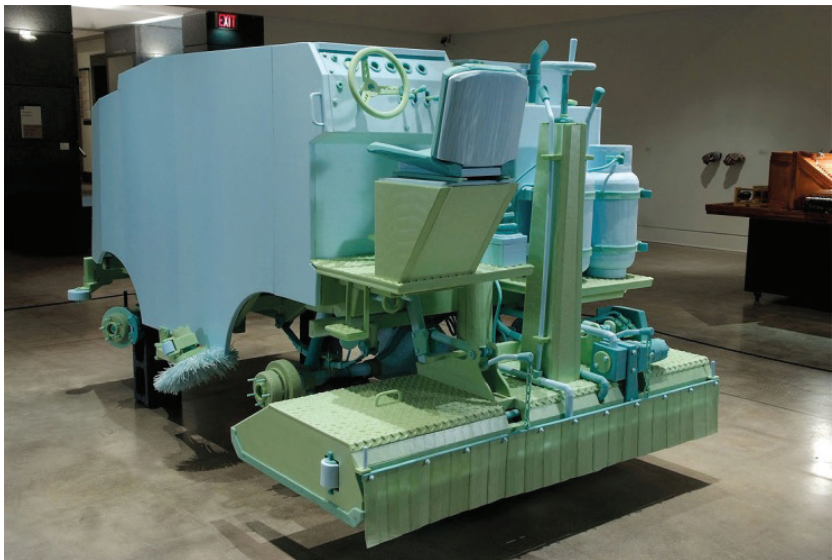


Figure 14.5 Chris Hanson and Hendrika Sonnenberg, *Zamboni* (2006)

In 1917, Marcel Duchamp rested a urinal on its back, signed the object “R. Mutt, 1917,” and presented it as art. He titled the work *Fountain*. Heralded as the cornerstone of modernist art, the object shook the foundations of the art world by conceptually challenging the division between art and life. Ironically, when the original was submitted for exhibition, it was refused, although replicas have since found themselves in the hallowed halls of the most prestigious art museums in the world. What is important for our present discussion is that *Fountain* is a concrete object, not an abstract rendering, and an object embedded in daily life and daily routine (at least for half the population). In other words, *Fountain* shares many characteristics with those hockey art objects discussed thus far.

In 2006, Chris Hanson and Hendrika Sonnenberg created a to-scale replica of a Zamboni from polystyrene and rested the sculpture on four concrete cinder blocks. The work is titled *Zamboni*. Unlike Duchamp’s found object, the creation of *Zamboni* demanded artistic labour. Also unlike Duchamp’s sculpture, *Zamboni* has, since its inception, had a place in art museum exhibitions. Thus in some ways, *Zamboni*, although sports art, is closer to high art than is *Fountain*. However, *Zamboni* is largely unable to challenge or disrupt cultural beliefs precisely because it functions as a mnemonic bridge between personal experience and a larger culture of hockey, it is embedded in a specific “know-how” of those hockey happenings, and it remains recognizably a concrete object, despite its career of exhibition showings. In short, whereas *Fountain* asserts something new, *Zamboni* rephrases what is known.

These assertions should not be taken as a denigration of hockey art. The issue, for me, is not whether hockey art is good or bad. Rather, the question concerns the type of knowledge that these objects communicate. Unlike many analysts of hockey art, I hesitate to consider these objects as transmitters of larger myths about the origins and nature of the Canadian nation or the symbolic, and implicitly ideological, impact of hockey iconography on identity formation. Instead, I argue that through an approach to hockey art that is grounded in hockey as a lived experience and an embodied form of knowledge, the objects of hockey art can be understood to function much like the communicative tools of oral-based cultures. Regardless of the specifics of its content, hockey art performs distinct cultural functions, serving less to challenge and unsettle traditional perspectives and values than to celebrate and reinforce them.

NOTES

- 1 Michael Oriard, “A Linguistic Turn into Sport History,” in *Deconstructing Sport History: A Postmodern Analysis*, ed. Murray G. Phillips (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 80.

- 2 Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (New York: Routledge, 2002; originally published London: Methuen, 1982), 33. A primary oral culture is one “untouched by writing” (31).
- 3 Ibid., 33.
- 4 Ibid., 42, 48.
- 5 Ibid., 34.
- 6 Ibid., 34–35.
- 7 See Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* (London: Arnold, 2001), and *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006); Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); and Kevin Michael DeLuca and Anne Teresa Demo, “Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism,” *Critical Studies in Media and Communication* 17, no. 3 (2003): 241–60.
- 8 Quoted in Kevin Woodley, “Goalie Mask Designs Evolve into Artwork,” *NHL.com*, 11 November 2014, <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=737093>.
- 9 “Carey Price Unveils New Heritage Classic Mask,” *Toronto Star*, 19 February 2011.
- 10 Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 79.
- 11 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 42.
- 12 Ibid., 8.
- 13 See Michael Kennedy, “Hockey as Metaphor in Selected Canadian Literature,” *Textual Studies in Canada* 12 (1998): 81–94.
- 14 Cynthia Sugars, “Notes on a Mystic Hockey Puck: Death, Paternity, and National Identity in Wayne Johnston’s ‘The Divine Ryans,’” *Essays on Canadian Writing* 82 (Spring 2004): 161. Sugars’s title alludes to Freud’s well-known essay “A Note upon the ‘Mystic Writing-Pad’” (1925).
- 15 “Canadian Journey—Bank of Canada,” 2012, <http://www.bankofcanada.ca/banknotes/bank-note-series/canadian-journey/>. See “Upgraded \$5 Note—Design Features,” under the “Design” tab.
- 16 “Les hivers de mon enfance étaient des saisons longues, longues. Nous vivions en trois lieux: l’école, l’église et la patinoire; mais la vraie vie était sur la patinoire.” The English translation is that of Sheila Fischman.
- 17 Robidoux, “Imagining a Canadian Identity Through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey,” *Journal of American Folklore* 115, no. 456 (2002): 222.
- 18 Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor, *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 274.
- 19 Sugars, “Notes on a Mystic Hockey Puck,” 159.

- 20 Jay Scherer and Lisa McDermott, "Playing Promotional Politics: Mythologizing Hockey and Manufacturing 'Ordinary' Canadians," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 43 (2011): 119. This rebranding, they contend, situated Harper squarely within the masculine Canadian "cycle of life" and was purposely reinforced by statements by Harper such as, "I love my job as Prime Minister, but if you could be a hockey player, I mean, what could be better than that?"
- 21 Robidoux, "Imagining a Canadian Identity Through Sport," 210.
- 22 Ibid., 212.
- 23 Because gender is a matter of social perception, our understanding of "masculine" and "feminine" shifts in accordance with shifts in the embodied performance of gender. As long as women only very rarely played hockey, the game could continue to embody what were assumed to be "male" qualities. As Nancy Theberge notes, however, women's participation hockey serves to challenge "modalities of feminine embodiment that are grounded in weakness and victimization." In a series of interviews with adolescent girls who play hockey, Theberge probed the ways in which these women understand and use their bodies. As she discovered, the sheer physicality of the sport was integral to "the players' sense of their athletics selves." Nancy Theberge, "'No Fear Comes': Adolescent Girls, Ice Hockey, and the Embodiment of Gender," *Youth and Society* 34, no. 4 (2003): 505.
- 24 Robidoux, "Imagining a Canadian Identity Through Sport," 220.
- 25 Ibid., 48–49.
- 26 Ibid., 54.
- 27 Ibid., 50. Ong is describing some of the results of research conducted by A. R. Luria in 1931–32 among non-literate and semi-literate peasants in the Soviet Union. Luria's research was published in Russian in 1974 and in English as *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*, trans. Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- 28 Ibid., 40–41.
- 29 Ibid., 41.
- 30 Mike O'Mahony, "Imaging Sport at the Grosvenor School of Modern Art (1929–37)," in *The Visual in Sport*, ed. Mike Huggins and Mike O'Mahony (New York: Routledge, 2012), 23.



DRUGS, VIOLENCE, AND DEATH

15

THE KAYFABE ERA

Early Professional Wrestling in Canada

Glenn Ruhl

A significant challenge inherent in understanding how Canadians view sport is the blurring of perceptions surrounding competition and entertainment. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than in the attitudes that Canadians express toward professional wrestling. In Canada, professional wrestling has evolved into a multi-million-dollar business. Partly as the result of marketing efforts, popular books, television programs, and movies devoted to wrestling have proliferated, contributing to an ever-expanding body of detailed, “insider” knowledge. At the same time, while there is no mistaking the mystique and enduring popularity of professional wrestling, relatively few Canadians actually *do* wrestling; instead, we watch, read, and talk about it. Our opinions on wrestling tend toward extremes, ranging from enthusiastic support, on the one hand, to intense dislike, on the other. Indeed, running like an undercurrent beneath virtually any discussion of the place of wrestling in the Canadian cultural landscape is the question of whether to consider it a sport at all or simply dismiss it as a tawdry form of entertainment.

The study of sport and athletics as an area of social research is less than a century old.¹ Most likely, this scholarly neglect was the result of a well-entrenched distinction between “high” and “low” culture: until fairly recently, cultural activities in which ordinary people engage, such as sports, were for the most part deemed unworthy of serious study. Today, the status of sport as a respectable area of study

is no longer challenged, and numerous studies concerned with the development of sport in Canada and the United States have been published.² A theme that has consistently emerged from these studies is that sport—the meanings that people attach to particular sports, to athletic competition, and to the very idea of play—reflects the intellectual and cultural climate of a society at a particular period in time.

Despite the often dubious place that professional wrestling holds in our society, the scholarly study of this sport is remarkably rich. Numerous academic articles and papers have been written on professional wrestling, focusing on themes such as fantasy, masculine melodrama, the carnival tradition, and conventional drama.³ Unfortunately, much of the “insider” writing on the topic of professional-wrestling itself, like most entertainment-industry writing, is anecdotal and filled with the musings of fans. As Michael Bérubé notes, “Much of the reportage about the entertainment industry takes the form of celebration and gossip, so much so that it easily falls under the heading of ‘promotional material.’”⁴ This most certainly applies to professional wrestling and brings us back to the greatest challenge inherent in a scholarly discussion about it, namely, whether to classify it as genuine sport or as pure entertainment. Sport has certainly played a significant role in the quest for personal enrichment, to the point that, as Jay Coakley suggests, it might even function as an “opiate of the masses.”⁵ Whether sport should be considered this way is debatable, but, as a form of recreation, it clearly occupies a significant place in Canadian society.

KAYFABE: THE ILLUSION OF REALITY

The history of professional wrestling in Canada and the United States dates back to the late nineteenth century. Initially, the predominant style was catch-as-catch-can, or “catch,” wrestling, which originated in England in 1870s and involved opponents who grappled with each other on a mat, using various “hooks” or holds. However, because wrestlers typically performed in circus sideshows and as carnival attractions, professional wrestling acquired a theatrical character, and, over time, this theatrical element became more pronounced. New, more “showy” styles evolved, of the sort that appealed to audiences, with wrestlers assuming the role of characters in a storyline—some good, some evil. Professional wrestling thus occupies an oddly ambiguous position in the world of sport: it demands a peculiar combination of athletic skill and acting talent. To this day, whether to call it a “sport” remains a contentious issue, and it is also not easy to categorize the professional wrestling fan, who is, in many respects, much the same as the fan of other, more socially acceptable, sports.

There are differences, however, and this is clearly evident in the culture surrounding the professional wrestling community.

Prior to the advent of large multimedia corporate productions that monopolized television and pay-per-view marketing avenues, in Canada, as in the United States, professional wrestling was characterized by a system of “territories” controlled by a loose alliance of promoters. For the most part, each territory was dominated by a single promotion company, which arranged and advertised wrestling events. Rivals would sometimes appear on the scene, competing for control of a territory, and, at times, more than one company would operate in a given territory, in a partnership of sorts. But those in the business always understood who controlled which territory. These territories were not all of a piece. Each promoter had a certain style, which was reflected in the style of the wrestlers whom the promoter chose to develop as talent. Significant differences also existed across territories in how wrestlers were paid and otherwise treated by promoters, and the reputation of a specific promoter or territory grew when the terms of employment were attractive to the wrestlers. This system of territories was, in essence, the management structure of the business and formed the backdrop for professional wrestling from the early twentieth century through to the 1980s.

The wrestlers themselves were a rough-and-tumble collection of performers whose athletic abilities gave them some measure of legitimacy and respectability within the sporting community. Canadians, particularly people in western Canada from 1940 to 1980, flocked to ice arenas, community halls, and assorted small-town venues to witness wrestling exhibitions. These exhibitions, with their emphasis on physical prowess, resonated in particular with working-class Canadians, who were accustomed to hard work and the struggle for survival. The wrestling circuit also reached into the rural heartland, at a time when more and more people were migrating to urban areas. Each week, promoters brought a collection of heroes and villains to Canadian communities. You didn’t need to travel to the big city to see the professional wrestlers—they came to you. And the communities responded. They loved the melodrama, the black-and-white storylines, and the escape into a world in which good reliably triumphed over evil, and they were more than willing to suspend disbelief when the performers held their matches.

Indeed, for many years, a mystery hovered over professional wrestling: were these contests real or fake? Even if the scripted storylines and assorted staged antics left a good many spectators convinced that the performances must be contrived, they were drawn in by the aura of intrigue that surrounded professional wrestling. Anyone who claimed to be even remotely familiar with wrestling was quick

to declare that it was all fakery, and yet it certainly looked real. The public never really knew for sure, and the sport's "insiders" traditionally protected its secrets. The "carney" term *kayfabe* was adopted in the context of protecting the professional wrestling business. *Kayfabe* refers to fakery—to presenting staged events as real and thus maintaining an illusion. As insider jargon, the term formed the basis for an unwritten code of silence among the sport's practitioners regarding the line between illusion and reality. If skeptics really wanted the inside story, certain performers were (and still are) more than willing to invite a volunteer into the ring for a lesson in the realities of professional wrestling. Should someone be brave enough, or foolish enough, to accept this invitation, he would inevitably be subjected to what was known in the business as "stretching"—inflicting a level of pain sufficient to gain respect (often by employing holds that would be illegal in legitimate wrestling). So the mystery continued.

The debate about whether professional wrestling is real or fake originated in the late nineteenth century. Over the decades, numerous newspaper accounts have "exposed" the chicanery of the business. For example, professional wrestling legends Frank Gotch and George Hackenschmidt were singled out for criticism after a particularly dubious match in the early 1900s, and accusations of duplicity appeared on a regular basis through the 1920s. Even promoters were not immune to the temptation to expose the truth of the business, as in 1934, when Jack Pfefer revealed all to Dan Parker, the sports editor of the *New York Daily Mirror*.⁶ Pfefer's revelations, which included information that outcomes were rigged, effectively put an end to the illusion that professional wrestling was a legitimate sport. All the same, football legend turned professional wrestler Herman Hickman exposed the business again in the 1940s in a *Look* magazine article. While it might seem surprising that such tell-all stories continue to this day, their popularity testifies to the atmosphere of uncertainty and intrigue that still surrounds professional wrestling. It also suggests that, as far as spectators are concerned, the knowledge that wrestling is a performance does not diminish its powers of attraction.

In "The World of Wrestling," Roland Barthes addresses the question of wrestling's status as "an ignoble sport." Professional wrestling, he argues, is properly understood not as a sport but as a form of pageantry, one in which "displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice."⁷ As Barthes observes:

There are people who think that wrestling is an ignoble sport. Wrestling is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe

or Andromaque. Of course, there exists a false wrestling, in which the participants unnecessarily go to great lengths to make a show of a fair fight; this is of no interest. True wrestling, wrongly called amateur wrestling, is performed in second-rate halls, where the public spontaneously attunes itself to the spectacular nature of the contest, like the audience at a suburban cinema. Then these same people wax indignant because wrestling is a stage-managed sport (which ought, by the way, to mitigate its ignominy). The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not, and rightly so; it abandons itself to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees.⁸

Barthes's description of "true wrestling" may not apply to the current version of professional wrestling, but it does resonate with the era defined by the territorial system that existed from approximately the late 1800s to the 1980s. When Barthes refers to the "spectacle of excess" taking place in "the most squalid Parisian halls," he is, without question, capturing the style of venue and promotion of the territorial era. As he points out, once a match begins, spectators lose interest in the question of whether what they are viewing is real or fake. Their participation is not cognitive but affective. They are there to immerse themselves in visual spectacle.

Barthes is also accurate in his assessment that it is "the function of the wrestler is not to win; it is to go exactly through the motions which are expected of him."⁹ In wrestling, gestures are typically exaggerated and melodramatic. As Barthes explains: "Each sign in wrestling is therefore endowed with an absolute clarity, since one must always understand everything on the spot. As soon as the adversaries are in the ring, the public is overwhelmed with the obviousness of the roles. As in the theater, each physical type expresses to excess the part which has been assigned to the contestant." Through their physical appearance and performance, wrestlers are readily coded by audiences as heroes or villains. As Barthes notes, "It is therefore in the body of the wrestler that we find the first key to contest."¹⁰ Barthes argues that wrestling appears real because it is "an immediate pantomime, infinitely more efficient than the dramatic pantomime, for the wrestler's gesture needs no anecdote, no decor, in short no transference in order to appear true."¹¹

In Barthes's analysis, wrestling matches are fundamentally about the primal struggle between good and evil, as personified by the wrestlers themselves. American professional wrestling, he suggests, "represents a sort of mythological fight between Good and Evil," which Barthes characterizes as "quasi-political" (*para-politique*), whereas the "process of creating heroes in French wrestling is

very different, being based on ethics and not on politics.”¹² Canadian professional wrestling, it may be argued, fits somewhere in between. Canadians, like American audiences, sought what Barthes calls “a highly moral image: that of the perfect bastard.” The more villainous a character was, it seemed, the more appealing he was to the Canadian public. Nevertheless, like French audiences, Canadians also wanted fairness. Rather than the blind patriotism of “my country right or wrong,” the concern was, “Did they play by the rules?” What really mattered was justice. “In the ring,” Barthes wrote, “and even in the depths of their voluntary ignominy, wrestlers remain gods because they are, for a few moments, the key which opens Nature, the pure gesture which separates Good from Evil, and unveils the form of a Justice which is at last intelligible.”¹³ Whether professional wrestling was a legitimate sporting contest was less important to the audience than the emotions the storylines generated. It was obvious to spectators what constituted Good and what constituted Evil, and they witnessed first-hand the victory of Justice—and because this contest unfolded with a clarity one rarely experiences in daily life, they clamoured for more.

So what continues to drive the cultural phenomenon that makes professional wrestling so widely available and pervasive? For one thing, to appreciate it requires no extensive experience or training and little reflection. It is rooted in sensationalism rather than reality. At one time, the pantomime of the wrestling storyline attempted to instill traditional values. Today, professional wrestling media, full of rich new content, benefit from decades of experience; with ongoing storylines, those involved in these media know exactly which psychological buttons to push so that the public will continue its support. They believe, as the American philosopher Eric Hoffer is reputed to have said, that “you can never get enough of what you don’t need to make you happy.” Perhaps it is all about economics. When Rosanne Barr’s ex-husband, Tom Arnold, declared, “We are America’s worst nightmare: white trash with money,” he was referring to the economic clout of people whose tastes are held in contempt by the relatively sophisticated and well educated. With this comment, he may have inadvertently hit the nail on the head with respect to both the continuing popularity of professional wrestling and the controversy surrounding it.¹⁴

AN INSIDER’S TAKE

From the mid-1960s until 1972, my father, Dave Ruhl, was the booker for the wrestling territory that covered Alberta and Saskatchewan. The booker, was considered

the manager, set the matches, determined which wrestlers would be used, and carried much of the responsibility for making sure the show went on without a hitch. As in many professions, management was often reviled, and the booker was the middleman who frequently took the heat for the promoter. The booker had to make hard decisions, and much of the decision making boiled down to whether the performer was liked or not. By the time my father assumed this position, the playbill (the cast of characters) had changed, the “actors” were an unappealing lot, and my father held many of them in disdain. His dislike of what he considered the human refuse making up the territory was common knowledge, and he pulled no punches in that regard. He had enemies, and he ran a tight ship for his employer.

I was never a “fan” of professional wrestling. It was something my father did, but he was essentially a farmer-wrestler. The concept of professional sport as a full-time occupation was essentially unknown: few, if any, could manage to survive on the earnings acquired through any sporting activity. Whether you were a wrestler or a boxer or played hockey or football, you couldn’t be without another job. Professional sport was suited to young men living in rural areas because the winter months afforded them an idle period during which they could travel and hope to earn some money playing sports. If you had talent and displayed a certain willingness to cooperate with the owners and managers, you might be given a chance to see the world and escape the monotonous drudgery of farm life, even if only for the winter season. In my father’s case, he demonstrated that he was reliable and could hold his own: few who challenged his wrestling skill in a legitimate fight proved to be his equal. Early in his career, he was willing to offer his services as a “jobber,” a wrestler willing to lose matches, thereby allowing his opponent to look good. Any wrestler wanting a shot as a top performer needed to prove his loyalty to the business in this way.

This was old-time wrestling, and the code was strict. Rookies, in particular, had to be taught discipline. Promoters needed to be sure that a wrestler would do as he was instructed and would not attempt to alter the outcome of a match. They also needed to instill the proper respect for the skill and strength that wrestling demanded, even if the outcome was predetermined. A rookie who seemed to think that, because matches were scripted, a wrestler didn’t really need much genuine ability, might be paired with a “shooter,” a wrestler who was apt to depart from the planned sequence of events during a match and instead make a legitimate attack. The shooter was a wrestler with enough skill to handle the unsuspecting novice in a manner that delivered a powerful reminder of the athleticism required for wrestling, thereby teaching the rookie respect for the business. At times, however,

being matched against a shooter failed to produce the desired result, and the newcomer clearly needed to be taught a more severe lesson. In this case, the rookie would be matched against a “ripper,” a wrestler known for inflicting pain and even injury. Shooters and rippers were often wrestlers who primarily engaged in legitimate forms of the sport and were thus relatively unknown to the audiences who attended pro wrestling events. For the most part, then, audiences were unaware of what was going on.

The kayfabe lexicon permeated the dressing rooms of the old wrestling territories. If you couldn’t cut the mustard, you were a “jabroni,” a loser. A “pencil-necked geek,” originally associated with circus sideshow performers, was another epithet for a “loser” and might also be applied to a particular fan. The cast of characters included “heroes,” called “baby faces” (or simply “faces”), and bad guys, villains, or “heels.” There were “stiffs” and “star gazers,” so called for their penchant for getting pinned, and there were good “workers,” that is, performers who didn’t “oversell” and made the contest look real. The ability to create the illusion of reality was especially important in small venues, where little distance separated the performers from the audience. Performers would use a concealed razor blade to inflict a small incision on their foreheads, a tactic known as “blading,” so that a well-delivered blow would open the lacerated area and, to the delight of the audience, start the flow of blood—very real blood. In fact, veteran wrestlers are often identified by the series of “track marks” on their foreheads, which testify to the many bloodbaths in which they have taken part.¹⁵

AN ERA ALL BUT FORGOTTEN

The characters I grew up with filled our family home with tales of their antics on the road. Insider talk was not to be shared, a code that I upheld because it was part of my father’s business. I was skilled at deflecting questions, and I never had anyone say to me, “My dad is tougher than your dad.” The wrestlers were a collection of athletes, misfits, family men, miscreants, scholars, circus freaks, boxers, midgets, and hucksters. I rarely attended the matches because it was like going to the office to watch my father work. There were, however, times when I would accompany my father to be part of a special moment, such as a headline event, or to see a “lesson” being taught. It was easy to appreciate the precision employed by someone like George Gordienko—an outstanding wrestler from Winnipeg, who retains a legendary status as a respected “shooter.” I also enjoyed meeting boxers like former heavyweight champions Rocky Marciano and Jersey Joe Walcott, and I

will always treasure the image of Rube Wright dressed up as Santa Claus, standing in my parents' kitchen.¹⁶

The proliferation of media coverage devoted to professional wrestling—or all sports, for that matter—is a relatively recent phenomenon. In addition to assorted books (ranging from popular to scholarly) and magazines, those interested in wrestling can now immerse themselves in blogs, websites, and social media. The repetitive storylines in most wrestling autobiographies and numerous pop culture tell-all books tend to mythologize wrestlers. In general, the stories fall into the mould of what old-time wrestlers called “the older we get, the better we were” stories, of the sort based on selective memory. Although Canada has a long history of producing remarkable professional wrestlers, most of the popular literature is devoted to the relatively recent era—from about 1970 onward. As a result, the stories of those who were active in the years when the illusion of reality was still carefully maintained are all but forgotten. Whether professional wrestlers of the early kayfabe era made a conscious effort to hold back their tales is hard to say; however, the aura of mystery that surrounded wrestling at the time was hard to betray. The fact that wrestlers were willing to protect a business that was, for the most part, ruthless and not particularly kind to them testifies to the strength of their loyalty.

During this era, a strong connection existed between wrestling and boxing—one that has, apart from guest appearances at special events, largely disappeared. In earlier days, however, the performers in the two camps were closely intertwined, frequenting the same training facilities and, in many cases, working for the same promoters. Even though wrestlers were part of an industry founded on staged contests, their athletic skill was very real. I remember a story I heard from former promoter and manager Darby Melnick and my father during a discussion of the quality of athleticism among the old-timers. King Kong Clayton was a professional wrestler who was highly regarded as an athlete—someone who, according to my father, was capable of mastering any sport. To illustrate Clayton's athletic prowess, my father and Melnick recounted a boxing match between Clayton and an outstanding boxer from Medicine Hat, Alberta, named Eppie Lust.

Eppie and his two brothers, Emil and Albert, were all top-notch boxers who had distinguished careers in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁷ In 1947, a short article appeared in the *Lethbridge Herald*, about an upcoming wrestling match featuring Clayton. As the article mentioned, “Before the war King Kong defeated Eppie Lust of Medicine Hat, Alberta, for the heavyweight boxing championship of Western Canada.”¹⁸ The authenticity of this title is open to doubt; however, the bout between Lust and Clayton did take place, and Melnick witnessed it. Evidently, Clayton handled Lust

with ease. As Melnick put it, “Every time King Kong hit Eppie, he opened him up.” Years later, my father recounted this story to Eppie’s brother Emil, who then owned a barbershop in Medicine Hat. Emil paused for a moment, reflecting on the fight, and said, “Yes, that’s true. Eppie had no business being in the ring against that man.” Professional wrestlers may have performed in a make-believe world, but many of them were also fine athletes, capable of delivering unanticipated jolts of reality to legitimate fighters.

In another example, in 1932, heavyweight boxer Kingfish Levinsky challenged wrestler Ray Steele to a legitimate boxer-versus-wrestler bout, held at Chicago’s Soldier’s Field. Levinsky was a ranked fighter at the time and held wins over Tommy Loughran and Jack Sharkey. In the parlance of the day, he was more than a “tomato can”—a marginal fighter who rarely lasted more than three rounds with an opponent and bled easily. The bout lasted approximately thirty seconds. After Levinsky threw a right hand, Steele grabbed his arm and administered a top wristlock, or what today’s mixed martial artists call a kimura. Steele then quietly declared to Levinsky, “Kingfish, it’s up to you. Do you want to continue or would you like me to break your arm?”

Of Volga German heritage, Ray Steele was born Peter Sauer in a German colony in Russia on 2 February 1900.¹⁹ After the death of his father, he was raised by his great uncle, and in 1906 he immigrated with his uncle’s family to Lincoln, Nebraska. Sauer was a talented amateur wrestler, winning two Amateur Athletic Union national championships. He was also a formidable shooter. Learning his craft in St. Louis and later in California, he wrestled professionally under the ring name “Ray Steele” from Glendale, California. He also served as the “policeman”—a wrestler who guarded another, making sure that the opponent took no liberties with rules, which could result in injuries—for “Golden Greek” Jim Londos, the unquestioned superstar of the 1930s in promoter Jack Curly’s New York City operation. Rube Wright considered Steele the best legitimate wrestler he ever faced.²⁰ Steele had some remarkable contests with Ed “Strangler” Lewis, but his main achievement came in 1940, when he took the National Wrestling Association’s title of World Heavy Champion away from Bronislau “Bronko” Nagurski. Steele employed a fast-paced style that would have gone over well in any era, particularly when compared to the plodding, methodical bouts of mat grappling that characterized wrestling until the 1920s.

Ed “Strangler” Lewis is one of the most famous wrestlers from the 1910 to 1940 era, and he was also one of the most formidable. He was considered a great “hooker”—a wrestler with the skill to administer an array of holds or “hooks.” Early

in the 1920s, Lewis and his manager, Billy Sandow, joined forces with promoter Joseph “Toots” Mondt, and the three came to be known as the “Gold Dust Trio.” Mondt is generally credited with having invented the modern form of wrestling (which he called “Slam Bang Western-Style Wrestling”)—a faster-paced, more theatrical style that soon became the industry standard and marked the beginning of the kayfabe era. Lewis, whose fame rivalled that of Babe Ruth, even challenged the then reigning world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey to a fight, in order to settle a supposed feud over whose skills were superior. When my father met “Strangler” Lewis, he, like any aspiring acolyte, asked him for some words of advice. In a somewhat tired fashion, as if he were about to deliver the same message for the umpteenth time, Lewis replied, “Leave yourself a hole.” “That’s it?” my father thought. “This is the sum total of wisdom from someone considered the greatest and most influential professional wrestler ever?” Later, he told me it was the best advice he was ever given.

There are other characters who deserve mention for their impact on early professional wrestling in western Canada. Regina’s Jack Taylor, considered the Canadian heavyweight champion, held a legendary status through the Great Depression years as one of the all-time greats. Taylor was replaced as champion in 1926 by Earl McCready, but he continued to wrestle into the 1940s. McCready was born in Lansdowne, Ontario, and grew up in Amulet, Saskatchewan. To refer to him as the “real deal” is an understatement. He was the Canadian national champion in 1926 and a member of the 1928 Olympic team; won three NCAA wrestling titles in 1928, 1929, and 1930; played football at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State); and competed as a wrestler at the British Empire Games where he won a gold medal. Largely forgotten today, he was arguably the greatest amateur wrestler in Canadian history. He was justifiably proud of his induction into the collegiate hall of fame and had an easy, approachable demeanour. Early in his own career, my father was matched with McCready, who later recalled how nervous my father was about meeting him. After his wrestling career, McCready settled into a peaceful life as a massage therapist in Washington State, but, in his later years, he was beset by health problems, passing away in 1983. He was considered a great amateur and professional wrestler in Canada, England, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa.

THE DEMISE OF THE TERRITORIAL SYSTEM IN WESTERN CANADA

Like the travelling carnival it so resembled, the territorial system that characterized early professional wrestling grew to be an anachronism. Urbanization and

modern communication through radio, television, and closed-circuit events closed the door on this style of promotion. The history of the Alberta promotion well illustrates the transition. Throughout most of the 1940s, professional wrestling in Calgary was promoted by Darby Melnick. In 1948, an American promoter, Larry Tillman, bought out Melnick, and wrestling in Calgary was subsequently promoted out of Great Falls, Montana, by Tillman and Jerry Meeker, with Melnick staying on as manager. That same year, the legendary Stu Hart founded Klondike Wrestling, which he operated out of Edmonton. In 1952, through a series of deals with Tillman and Meeker, Hart acquired control of the Calgary promotion and thus became the promoter for the entire territory, which he now operated under the name Big Time Wrestling (later Wildcat Wrestling and then Stampede Wrestling). This deal brought Alberta into alignment with Saskatchewan. Western Canada was known as a solid territory, but it was also known for the harshness of its weather, excruciatingly long road trips, and, for the most part, little monetary reward or international fame. A wrestler may not have gained financially or increased his notoriety, but he was sure to have received an education about the realities of the sport if he wrestled in western Canada.

The popularity of professional wrestling exploded in the 1950s with the advent of television. Hart used the medium extremely well, eventually bringing in the smooth-talking and manipulative Sam Menacker to serve as an announcer and booker for his operation. Poor business dealings led to the collapse of the relationship between Hart and Menacker, and Hart pushed his enterprise into a new era with the television show, Wildcat Wrestling. Moving back into the television market with announcer Ed Whalen was fortunate timing. In 1967, Wildcat Wrestling was renamed "Stampede Wrestling," the brand that remains synonymous with the Hart family legacy. Eventually, Stampede Wrestling was sold to Vince McMahon, owner of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), in essence bringing to a close the saga of territorial wrestling in western Canada.

Territorial wrestling lives on in television reruns and numerous pop culture references, and stories continue to emerge that shed light on this fascinating era in the history of Canadian sport. Sadly, but not unexpectedly, the code of the old-time wrestler has vanished. But the human side of a highly commercial and often ruthless business survives in the stories told by insiders. The rough exterior of the performers often belied a soft side that was rarely seen by the public. Perhaps one had to experience these characters first-hand in order to truly appreciate them. Even so, the personalities and stories from third-person accounts of the wrestlers of the past continue to hold a fascination for many people. A mere statistical recounting

of wins and losses is not what engages people's interest. What matters is the lasting imprint of the sport on Canadians, including me, in terms of childhood memories and reflections of a simpler, less complicated time.

Seen through the eyes of a child, an adult is swiftly judged, earning either respect or dismissal. When I met Rocky Marciano, who was serving as a guest referee for the local wrestling promotion, it was easy to see that the former world heavyweight boxing champion was going through the motions, making an effort to put his best face forward. Sitting between him and my father on the front seat of my father's automobile, I politely asked Rocky if he would sign some autographs on a pad of "scribbler" paper for me. As he graciously did this, he joked with me, and I could easily sense that he liked children. Granted, I was slightly dismayed when he wrote "to my pal Glenn," and his signature looked like "Porky" instead of "Rocky," but I still treasure that autograph, along with a Canadian two-dollar bill signed, also to his "pal," by Jersey Joe Walcott, another gentleman and former heavyweight champion. Wrestlers such as Billy Robinson, Mike Sharpe, Baron "Ripper" Leone, George Gordienko, Sky Low Low, Sweet Daddy Siki, Earl McCready, Firpo Zbysko, and Jim and Rube Wright will always occupy an indelible place in my childhood memories, along with boxers such as Lou Nova and Jack Sharkey, as I am sure they still do for other Canadians who remember the early days of professional wrestling in western Canada.

CONCLUSION

The self-imposed code of silence called kayfabe, to the extent that it ever truly existed, was broken long ago. Early professional wrestling tried to create the illusion of reality, but reality never was, and no doubt never will be, a major concern for anyone in the business. As time passes, fantasy victories become believable, and stories about legendary shooters or legitimate tough guys continue to proliferate. In reality, the surreal party atmosphere festooned by "ring rats" (wrestling groupies) and double standards is often a façade for tragic and unfulfilled lives. Like most professional athletes (as well as other celebrities), these men were not heroes; they were, in the end, a troupe of actors. The performances were staged, and the performers were entertainers. *Panum et circenses*—give the people bread and circuses. When the professional wrestling sideshow arrived, the circus had come to town.

Criminologists Jack Levin and James Alan Fox call professional wrestling "a culture that's ripe to sustain evil." In some ways, this comment could be applied

to modern culture more generally, a culture in which the concept of the “hero” is now suspect, at best. As Levin and Fox note, “We used to put our heroes on pedestals where they could be admired, revered, and emulated, but those days are long gone.”²¹ Why is this? Perhaps the world we inhabit has grown so callous that we can no longer afford to believe in heroes. In the modern *zeitgeist*, virtue is a form of weakness. We cheer for the bad guy, and although often reluctant to say so explicitly, we expect our heroes to be flawed. Of course, heroes have always had feet of clay, but today they seem to let us down more than ever.²²

But the erosion of our belief in heroes is by no means the only factor exerting an influence on professional wrestling. In addition, the changing position of women in society is altering the character of competitive activities once regarded as the domain of men, whether in sport, business, or politics. Although the number of women actively participating in other sports has increased dramatically, professional wrestling, like football and mixed martial arts, continues to be dominated by men. The female fan base for combat sports (and for sports overall) is, however, substantial and in fact seems to be growing.²³ This apparent increase in the passive and affective participation of women in such sports is intriguing, given that the active participants are almost exclusively male. Commenting on the rise of football and the declining popularity of the relatively genteel sport of baseball, Frank Deford suggested that football is perhaps “a subversive vestige of the male-centric past.”²⁴ The same might be said of wrestling—but the question of women’s attraction to combat sports remains. Until fairly recently, competitive activities, especially those involving displays of physical strength, were regarded as inappropriate to women—insufficiently “feminine.” As women entered the work force, however, attitudes began to shift, and women today have somewhat more freedom to take part in open competition. That, as in the case of professional wrestling, they are also free to do so in ways that many would regard as exploitative is perhaps another indication that the male-centric past is still with us.

The late comedian George Carlin famously described football as a “twentieth-century technological struggle,” one that reminds us that we are “perfectly capable of taking the life of a fellow human being, preferably a stranger.”²⁵ He was referring, of course, to the technology of combat rather than to communications technology. But the technology that, in theory, connects us also isolates us. In the domain of wrestling, there is no question that the days of kayfabe are over. The mystery that was part and parcel of the old territorial system is unlikely ever to be resurrected because the new media are geared more to exposure than concealment. The public knows the angles. What takes place in one town can be tweeted, YouTubed,

blogged, and posted instantly. There is no anticipation, no build-up of excitement; old-time promotion just isn't possible.

Although sport is essentially a form of play, it also provides both spectators and participants with an outlet for aggressive energy. Competitive sports thus function in part as a means to release social tensions that might otherwise erupt into genuine conflict.²⁶ However, the line between genuine conflict and the make-believe of athletic contests seems to have grown very faint. Contrary to the promotional hype for the Ultimate Fighting Challenge (UFC) suggests, it is warfare, not the UFC, that is "as real as it gets." But perhaps we are at once too removed from the atrocities of war and too accustomed to graphic images of violence to value the distinction between the real and the staged. No matter how contrived the professional wrestling storyline was in the early days, in a world too close to the devastation of two world wars, a predictable outcome was what Canadians wanted. In both Canada and the United States, faith in sport and athletics, as Robert Lipsyte points out, was vigorously promoted by industry, the military, government, and the media. The values of the arena and the locker room were to be part of the nation's life.²⁷

As it still does, professional wrestling resonated with the Canadian working class. The early days of professional wrestling in Canada were not filled with corporate entrepreneurs making their fortunes but rather with grifters, opportunists, and cheap sideshow entertainers. It may, indeed, have been a "tawdry" business, but it was one that featured some superb athletes. Now we use sophisticated technology to bring up old video clips online. We have blogs and websites devoted to old-school or legitimate wrestling and the legends that have built up around it. Despite promotional events such as Hart Legacy Wrestling's "Resurrection" show in January 2013, I can't imagine people going to Calgary's Victoria Pavilion on a Friday evening the way they once did.

NOTES

- 1 Richard C. Mandell, *Sport: A Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 305.
- 2 On Canada, see, especially, Colin D. Howell. *Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); M. Ann Hall, *The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); and Don Morrow and Kevin B. Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2013). For the United States, see, for example, Benjamin G. Rader, *American Sports: From the Age*

of *Folk Games to the Age of Televised Sport*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008).

- 3 See, for example, Thomas Hackett, *Slaphappy: Pride, Prejudice, and Professional Wrestling* (New York: Ecco/HarperCollins, 2006); Jeffrey J. Mondak, "The Politics of Professional Wrestling," *Journal of Popular Culture* 29 (1989): 139–46; Henry Jenkins, "Never Trust a Snake: WWF Wrestling as Masculine Melodrama," in *Out of Bounds*, ed. Aaron Bake and Todd Boyd (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 48–78; John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Winchester: Unwin Hyman Press, 1989); and Sharon Mazer, "The Doggie Doggie World of Professional Wrestling," *Drama Review* 34 (1990): 96–121. See also the essays collected in Nicholas Sammond, ed., *Steel Chair to the Head: The Pleasure and Pain of Professional Wrestling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), especially Laurence de Garis's "The 'Logic' of Professional Wrestling" (192–212), which offers a useful discussion of the "old and new" of professional wrestling.
- 4 Michael Bérubé, "What's the Matter with Cultural Studies?" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 14 September 2009, <http://chronicle.com/article/Whats-the-Matter-With/48334/>.
- 5 Jay J. Coakley, "Sport in Society: An Inspiration or an Opiate?" in *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. D. Stanley Eitzen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 20–40.
- 6 In the early 1930s, as talent manager for New York promoter Jack Curley, Pfefer had been instrumental in the success of the New York promotion and its star, Jim Londos. In 1932, when a rift developed between Curley and Londos, Pfefer sided with Londos, only to be left as an outsider the following year, when the rift was healed and alliances shifted. Seeking revenge, Pfefer went to Parker and divulged the truth about the business. On 19 November 1934, Londos was scheduled to wrestle another star, Everett Marshall, whom he had defeated twenty-five times previously. That morning, an article appeared in *New York Daily Mirror* with the headline: "Londos and Marshall Meet at Garden Tonight for 26th Time. Score—Londos 26, Marshall 0." This marked a turning point both for professional wrestling and for Pfefer, who became a reviled figure in the industry. Evidently, *Ring Magazine*, a highly respected publication devoted to boxing and wrestling, had been correct when it proclaimed, only a month earlier, the end of "honest-to-goodness wrestling matches."
- 7 Roland Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press Farrar, Straus & Giroux), 17. Barthes's essay, "Le monde où l'on catche," originally appeared in October 1952 in *Esprit* (195, no. 10), and was included in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1957).
- 8 Barthes, "World of Professional Wrestling," 13.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 14.

- 10 Ibid., 15.
- 11 Ibid., 17.
- 12 Ibid., 21.
- 13 Ibid., 17.
- 14 Quoted in R. Wesley Hurd, "After Virtue," Gutenberg College, February 1995, <http://msc.gutenberg.edu/2001/02/after-virtue>.
- 15 The use of tactics such as blading became far less common with the advent of televised wrestling, given that the audience for such broadcasts now extended to casual viewers, notably women and children, and that programming had to conform to broadcasting standards. How far viewers would actually be put off by displays of blood is, however, a question. In November 2000, the London-based research firm of Cragg Ross Dawson conducted a qualitative study of the audiences for televised wrestling, the results of which appeared in a March 2001 report titled *Wrestling: How Do Audiences Perceive TV and Video Wrestling?* (<http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/bsc/pdfs/research/Wrestling.pdf>). Section 4.4 of the report (66–70) discusses the reaction of audiences when they were shown video clips of matches that included bloodshed. Despite the fact that viewers were generally convinced that nothing in pro wrestling was real, even dedicated fans were "taken a little aback" by blood, while relatively casual viewers (women, especially) found it "shocking and ugly" (67). However, as the report notes, "the capacity of bloodshed to shock respondents seemed short-lived. Feelings of revulsion or alarm, which initially appeared to be genuine and strong, seemed to dissipate rapidly" (69).
- 16 Rube Wright was among the most formidable of the early legitimate wrestlers. To my knowledge, no one ever challenged him to a fight if he announced in the locker room that "he felt like winning." When I asked Rube whether he had ever bested Earl McCready—the great Canadian amateur and professional wrestler, who was perhaps the most worthy contender for the title of greatest legitimate wrestler of the era—he replied they had never faced each other in a legitimate fight. He simply stated, "Earl can't say he beat me and I can't say I beat him." Promoter Stu Hart was quick to point out that if you ever challenged Rube to a fight, "you better have a good pair of running shoes handy." See Erb, *Stu Hart*, 113.
- 17 Emil Lust fought as a welterweight from 1929 to 1942, Eppie (Young Tunney) was active from 1932 to 1945 as a middleweight and light heavyweight, and Albert (Al) was a welterweight from 1941 to 1943, with Eppie as his manager. Not only were all three brothers outstanding boxers and title holders, but they all served with distinction and valour in World War II.
- 18 *Lethbridge Herald*, 3 September 1947, 11. Rather sadly, today, even the most determined user of Internet search engines is hard-pressed to find anything but a passing reference to Clayton.

- 19 The Volga Germans were a considerable presence in the world of sport. In addition to Steele and my own father, they included such notables as Hockey Hall of Famer Dave “Sweeney” Schriner, who was born in the same German colony as my grandparents.
- 20 In 1985, my father visited Rube Wright at his home in Oregon. Sharing recollections and memories, my father asked Rube for a definitive statement on who he felt was the best wrestler he had ever worked out with. Without hesitation, Rube said it was Ray Steele. Knowing Rube’s personality and my father’s fondness for Ray, he may have said this out of kindness; however, when he spoke further about Steele’s technique and skill it was clear to my father why he had such a lofty opinion of him.
- 21 Jack Levin and James Alan Fox, “A Culture That’s Ripe to Sustain Evil,” *Boston Herald*, 11 May 1999, 25.
- 22 Examples abound in the world of sports alone: Hulk Hogan (steroids), Pete Rose (illegal gambling), Mike Tyson (rape), Pee Wee Herman (indecent exposure), O. J. Simpson (murder), Barry Bonds (steroids), Lance Armstrong (performance-enhancing drugs)—the list goes on.
- 23 At a Denver press conference in July 2011, Dana White—president of the world’s largest mixed martial arts organization, the UFC—claimed that women made up nearly half of the company’s fan base. Brian Hemminger, “Dana White: Probably 45 Percent of Our Fanbase Is Now Female,” *SB Nation: MMA Mania*, 19 July 2011, <http://www.mmamania.com/2011/7/19/2283204/dana-white-and-rampage-jackson-comment-on-the-growth-of-female-mma>. See also Chris Gentilviso, “NFL Turns Its Marketing Attention to Female Football Fans,” *Time*, 28 September 2010, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2010/09/28/nfl-turns-its-marketing-attention-to-female-football-fans/>.
- 24 Frank Deford, “The American Pastime Fades in Popularity,” NPR broadcast, 30 October 2012, <http://www.wbur.org/npr/163951231/the-american-pastime-fades-in-popularity>.
- 25 “George Carlin: Baseball vs. Football,” n.d., <http://lybio.net/george-carlin-baseball-vs-football/comedy/>.
- 26 See Flath, “Play, Sport, Athletics, and War”; Peter Marsh, *Aggro: The Illusion of Violence* (London: J. M. Dent, 1978).
- 27 Robert Lipsyte, “Sports, a Pleasure of the Flesh, Emphasizes Spectatorship Instead of Participation,” *Washington Post*, 23 March 1978.

16

“THE UFC IS SELLING WOLF TICKETS”

Sport and Fiction in the Ultimate Fighting Championship

Bart Beaty

You told the fans that I deserve to get beat down, that I chased you around. I got the fight, right? I'm working towards something, everybody knows that. Sorry I had to [say you were scared] to get the fight. They're selling you all wolf tickets people, you're eating them right up. Georges here is selling wolf tickets. Dana here is selling wolf tickets. The UFC is selling wolf tickets. You guys are eating them right up.

Nick Diaz, 14 March 2013

Speaking to reporters at the press conference to promote UFC 158 in Montréal, welterweight title contender Nick Diaz claimed that Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) promoter Dana White and welterweight champion Georges St-Pierre had engaged in a conspiracy to deceive the public into purchasing a pay-per-view fight card on the basis of a lie.¹ Diaz, using a slang expression that refers to the practice of threatening someone in a boastful manner, accused UFC management of marketing a fake feud between the two welterweights. Specifically, Diaz objected to the fact that the UFC had used an ominous and darkly lit photo of him on the fight posters to make him look more thuggish; that St-Pierre had repeatedly claimed that it was his intention to “retire” Diaz during the fight; and that Diaz had been consistently portrayed as a villain in the promotion of his fight because he had

skipped previous press conferences and public workouts and had failed a drug test following his loss to Carlos Condit at UFC 143 (4 February 2012). Diaz's claims were unusual in the realm of fight promotion for a number of reasons, but two are particularly notable.

First, given that Diaz received a pay-per-view percentage bonus for his title fight with St-Pierre, his efforts to discourage fans from purchasing the fight would financially hurt both him and his employer. Indeed, his effort to minimize interest in the main event of a combat sport during the final days of hype may well be unprecedented. Second, Diaz was arguably only in the position of fighting for the title because he himself had engaged in the kind of "wolfing" that he was now decrying. Diaz had been originally scheduled to fight St-Pierre at UFC 137 (29 October 2011), but that fight fell apart when he failed to make a number of media appearances and when St-Pierre was forced to undergo arthroscopic knee surgery. Following his victory over former lightweight title holder B. J. Penn at UFC 137, Diaz claimed in a post-fight interview, "I don't think Georges is hurt, I think he's scared," a comment that caused the fans to boo him, which positioned him as the villain in the inevitable clash between the two fighters.²

Diaz's commentary leading to UFC 158 was at times confusing and contradictory, but more importantly, it points to the central tension that has surrounded the emergence of the UFC as a dominant sports brand. With its origins in boxing, amateur and professional wrestling, Brazilian jiu jitsu, and toughman competitions, the history of mixed martial arts is checkered and convoluted. Nonetheless, mixed martial arts—a sport that relies heavily, nearly exclusively, on the ability to promote fights that the public will buy on pay-per-view television—has come to be understood as a hybrid of sport and entertainment. In the simplest terms, the UFC, as the largest and most visible brand in mixed martial arts, is torn between a "pure sports" logic and the desire to put on entertaining fights.

A pure sports logic is one in which the central integrity of a sport or sporting event remains completely untainted by commercial concerns. It is exemplified by the rhetoric of amateurism that surrounded the Olympic Games through the first half of the twentieth century. At its ideal, a pure sports logic would insist that a combat sport has a champion in a particular weight class and contenders who are ranked according to who defeated whom, with the ultimate goal being the matching up of a champion and an undisputed number one contender (who is classified as such by the fact that he has defeated some combination of the fighters ranked lower than himself). Fundamentally, this is how the major professional sports in North America seek to operate: title games such as the NFL's Super Bowl

are contested by the teams that have “earned” the right to contend for the championship by defeating other teams. In the case of football, although a single game elimination format can be criticized for not producing the “best” result (as when a team with a superior record during the regular season is upset by a lower-ranked team), there is no suggestion that the NFL has worked to orchestrate particular results or favoured more popular teams.

The logic of sports entertainment, however, is one in which schedules are shaped or bouts promoted on the basis of objectives other than determining the best team or athlete. Certainly, the logic of entertainment factors into the major professional sports: the use of divisions in professional sports is intended to enhance regional rivalries even though it can unbalance the schedule (in cases where certain divisions are clearly more competitive than are others). Major League Baseball was particularly embroiled in the logic of sports entertainment when it would schedule inter-league games to showcase rivals like the New York Yankees and Mets or the Toronto Blue Jays and Montreal Expos without regard to notions of scheduling equity.

In the UFC, an entertainment logic particularly predominates in two types of cases: first, when winners of “boring” fights are not promoted to title fights or are even released from their contracts in favour of less talented but more exciting fighters, and, second, when fighters are given title shots or allowed to headline major shows even though they have not earned that right according to the logic of pure sports. In the case of Nick Diaz’s title shot, both factors seemed to be in play. Diaz is an unusual personality whose boxing style favours exciting knockouts, but he “earned” his title shot at St-Pierre only after losing to the former number one contender, Carlos Condit.

BETWEEN SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT: THE ORIGINS OF THE ULTIMATE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIP

While mixed martial arts has a number of important forerunners and influences in terms of its development as a sport, the most important of these is, ironically, not a sport at all: professional wrestling. Amateur and Olympic-style wrestling trace their histories back to ancient Greece and Rome, while professional wrestling—which features travelling performers in staged matches—began as a form of circus entertainment in the United States in the decades immediately following the conclusion of the Civil War. Professional wrestling has had a substantial fan following since at least the 1880s. In the early days of live television broadcasting, professional wrestling was a leading attraction because it ran weekly and the action could be filmed

easily by a single camera. Television's influence augmented the already outlandish characterizations that were common in professional wrestling, with promoters establishing clear heroes and villains and then engaging them in convoluted feuds involving battles for honour and respect that took on an increasingly melodramatic tone, especially as they could be serialized to build televisual suspense. By the mid-1980s, when much of the American professional wrestling industry had been consolidated under the control of Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation, the business model included the promotion of grudges between tough-talking body-builders who were engaged in long-running soap-operatic narratives. Significantly, in professional wrestling, actual fighting skills are almost irrelevant since the matches are predetermined (or "worked") and the intention is not to injure one's opponent but to perform a show that can be repeated nightly in different cities. The key drawing cards for professional wrestling, therefore, are clearly the charisma of a performer and his ability to talk a crowd into a buying a ticket or a pay-per-view. The history of professional wrestling in the United States is filled with headliners like Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, and the Rock, who made millions through a combination of televisual charisma and the ability to sell tickets by cutting promos where they would trash-talk about their opponents (often good friends of theirs) and suggest personal feuds where none actually existed. The WWE (World Wrestling Entertainment, as McMahon's company has been known since 2002) is the pinnacle of sports entertainment and has, for the better part of the past decade, referred to its performers on air not as wrestlers but as "sports entertainers" and "superstars."

For much of the twentieth century, the primary rival to professional wrestling, and by far the dominant combat sport in the world, was professional boxing. While boxing differs from professional wrestling in that its outcomes are not predetermined (at least not explicitly, although the history of boxing is rife with stories of fights fixed by promoters and gamblers), it is extremely similar insofar as its greatest successes have been tied to charisma and the ability to sell fights to fans through interviews. Certainly, the strongest example of this tendency is Muhammad Ali, whose combination of boxing skill, personal charisma, and a way with words helped turn his self-declared status as the "greatest of all time" into a truism. Ali, who largely cribbed his interview style from Los Angeles-area professional wrestlers like "Classy" Freddie Blassie, is perhaps the best exemplar of the maxim that personalities sell fights.

Indeed, the relative decline of professional boxing over the course of the past two decades can be blamed in part on the decline of the pure sports element of

ranking and competition, with the various promoting organizations sometimes thwarting a “true” ranking across weight classes, and on the decreasing number of boxers with outsized personalities whom the public will pay to see fight (today, limited essentially to Floyd Mayweather, Oscar De La Hoya, Manny Pacquiao, and a very few others). For the most part, boxing has thrived when its champions and challengers have been larger-than-life personalities like Mike Tyson, and it has suffered when those fighters have been less charismatic and telegenic, like Vladimir Klitschko. Indeed, Klitschko, who has been a dominant champion with fourteen successful title defences (the third-most in heavyweight boxing history) and has had fifty career wins by knock-out, has been something of a warning to the UFC: better to promote a less talented fighter with a bigger personality than to go with the outstanding athlete whom the public finds uninteresting.

Both professional wrestling and professional boxing provided important business models for the UFC, particularly given their reliance on pay-per-view revenues as their dominant economic drivers. Yet although it originated initially as a one-night-only pay-per-view event, stylistically and formally, the UFC had a greater reliance on Brazilian jiu jitsu (BJJ) than it did on boxing or wrestling. A derivative of judo, BJJ has its origins in 1910s Brazil. Extensively developed by Carlos and Helio Gracie (and later by their sons), BJJ is a combat and self-defence system emphasizing ground fighting rather than striking. In particular, BJJ masters taught that a smaller man could defeat a larger man in combat through the use of joint locks, grappling, and chokeholds achieved through superior balance and leverage. Helio Gracie made his reputation in Brazil as a professional fighter in the 1930s, defeating a professional boxer in thirty seconds and fighting and defeating many trained judo fighters who were significantly larger than he was. Gracie’s fame allowed him to earn a living training students in the practice of BJJ, a skill that he also passed on to his seven sons, including Royce Gracie, the winner of the first UFC event.

The first UFC show, held in Denver on 12 November 1993 and broadcast on pay-per-view, was promoted by Art Davie, filmmaker John Milius (a Gracie student), and Rorion Gracie (one of Helio Gracie’s sons). The intention was not to create a new sport but to demonstrate the superiority of Gracie jiu jitsu to other combat disciplines. The question of the superiority of various fighting forms—judo, tae kwon do, jiu jitsu, boxing—had been a source of debate and speculation in gyms and dojos for some time. The Gracies felt that by having Royce Gracie win an eight-man single-elimination one-night fighting tournament as the smallest entrant, the question would be settled once and for all, leading to a growth in their training

system in the United States. UFC 1 featured fighters from varying disciplines: two kickboxers and one representative each of savate, karate, sumo, boxing, shootfighting, and Brazilian jiu jitsu. As predicted by the promoters, Royce Gracie was victorious, defeating boxer Art Jimmerson, shootfighter Ken Shamrock, and savate fighter Gerard Gordeau. The success of the first event led the promoter, Semaphore Entertainment Group, to run additional events with the same format. The organization lacked weight classes and featured weight mismatches of up to three hundred pounds when sumo wrestling was introduced as a discipline. Royce Gracie won three of the first five events and fought Ken Shamrock to a draw in the championship bout on another. After five pay-per-views and the draw with Shamrock, the Gracie family withdrew their support from UFC, arguing that the introduction of rules, including time limits, mitigated against their vision of the sport (although cynics note that the family withdrew at exactly the same time that the rest of the fighters began to understand and counter jiu jitsu techniques).

The evolution of the UFC from a one-night spectacle toward a legitimate sporting event happened gradually and involved the adoption of unified mixed martial arts rules and sanctioning from state and provincial athletic commissions. While the advertising slogan for the first UFC event was “There Are No Rules!” the organization did in fact ban biting and eye-gouging from the start. In UFC 5, time limits were introduced; these were gradually revised to the current system of five-minute rounds and a ten-point scoring system borrowed from boxing. UFC 12 introduced weight classes (heavyweight and lightweight) for the first time, and UFC 15 placed limits on head butts, groin strikes, kicks to downed opponents, and elbows to the back of the head. UFC 28 was the first event sanctioned by an athletic commission (New Jersey) and run under what are now known as the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts. In the events that followed, several new weight classes were introduced. (The UFC currently has championship titles in eight weight classes, from flyweight to heavyweight.) Each of these changes moved the organization more closely to the pure sport ideal. In particular, the use of third-party government-sanctioned athletic commissions to authorize bouts, conduct tests for performance-enhancing drugs, and impose penalties and sanctions has helped to bring credibility to a sport that was once termed “human cockfighting” by Arizona senator John McCain.

Public condemnation from McCain and others exerted enormous pressure on the UFC, which has evolved to be the dominant company in the sport of mixed martial arts. After McCain wrote to governors asking them to ban the sport in 1999, thirty-six states did so. The UFC was dropped by most cable systems and lost

its home video distribution network. Reduced to running small venues in mostly southern states and without significant pay-per-view or video revenue, Semaphore SEG agreed to sell UFC to Station Casinos owners Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta and promoter Dana White in 2001 for \$2 million. Lorenzo Fertitta, a former member of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, secured sanctioning for the organization in that state, and UFC returned to pay-per-view with UFC 33. UFC struck a television deal with Fox Sports Net, which aired the first mixed martial arts match on American cable television in 2002 and later aired footage of some of UFC's previous bouts. With sanctioning from the state of Nevada, an increasing number of states undid their previous bans on mixed martial arts. With the support of Fox Sports Net the UFC began the push toward mainstream sports credibility. On the verge of becoming a legitimate sport, its breakthrough stemmed from its ability to channel older boxing and professional wrestling tropes by promoting grudge matches between fighters whom the public believed legitimately had interpersonal issues. The breakthrough offered by UFC promoter Dana White, a former boxing manager, was the realization that the "pure sports" logic of boxing had been undermined by the proliferation of organizations and that the "sports entertainment" model of Vince McMahon's WWE was inherently limited by its lowbrow associations and its status as a "fake" soap opera for working-class males. By presenting UFC as something of a hybrid of the two models, UFC would have the best of both worlds if it could find a way to bring its product to an audience.

GOOD GUYS VERSUS BAD GUYS: CELEBRITY IN THE UFC

UFC 5 introduced its first non-tournament "superfight" (Gracie vs. Shamrock) to crown a champion, and singles fights would eventually replace the tournament format altogether. With the establishment of champions in various weight classes, the UFC moved closer toward a logic of pure sports, but ironically, it also heightened its focus on the entertainment aspect of the promotion by gearing its fighters toward potential "grudge matches." Arguably, the most important of these in the post-SEG period was the main event of UFC 40 (22 November 2002), which featured a light heavyweight title fight between Ken Shamrock (the UFC's first champion, returning to the promotion for the first time since leaving to pursue professional wrestling with the WWF) and champion Tito Ortiz, who had a bad boy reputation and who had shown disrespect toward and had feuded with a number of Shamrock's training partners since 1999. The ensuing bout drew 150,000 pay-per-view buys, more than triple the company's average at the time, and helped turn

the company around, since the event was given mainstream sports media coverage in venues including USA Today and ESPN. Significantly, the success of Shamrock vs. Ortiz demonstrated to the UFC that the avenue to success lay in the ability to convince the public not only that the fights were significant in terms of winners and losers moving up or down the card toward a title fight but also that they involved competitors with deep emotional investment in the outcome. Shamrock used the talking skills that he had developed in professional wrestling to convince the public that he truly hated Ortiz. In short, the main event of UFC 40 was a professional wrestling match in which the outcome was not predetermined by the promoter.

Despite the success of Shamrock vs. Ortiz and several other well-promoted fights, the UFC continued to struggle. The turning point for the company was in 2005 with the development of a reality TV series, *The Ultimate Fighter*, which it produced itself and then sold to Spike TV, a cable channel whose audience was heavily skewed toward young men. Airing after *WWE Monday Night RAW*, the world's flagship professional wrestling program, *The Ultimate Fighter* brought sixteen fighters in two weight classes to a communal house in Las Vegas. The fighters were divided into two teams, coached by light heavyweight champion Randy Couture and the challenger for his title at UFC 52, Chuck Liddell. The goal of *The Ultimate Fighter* was to introduce the public to the sport of mixed martial arts by combining it with the popular reality TV show competition format in which contestants are "voted off" the show. The twist, however, was that the competitors would not be voted off but would be eliminated by losing a fight to an opponent from the other team. In this way, *The Ultimate Fighter* revived the single-elimination tournament format of the UFC's earliest events (although spaced over a period of weeks rather than taking place on a single night). A secondary goal of the program was to promote UFC 52 by highlighting the rivalry between coaches Couture and Liddell, as well as the charismatic leadership of Dana White, who served as host. Finally, the third goal was to find and develop potential new fighters, based as much on their personalities as on their skills.

Keeping a large percentage of the professional wrestling audience that led into it, *The Ultimate Fighter* was successful from the start but became a sensation with the fifth episode (14 February 2005). This episode followed the repercussions of a decision by White, the host of the show, to allow the fighters to have a night off at the Hard Rock Cafe in Las Vegas. Returning to the house drunk, the fighters began to provoke each other. When a fighter named Chris Leben opted to sleep on the lawn rather than share the house with the other contestants, two members of the opposing team (Josh Koscheck and Bobby Southworth) turned a garden

hose on him while he slept. When the deeply inebriated Leben awoke, he went on a rampage looking for the perpetrators, which included smashing several doors. Determining that all parties were to blame for the situation, White ruled that Leben and Koscheck would fight and that the loser would leave the house. The episode ended with the cliffhanger of the fight being announced.

The episode, with its melodramatic moments of clear villainy and drunken heroism, sparked word-of-mouth interest in the show, with repeat airings achieving increasing ratings. A classic professional wrestling storyline created by happenstance and advantageous editing, the episode created the ultimate mixed martial arts grudge match. The fight between Koscheck and Leben was the high point of the regular season run, despite the fact that it was a weak and uninspired match in which the villainous Koscheck held his opponent down for three rounds, doing little actual damage. Nonetheless, the fight did help lay a foundation for two other events: UFC 52, featuring the coaches fighting for the light heavyweight title, and *The Ultimate Fighter* finale on Spike TV the week before, which featured the finals of the tournament.

The Ultimate Fighter finale (9 April 2005) centred on two tournament finals. In the first, Diego Sanchez, a technically advanced but charisma-challenged middleweight, defeated fan favourite Kenny Florian by technical knockout in the first round to win a UFC contract guaranteed at \$100,000. It was the main event, however, that changed the sport forever. In that light heavyweight match, Forrest Griffin defeated Stephan Bonnar by unanimous decision, with all three judges scoring the extremely close bout 29:28. What was remarkable about the fight was not only the obvious camaraderie and respect the two fighters had for each other based on their experiences training alongside each other but also the punishment inflicted by each fighter on the other as the two adopted an unreserved brawling style that in the later rounds largely amounted to each trying to land a knock-out punch while doing little to defend himself. Significantly, the ratings for the fight rose during every minute of the match, indicative of the fact that word of the spectacle was spreading quickly across the Internet and social networks. Widely considered the most important fight in UFC history, Griffin vs. Bonnar was the most watched mixed martial arts match to that time and, because of the stakes of the contest, arguably the most exciting. Thanks to a near-perfect combination of athleticism and melodrama, the match turned both Griffin and Bonnar into folk heroes in the sport, gained them tremendous fan followings, and sold the sport to the public as a thrilling spectacle in a way that no other fight ever had. Based on the success of this event, and because of their own star power, UFC 52, the week following, became

the highest-grossing event in the history of the UFC, drawing more than 300,000 pay-per-view buys, doubling the previous record. The rematch between coaches Couture and Liddell at UFC 57 raised the number to 410,000.

Having found the formula for success, the UFC began an exponential growth period between 2006 and 2010. The return of Royce Gracie and a rematch between Shamrock and Ortiz drew 620,000 and 775,000 buys, respectively. Ortiz vs. light heavyweight champion Liddell at UFC 66 was the first event to break one million buys. At this time, the UFC began to buy out a number of its rival organizations, consolidating itself as the industry leader in mixed martial arts, and *Sports Illustrated* ran its first cover feature on the sport in May 2007. By 2009, the company would do 1.7 million pay-per-view buys for UFC 100 (11 July 2009), a supercard featuring a title fight between Brock Lesnar, a former WWE professional wrestler and then-current heavyweight champion, and Frank Mir, a former UFC heavyweight champion; a welterweight title fight pitting champion Georges St-Pierre against Thiago Alves; and a match between Michael Bisping and Dan Henderson, the coaches for the ninth season of *The Ultimate Fighter*. To date, this has been the UFC's most successful show, and it is the top-selling non-boxing pay-per-view in history, trailing only two Mike Tyson fights and the 2012 bout between Floyd Mayweather and Oscar De La Hoya.

The Ultimate Fighter led the UFC into mainstream credibility, and the series subsequently became a launching pad that was used to cement the celebrity of some of the sport's most significant fighters. Georges St-Pierre was one such figure. Born in Saint Isidore, Québec, St-Pierre debuted in mixed martial arts in 2002, winning five fights in local leagues before appearing at UFC 46 with a victory over Karo Parisyan on 31 January 2004. He was given his first welterweight title shot against champion Matt Hughes in only his third UFC bout (22 October 2004), losing via armbar at the end of the first round. After running off a series of four impressive victories in 2005, St-Pierre earned a rematch with Hughes by defeating former lightweight champion B. J. Penn at UFC 58 (4 March 2006). St-Pierre was forced to withdraw from that fight because of an injury, and during his rehabilitation period, both he and Hughes appeared as trainers on the fourth season of *The Ultimate Fighter*, during which time Hughes was portrayed as bullying St-Pierre psychologically, particularly by repeatedly emphasizing his prior defeat at the hands of the champion. At UFC 63, Hughes defeated B. J. Penn (who had received the title shot that St-Pierre had forfeited due to injury), and St-Pierre entered the octagon following the fight to give an interview.

St-Pierre's interview comment "I am not impressed by your performance" was not the typical trash-talk of a professional wrestler, but coming from the soft-spoken Canadian, it was seen as inflammatory, and it set up an enormous hunger for a rematch. St-Pierre's victory over Hughes at UFC 65 (18 November 2006) established him as the welterweight champion and one of the biggest stars in the sport. With St-Pierre, the UFC introduced a new level of fan devotion—that of national and regional pride. Canadians had long been fans of both professional wrestling and mixed martial arts, but the sport remained marginalized on Canadian television and most provinces banned live events. St-Pierre's gentle demeanour and heavy Québécois accent made him an instant icon in Canada, turning the country into a priority market for the UFC. Shockingly, he showed up to his first defence woefully unprepared and lost his title to an underdog fighter, Matt Serra (7 April 2007). That could have been enough to kill his career, but St-Pierre rehabilitated himself from his second loss by dominating four-time NCAA wrestling champion and *Ultimate Fighter* first-season villain, Josh Koscheck, and then decisively winning a rubber match against Matt Hughes, who interestingly had gone from hero to villain after his stint on *The Ultimate Fighter*. On 19 April 2008, St-Pierre reclaimed his title from Matt Serra at the UFC's first-ever Canadian event, with a stunning performance in Montréal's Bell Centre that left no doubt about his dominance in the sport. In regaining the title in his hometown, St-Pierre became a national hero in Canada. He has held the welterweight title since that time, running off seven successful title defences before facing Nick Diaz in Montréal. During that period, he lost only two rounds on judges' score cards and was so dominant in the sport that Rogers Sportsnet named him Canadian Athlete of the Year three years in a row (2008 to 2010). In late 2013, after winning his eighth title defence, St-Pierre vacated the welterweight title and announced his desire to take time away from the sport. The combination of superior athletics and a soft-spoken demeanour had positioned St-Pierre as the ideal Canadian fighting champion, making him a superstar attractive to advertisers (including Gatorade and Under Armour), marketers (he released his own series of exercise videos), and even filmmakers (he appeared in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* in 2014).

CREATING UFC 158

The dynamics that went into the creation of the UFC as the most significant new addition to the recent history of sports were well on display in the promotion of the main event of UFC 158 in Montréal. Indeed, in many ways, the tensions that are

so central to successful promotion in the present-day period—a pure sports logic married to a sports entertainment logic—were virtually embodied in the media and fan discourses surrounding the two combatants. Coming off his long winning streak and domination of a series of number one contenders, Georges St-Pierre was both the hometown hero and the embodiment of professionalism and the pure sports sensibility. Since regaining the title from Matt Hughes, conversations about St-Pierre had tended to focus not on whether he would win or lose his next fight but where he ranked in the theoretical pound-for-pound rankings and whether one could make a legitimate claim that he was the greatest fighter in the history of the sport. With St-Pierre having soundly defeated the only fighters to whom he had ever lost and having consistently out-struck and out-wrestled his opponents in almost all of his bouts, the UFC now had the ironic problem of finding media-friendly hooks to sell his matches to the public. In combat sports, when the audience does not believe that the contender has a legitimate shot at winning the title, it is difficult to build an audience for a fight. St-Pierre's loss to Serra, which was the result of a single well-placed punch to the jaw, was frequently used as a reminder that in mixed martial arts "anything can happen," but this is relatively thin material for fans and for the press. Moreover, St-Pierre seldom participated in the type of trash-talk in which other fighters engaged. (In fact, he seemed to genuinely regret having insulted Matt Hughes's performance against B. J. Penn.) His well-crafted media persona was that of the squeaky-clean, all-Canadian boy whose success is based on a superior work ethic. This was an image that was carefully cultivated by his sponsors, which had helped to make him the most visible face of the sport in the world. Indeed, by the time of UFC 158, St-Pierre was the most widely promoted active Canadian athlete in the world, and he was known for his seriousness in defence of his title and his reluctance to use the media-marketing machine. Having faced a backlash for his "impolite" remarks to Matt Hughes, St-Pierre had resorted to talking up his opponents rather than running them down.

Nick Diaz, in contrast, came into UFC 158 with an extremely different media and fan profile. Diaz entered the championship fight with a 26-8 (1) record. While he had previously held welterweight titles in Strikeforce and World Extreme Cagefighting (both smaller mixed martial arts organizations that had been subsequently purchased by the UFC), his record as a fighter in the UFC was only 7-5. Having debuted in mixed martial arts shortly after his eighteenth birthday, Diaz had fought for a larger number of promotions with varying success. He joined the UFC in September 2003, generating mixed results before he was released from his contract in April 2006 after losing three fights in a row. He had a reputation for

taunting both inside and outside the ring, including an altercation in the hospital with Joe Riggs following their fight at UFC 57. Fighting for the Japanese mixed martial arts promotion, Pride, in 2007, Diaz failed a drug test for marijuana. His results were so elevated that he was accused by the Nevada State Athletic Commission of fighting under the influence of the drug and his victory over Takanori Gomi was changed to a no contest.

After serving a six-month suspension, Diaz fought for Elite XC and Strikeforce, where he became champion. When the UFC purchased Strikeforce, he was brought back for a potential champion-versus-champion match with St-Pierre at UFC 137, but he was removed from that fight after failing to appear at a media event. He was demoted on that card and defeated B. J. Penn in the semi-main event, while the entire card was shuffled because of St-Pierre's knee surgery. Following his defeat of Penn, Diaz fought Carlos Condit for the interim welterweight title, with the winner to challenge St-Pierre on his return. Diaz lost that fight by unanimous decision and then failed a drug test for marijuana a second time. Suspended for one year, he returned at UFC 158, facing, surprisingly, St-Pierre. Thus, the road to the title fight for Diaz consisted of losing a number one contender's match, failing a drug test, and sitting out for one year. By almost any "pure sports" logic, Diaz had absolutely no claim to a title match. However, in terms of sports entertainment logic, pairing him with St-Pierre made perfect sense: Diaz was the consummate bad guy whom the hometown hero would definitively put in his place in Montréal.

The promotion of the fight in the press reads in large measure as if it were scripted by the UFC itself. The fight was announced by Canadian Press in an article on 16 December 2012, in which a remark by St-Pierre laid the foundation for the entire drama: "There's been a lot of talk about who I should fight next but this was really the only choice for me. He's made it personal and I personally can't wait."³ Articles published about the media conference where Diaz initially failed to appear highlighted the challenger's lack of reliability and the champion's calm professionalism. In the days immediately leading up to the fight, Diaz skipped a public workout for the press, and the narrative, already familiar to fight fans who haunt Internet message boards, broke into the public. A Canadian Press journalist wrote: "Georges St-Pierre played with children and threw signed merchandise into the crowd. His opponent, Nick Diaz, didn't bother to show up. Short of escorting a senior citizen across the street or donating an organ to a relative in need, St-Pierre couldn't have done much more for his good guy image."⁴

The same article noted that Diaz had skipped the filming of a preview show for the fight and had complained about having to fly economy to Montréal from

his home in Stockton, California. The piece repeated many of the core sound bites surrounding the fight: St-Pierre's contention that Diaz is "the most disrespectful human being I've ever met" and Diaz's claim that St-Pierre is "pampered." At the weigh-in on the day before the fight, Diaz heightened the theatrics by throwing an elbow in the direction of St-Pierre during the traditional fighter's pose. All of this, of course, filled the papers and sports newscasts in the days leading up to the fight. Reported as straight news, the events (press conferences, workouts, weigh-ins) are all carefully orchestrated public displays designed to build interest in the pay-per-view (the live event having sold out 20,145 tickets at the Bell Centre, with a total gate of more than \$3.7 million). The hype worked. While the live ticket sales placed this event only fourth on the list of top-grossing UFC events at the Bell Centre (the St-Pierre-Serra rematch for the title occupies the top spot, at more than \$5.1 million in ticket sales), the event did particularly well on pay-per-view. While live tickets are purchased months in advance (and priced by the UFC before the true level of demand can be ascertained), pay-per-view purchases are largely a last-minute decision. In the case of UFC 158, the strong media promotion of the good guy/bad guy dynamic seemed to have worked magic—the event was reported as having garnered slightly under 1.1 million pay-per-view buys, almost two hundred thousand more purchases than the next highest show headlined by St-Pierre (UFC 94, with B. J. Penn) and nearly triple the best performance of any other show headlined by Diaz (UFC 143, with Carlos Condit). The pay-per-view success placed the event third on the UFC's all-time list, trailing only two fights featuring professional wrestler-turned-UFC champion Brock Lesnar (one of which, UFC 100, featured St-Pierre in the co-main event).

The actual fight itself was somewhat anti-climactic, although it was thoroughly enjoyed by fans in attendance. As many had predicted, Diaz was unable to use his boxing skills to damage St-Pierre, and St-Pierre used his world-class wrestling skills to take Diaz to the mat repeatedly, where Diaz's boxing was neutralized. St-Pierre won a lopsided unanimous decision (all three judges scoring the fight 50-45), to the delight of the Québécois fans. In his post-fight interview, St-Pierre essentially affirmed the charges made by Diaz, in the days leading up to the bout, that the UFC and St-Pierre had been selling "wolf tickets." St-Pierre told the crowd that "Nick Diaz is a good guy," a gesture of sportsmanship that recalls the tradition of shaking hands at the end of a hockey playoff series but a declaration that is suggestive of just how much of the pre-fight hype was simply manufactured for marketing purposes. For St-Pierre, UFC 158 was another dominant victory on the champion's road to becoming recognized as the greatest competitor his sport has ever known.

For the UFC, it was a box-office bonanza that generated more than \$60 million in revenues in a single evening. For the Canadian fans, it was a night of entertainment in which the virtuous and hard-working Québécois fighter soundly dispatched the brash-talking and disrespectful American upstart. Through it all was a demonstration that sports entertainment is every bit as important to the sports experience as pure athleticism, and possibly more so. As Georges St-Pierre proved at UFC 158 in Montréal, sometimes it is necessary to cry wolf.

NOTES

- 1 Jesse Holland, "Nick Diaz Accuses Dana White and Georges St. Pierre of Selling Fans 'Wolf Tickets' to UFC 158," *SB Nation: MMA Mania*, 14 March 2013, <http://www.mmamania.com/2013/3/14/4104852/nick-diaz-accuses-dana-white-georges-st-pierre-selling-wolf-woof-tickets-ufc-158-mma>. The Ultimate Fighting Championship, a mixed martial arts promotion company based in the United States, produces events around the globe.
- 2 Jordy McElroy, "Nick Diaz on GSP Injury: 'If It Hurts, Don't Do It,'" *Bleacher Report*, 6 January 2012, <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1013115-nick-diaz-on-gsp-injury-if-it-hurts-dont-do-it>.
- 3 Quoted in Canadian Press, "Welterweight Champ Georges St-Pierre Set to Face Nick Diaz at UFC 158," *Globe and Mail*, 16 December 2012.
- 4 Canadian Press, "Nick Diaz Misses Public Workout in Montreal Ahead of UFC 158 Event," *Globe and Mail*, 13 March 2013.

17

ON THE TEMPTATIONS OF DOPING

Moral Relativism and the Tour de France

Angela J. Schneider

Ask many Canadians where they were in 1988 when Ben Johnson won the men's 100-metre dash at the Seoul Olympics, and the reply will come quickly. Given that track and field is not a sport in which Canadian athletes have traditionally excelled, some even rank this sporting moment as one of our nation's best, up there with Canada's win in the 1972 hockey summit series with Russia. These same Canadians will also probably add that Ben Johnson being stripped of his Olympic gold medal for doping was one of the country's most embarrassing and humiliating sports moments. The victory and its aftermath are forever etched in the minds of many.

In the wake of that 1988 embarrassment, Canada has seen a federal commission (the Dubin inquiry) investigate drug use in sport, as well as the appointment of a ministerial task force, parliamentary committee reports on the topic, the formation of the Canadian Policy Against Doping in Sport, the creation of the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, which administers the Canadian Anti-Doping Program, and the basing of the World Anti-Doping Agency in Montréal (largely thanks to the efforts of Denis Coderre and Richard Pound). Canadians have thus had a great deal of exposure to the issue of doping in sport. Although Canada is known to many other countries for fairness and tolerance, it has been viewed by some countries as extreme to so openly castigate itself for cheating in sport. The Canadian attitude

toward doping also raises interesting questions. Given the pressure on Canadian athletes to perform, and what is often viewed as the prevalence of doping in some successful countries, some might ask if there a double standard at work here? Are we expecting too much from our athletes, when other athletes from other countries seem to be given more flexibility?

This chapter will consider more recent international doping scandals that have occurred in France. In particular, the Tour de France and cyclist Lance Armstrong, who, before his use of drugs was exposed in 2012 by the US Anti-Doping Agency, was credited with having won the Tour de France seven times in a row, from 1999 to 2005.¹ In accordance with the philosophical principle of charity, I will examine the nature and cultural function of the Tour de France, with a view to arriving at a more complete understanding of why riders such as Armstrong are tempted to engage in doping in the Tour de France. Not everyone would agree that athletes who use drugs deserve the benefit of this kind of sympathetic review. However, having interviewed Lance Armstrong while completing research for the World Anti-Doping Agency, and having observed both the worldwide increase in the loss of athletes' rights to privacy that current doping-control protocols entail and the very high risks that competitive sports oblige many athletes to take, I feel that it is important to assess whether any acceptable rationale exists for doping in sports like the Tour de France.

Simply put, the principle of charity states that we should seek the most intelligible possible interpretation of another person's words and actions. Since receiving its first major elaboration by Willard Van Orman Quine, the principle has been formulated in several ways. Quine's interest was with "obvious truths," that is, statements based on empirical observation or on logical reasoning, which, he argued, should be interpreted so as to maximize agreement.² Donald Davidson extended the principle of charity, which he came to refer to as the principle of rational accommodation, to include statements that were not in the nature of obvious truths, thereby broadening Quine's formulation. In so doing, he shifted the emphasis from maximizing agreement to "optimizing" intelligibility. According to Davidson, when we abide by the principle of charity, we attempt to make the maximum possible sense of the statements of others, regardless of their formal character.³ If someone says or does something that fails to make sense to us or that seems to us incorrect or morally offensive, we should not immediately assume that the person's words and actions have no rational basis. We should begin by making an effort to understand, rather than to evaluate. Language philosopher Richard Grandy reformulated the principle of charity as the "principle of humanity," according to which, when we are

choosing between different possible interpretations, we must “bear in mind that the speaker is a person and has certain basic similarities to ourselves.”⁴

The principle of charity thus involves a methodological presupposition of underlying coherence, one that requires us to set aside our preconceptions about an argument, a topic, or a belief (in this case, the view that doping is ethically unacceptable) in an attempt to gain an understanding of the actions of the other person. Suspending judgment in this way frees the mind from conditioned responses and enables it to absorb and understand the new. At the same time, in order to achieve genuine empathy, we must also equip ourselves with as broad an understanding as possible of the circumstances under which the other person’s actions took place. So with this perspective, let us now consider what may be one of the strongest arguments in favour of doping (in this case in the Tour de France).

A STRONG ARGUMENT FOR DOPING IN THE TOUR DE FRANCE: MORAL RELATIVISM

A common argument for justifying an action that may appear ethically questionable—and possibly the strongest argument with regard to doping in the Tour de France—is that based on moral relativism. Moral relativism (also known as ethical relativism) is most often associated with the position that deep and widespread moral disagreements exist, and the justification of moral judgments is not absolute but relative to a particular group of persons: “What’s right for me might not be right for you.”⁵ One person may believe that a certain action, such as doping, is morally acceptable, whereas another would reject the action as unethical. At the level of personal beliefs, this means that not all athletes will agree on what constitutes ethical behaviour. As anthropologists have long observed, moral relativism also applies to whole cultures: the majority of people in one society may condone behaviour that, in another society, most people would find unacceptable.⁶ For example, the attitude toward doping that prevails among Canadians may differ somewhat from the attitude shared by most Americans. This raises the question, to which I will return later, of whether any universal moral principles exist against which we would be able to judge one person’s (or one society’s) ethical standards with regard to doping. A moral relativist would argue that no such principles exist.

Many social scientists have noted that individual moral values reflect those of the surrounding society—an observation that supports the relativist claim that ethical beliefs are culturally constructed. Furthermore, if moral attitudes are learned from the social environment, then they are not the product of independent, rational

reflection on the part of individuals: we do not separately “invent” our code of ethics. In the case of Tour de France riders, the social environment would include not only national culture in which the cyclist was raised but also the cycling sub-culture—that is, the community formed by the Tour de France itself—and an individual rider’s conscience would be shaped by both. Most individuals are, in fact, ethnocentric, in the sense that they tend to defer to the opinions held by the larger group. This can lead to dogmatic beliefs, as is evident in many riders’ conviction that they cannot win the Tour de France without doping, as well as to an attitude of intolerance toward those who do not adopt the group’s beliefs. Groups cohere around shared beliefs, and these beliefs need to be protected. It could be argued that this is one of the main reasons that Armstrong and other riders in the Tour got away with doping for so long after it was banned: no one was prepared to betray the group by speaking out. The extreme protectionist tendencies of this particular group lead to dissenters being punished.

EXTREMES OF ENDURANCE: CYCLING AND DRUGS

“Death” is the proof that one has fought to one’s maximum—fascination of going beyond one’s capacity, to test one’s strength. In road cycling there are no limits to human effort: it represents the ultimate motivation to achieve. The road cyclist is the only true hero in the sports world—pure willpower.⁷

The Tour de France is considered by many to be the ultimate endurance race, with riders covering more than three thousand kilometres in twenty stages over three weeks. Each day, riders are on their bikes for four or five hours, averaging a speed of more than forty kilometres per hour. Doping is directly related to the fact that this kind of racing may well be the hardest sport competition that exists today. According to interviews I conducted with team doctors during the 2002 Tour de France, recovery from a one-day effort at this intensity would require approximately forty-eight hours, but the maximum time that these riders get off is sixteen hours. Although a diet rich in carbohydrates and protein, as well as an increased intake of fluids, can aid recovery, many team doctors and trainers believe that ongoing medical treatment is essential to make up for the missing thirty-two hours of recovery time.⁸

The Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) states that, according to their research, certain core traits are needed for road cycling: endurance, perseverance, willpower, competitiveness, a strong survival instinct, the ability to tolerate loneliness and frustration, the drive to overcome obstacles, the capacity to share, and humility.⁹

Endurance involves human effort beyond the ordinary limits of mind and body—the human capacity to suffer without giving up. At the same time, death is indeed the proof that a maximum has been reached. No matter how much willpower and perseverance are brought to bear on it, the human body does have limits. Not very surprisingly, then, the extraordinary—indeed, inhuman—physiological demands associated with the Tour de France and other long-distance competitions are often cited as the cause of doping.

However, while one might expect that such extreme demands would be the subject of protest, at the very least among cyclists themselves, this has not been the case. Instead, whereas traditional labour unions fight for safer working conditions, cyclists have fought for their right to drugs:

The slow-downs and strikes mounted by cyclists over the past half-century have been directed, not against their extreme suffering and diminished life-spans, but against the regulation of the drugs they use to cope with stress. In fact, the idea of moderating or “humanizing” these competitions has attracted little interest among riders and their physicians.¹⁰

More recently, calls have been made for the reduction of the physiological severity of the Tour, but they do not seem to be coming from the current riders, promoters, organizers, or officials.¹¹ It is interesting to note that many team doctors see their athletes as patients requiring medical care but are not calling for change. This phenomenon has prompted Andreas Singler and Gerhard Treutlein, among others, to comment on the striking passivity of high-performance sports physicians, who seem unwilling to address the problem of “inhuman” stress during training and competition.¹² Yet, as Ivan Waddington argues, “it is this punishing schedule which largely sustains the tolerance of doping within cycling and, if we are seriously concerned about . . . the health of professional cyclists, then reducing the physical demands made upon cyclists ought to be the first priority.”¹³

Physicians’ organizations worldwide have taken a stance against certain other sports, such as boxing, because of safety risks, but no such stance has been taken against the Tour de France. Rather, what has become acceptable is a “reduction of harm” model that relies on medical intervention after the fact, rather than on attempts to reduce harm by reducing the physical stress of the Tour itself. This model is best illustrated in the UCI’s approach to erythropoietin (EPO), a hormone used to stimulate the production of red blood cells and hence improve oxygenation. In 1997, the UCI began testing cyclists’ hematocrit, that is, the volume percentage of red blood cells in blood. Among men, a normal hematocrit averages around 45 percent. If a cyclist’s hematocrit is found to exceed 50 percent, he is removed

from competition and prescribed a period of rest. This blood testing is justified on the grounds that it safeguards cyclists' health, and yet no efforts are made to determine why a cyclist's hematocrit is abnormally high. The official position of the UCI is that EPO use is forbidden, but some, including the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), have argued that this approach simply condones the use of EPO to increase the volume of red blood cells to a maximum of 50 percent. In implementing hematocrit testing, the UCI has effectively embraced a harm reduction approach, one frequently used in the treatment of drug addiction and abuse. A harm reduction approach does not take a position on the moral acceptability of a particular practice; it merely acknowledges that the practice exists and then seeks to minimize its adverse effects. For many at WADA, however, such an approach is unacceptable, as it cannot be reconciled with a zero-tolerance policy.

Some critics, including not only Waddington but John Hoberman and Verner Møller, claim that this "harm reduction" approach has largely escaped scrutiny precisely because it is applied at the point when intolerable stress appears to call for banned substances that can provide relief. These critics argue that the Tour subculture created its doping predicament many years ago by accepting intolerable stress as the price of staying in business, which had the effect of creating a doping culture that it could not defend on principle.

DOPING EXPOSED: THE 1998 SCANDAL

Cycling is seen by many as a transparent sport, in the sense that both the physical effort and the psychological will to win are clearly visible to spectators. There is no room to hide and little room to cheat during the event. The existence of doping threatens that perception of transparency: it is a hidden activity, a form of cheating that takes place off the road and out of sight. Thus, when the Tour de France came under attack from politicians and the media during the 1998 international doping scandal, its organizers, team managers, and athletes reacted to the assault collectively, as participants in a sport bent on defending its autonomy, values, and survival. Much the same display of solidarity happened again in the face of the Armstrong scandal.

The 1998 scandal, sometimes called the Festina affair, began when drugs, syringes, and other doping-related materials were discovered in a car belonging to one of the teams in the competition, the Festina team. Investigations subsequently revealed that drug use was widespread among Tour riders from many teams, earning the 1998 event the nickname "Tour du dopage." One of the drugs implicated in the

scandal was EPO. In the years leading up to 1998, there had been a shift away from stimulants and toward a practice known as “blood doping,” for which EPO was the drug of choice. The revelations led to allegations that the subculture of professional cycling permitted the only semi-concealed consumption of banned performance-enhancing substances. That scandal clearly damaged the cycling community, and the Armstrong case likewise had many people, including former WADA chief Richard Pound, speculating that cycling might be removed from the Olympic Games. Once viewed as a sport that inspired loyalty and self-sacrifice, cycling has come to be viewed more cynically, essentially as an aggregation of individual entrepreneurs who cooperate in order to maintain a mutually advantageous arrangement.¹⁴

Although the extreme physical demands of long-distance cycling are perhaps the most obvious rationale for doping, some former professional cyclists have tried to explain the attraction to doping in terms of the psychology required for the sport, arguing that winning requires a willingness to engage in forms of subterfuge. In *Le procès du dopage*, Jean-François Quénet writes: “I am convinced . . . that the vice is inherent in the practice of elite cycling. Why? Because much of a rider’s behavior involves bluffing his opponent, getting him into difficulty, exposing him to the wind . . . in a word, fooling him! By a kind of natural extension, certain riders are inclined to see doping as a permissible strategy.”¹⁵ Potentially scandalous comments from cyclists in the public media are, however, unlikely to shock professional cyclists because the subculture of cycling understands the allure of doping.

As other riders have argued, doping has essentially become a necessary part of the sport, one that assists in sustaining the spectacle that the sponsors and public demand. In a 1969 interview, a five-time Tour de France champion—someone often viewed as one of the greatest professional cyclists in modern history—commented on the practice of taking drugs: “I dope myself. Everyone dopes himself. Obviously, we can do without them in a race, but then we will pedal [only] fifteen miles an hour. Since we are constantly asked to go faster and to make ever greater efforts, we are obliged to take stimulants.”¹⁶ Similarly, another rider was quoted as saying: “People talk so much about doping. . . . But if you don’t take anything these days, then you’re not going to get anywhere.”¹⁷ The right to work—that is, the recognition that athletes are workers doing a job—dominates this perspective, in which doping is seen as necessary to professional survival.

The accusations, indignation, and disappointment that followed the 1998 scandal challenged the idea that the cycling world is a coherent community built on shared ideals. Critics, such as Hoberman, argue that the cycling community is not, in fact, founded on cooperation, shared values, and an ethos of self-sacrifice

on behalf of shared goals. Rather, it is an arrangement that allows its members to pursue individual goals in a self-interested way that may well be compatible with community coherence only in a functional sense, in that it sustains the Tour de France as a profitable enterprise. In this view, the cycling world is a closed community that observes its own rules, rules that contribute to its reputation as a haven for drug use. As Møller argues: "Once again it is necessary to point out that there is an essential difference between the morality that prevails inside of cycling and the morality that reigns outside its special domain. It is as though we were talking about two cultures with radically different value systems."¹⁸

When the 1998 doping scandal hit cycling, civil authorities stepped in, superseding sport authorities who represented the culture of cycling. This raised the ethical question of whether the sport world is entitled to a special status that renders its members exempt from the values of outsiders. If the answer is no, then which set of values—those of the sport community itself or those of the broader culture—should be used as an ethical baseline?

THE CONTINUED SUCCESS OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE IN THE FACE OF SCANDAL

The Tour de France is an immense spectacle, a cultural celebration that winds its way through France. As a spectator at the 2002 Tour commented, "The riders in the Tour de France go where people live, they go to them, down their street—what other sport does that?"¹⁹ Long-distance stage races are indeed unique in that they take the very best performers in the sport right to the doorsteps of spectators. Organizers estimate that more than eighteen million spectators view the race from the side of the road while having picnics and camping out. They line virtually every metre of the route, jostling for position hours before the riders appear. In some of the mountain stages, spectators camp out for days to claim the best spots.

The Tour de France is, in other words, an extremely successful spectacle. The defiant attitude of its supporters during the 1998 doping scandal is thus unsurprising but is important to understand. This was a view backed by a largely supportive public. As Møller points out:

The opponents of doping had a very hard time digesting the fact that the revelations and scandal-mongering media coverage of 1998 did not cause the cycling public to turn its back on the event. Given that the whole thing had been revealed to be cheating and fraud, the Tour route should have been devoid of spectators when the riders passed by. Yet the actual situation was

exactly the opposite; the public was eager to show its sympathy and support for the harried riders. It was obvious that they did not feel cheated.²⁰

Indeed, the public's attitude toward doping does not always conform to the prohibitionist line that is publicly embraced by many officials, and this in itself is a matter of real social significance.

The days immediately after the scandal broke were filled with denials. Although cycling outsiders and critics questioned both the attitudes of Tour officials and the show of public support, the tacit acceptance of doping by spectators no doubt meant that, when these declarations proved to be hollow, it made little real difference.

Throughout all of this, the Tour's continued success has been clear. It still receives blanket media coverage. The national dailies in France routinely run two or three pages, while the sports newspapers run five or six. There is full-day coverage on television, with a worldwide viewing audience estimated to be in the billions.²¹ Furthermore, this lack of public disapproval and rejection has occurred in cultures in which the use of illicit drugs is not generally condoned, making their norms seem both arbitrary and hypocritical.

What is behind this tolerance on the part of the public? Despite the existence of anti-doping laws dating from 1965, French society did not condemn cyclists, who were, after all, French heroes—popularly known as the “giants of the road.” Similarly, the authorities who might have prosecuted riders caught using drugs apparently concluded that the benefits of doping among cyclists (notably the triumphant success of these cyclists in the Tour) outweighed the costs to the society at large.²²

THE TOUR AS NATIONAL EPIC

When the Tour de France was created, in 1903, it was for commercial reasons—to boost the sales of a new magazine, *L'Auto*. Its creators probably never imagined that they were also creating an event that would come to generate so much French pride and nationalist spirit. The Tour is, in effect, a huge French party. Each stage begins and ends in a different town, which is closed to traffic for the day. Everything stops for the Tour. It is a national and local celebration. French riders and their victories are cheered, with local riders feted and honoured.

These “giants of the road” do seem larger than life, as Roland Barthes's well-known essay “The Tour de France as Epic” (1957) suggests. Barthes emphasizes “the great risk of the ordeal,” the “magnificent euphoria” that it makes possible, and the Tour's function as “a myth of expression and a myth of projection, realistic and utopian at the same time.”²³ The mythic aspect of the Tour, he argues, the tension between

its “vestiges of a very old ethic, feudal or tragic” and “the world of total competition,” obscures its commercial core:

It is in this ambiguity that the essential signification of the Tour consists: the masterly amalgam of the two alibis, idealist and realist, permits the legend to mask perfectly, with a veil at once honorable and exciting, the economic determinisms of our great epic. . . . What is vitiated in the Tour is the basis, the economic motives, the ultimate profit of the ordeal, generator of ideological alibis.²⁴

Viewing riders as workers employed in the service of profit would undermine their status as heroes of an epic ordeal. Similarly, mythic heroes do not engage in doping. Their inspiration, their ability to transcend human limitations, derives from communion with the divine. “To dope the racer,” Barthes writes, “is as criminal, as sacrilegious as trying to imitate God; it is stealing from God the privilege of the spark.”²⁵ This Barthean perspective does much to clarify the psychological foundation of public support for the Tour—the need to deny, or forgive, what threatens its utopian aspect.

DOPING AND COMMUNITY SOLIDARITY

As Barthes points out, riders are themselves caught in an ambiguous ethic, one in which “certain knightly imperatives constantly mingle with the brutal demands of the pure spirit of success.” A tension exists between the notion of an individual rider’s sacrifice and the “ethic of the collectivity” demanded by cycling as a team sport.²⁶ There is indeed evidence that the riders love the sport and look out for each other. For example, when an accident occurs, the pack slows down and, if possible, allows the riders involved to catch up. At the same time, riders face pressures that work against group solidarity. Since the doping scandals, for example, some riders are concerned about guilt by association and seek to distance themselves from those implicated. In addition, riders face personal pressures. They often quit school at fifteen to become professionals, and, except for those who become superstars, they are not paid well: riders I interviewed in 2002 reported earning less than US\$25,000 a year. They have families to feed, and they must often make hard choices to make ends meet. Members of cycling teams also endure a very long season, sometimes as long as ten months, most of which is spent away from home. This produces a team culture that is very tight and closed to the outside, and yet, even on the same team, riders have to compete with each other. This closed environment thus breeds a culture of secrecy around the tactics that each athlete uses to help him prepare.

Cycling is, in short, a very hard way of life, both physically and mentally, and its hardships certainly create bonds of sympathy and respect between some riders. But doping practices may also bind some of them together. Critics of cycling argue that the riding community has an endemic disdain for doping rules and claims a special status for itself as a subculture in which doping is quasi-tolerated. In this subculture, certain traditions are perpetuated. The pressure on the cyclists to dope has come in part from coaches and managers, who used drugs themselves during their cycling days when they were active athletes. The media then reinforce the image of cyclists as drug users. Positive tests for drugs confirm suspicions, the media then seize on these stories, and the publicity becomes confirmation that everyone is doping. Even those who choose to stay clean can't escape being tainted. It's not practically possible, nor is it financially possible to prove that one has taken a drug test every day and that it has always been negative. Athletes don't trust the testing system, and they feel that their privacy is violated by constant testing. Some riders claim that doping is not even a voluntary decision. As one former professional put it, "No one starts out wanting to dope but you become a victim of the sport."²⁷

This sort of solidarity is the product of a siege mentality, according to which telling the truth is incompatible with maintaining good team spirit. Riders are thus required to subordinate their self-interest to the law of silence rather than to an ideal in which the riders can take pride.²⁸ In some ways, the solidarity of professional cyclists resembles that of a labour union. However, it was not until the spring of 1999, following the 1998 scandal, that the riders formed a professional cyclist association (known as the CPA, or *Les cyclistes professionnels associés*) and elected a president. Perhaps, until then, they did not view themselves as "workers" who were vulnerable to exploitation and needed to band together for mutual protection.

Anti-doping campaigns designed to address what is presented as a social plague that threatens public health find easy support from a general public that does not need drugs in order to make a living. But these campaigns overlook the situation of elite athletes. Official demands for drug-free sport put great pressure on sports associations to adopt strict anti-doping penalties that would in fact mean long periods of unemployment for riders who are caught using drugs. The UCI is concerned with the health of professional riders and has clearly articulated the economic interests and feelings of the athletes. Yet some at WADA have claimed that doping control by the UCI has been ineffective at best and, at worst, suspect. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the standard anti-doping doctrine more or less ignores the sociological and economic dimensions of the doping phenomenon.

Adding to the tensions surrounding doping is the fact that professional cyclists are part of a community willing to engage in physically very dangerous behaviour—hurtling down mountainsides at one hundred kilometres an hour, for example—in order to produce a cherished spectacle for the public. Yet, as Møller notes, “we still do not understand why these performers are willing to assume the role of the victim, even when it comes to ingesting drugs (such as amphetamines) that *may* damage health in the long term but *are* literally life-threatening when they are taken to prolong endurance.”²⁹ The fact remains, however, that cyclists are drawn to, and the public fascinated by, extreme, risk-filled behaviour—and this produces a moral dilemma.

An obvious, almost absurd, contradiction exists between the public celebration of voluntary risk-taking on the part of elite athletes and doping-control regulations designed to protect their health. If we refuse to see riders as oppressed workers whose health and safety must be protected, then we must also reject the argument against doping in elite sport on the grounds that it is unhealthy. Given that the sport is in its very essence dangerous, it is difficult to argue the medical case—that professional cyclists need to be defended against bodily risks—to the public. In fact, the public appetite for extremes of performance has prompted some, including Møller, to defend the autonomy of the professional cycling subculture and the right of cyclists to practice self-medication without interference from outsiders. Perhaps this is one reason why, rather than concentrating on health maintenance that could withstand the scrutiny of outsiders, doctors and riders have entered into a tacit conspiracy.³⁰

Despite efforts at concealment, doping and cycling are intimately linked in the public imagination. Some point to the media coverage surrounding the Tour de France, which subjects riders to intense pressure and to a degree of scrutiny all but unparalleled in other sports. Spectators are well aware of that cyclists use drugs, as is evident from figure 17.1. The connection between doping and cycling has even been exploited as a marketing tactic. In 2002, the Swiss branch of the European Milk Board (a group about as mainstream as one could find) ran a billboard campaign featuring a cyclist milking a cow with the tag line: “Le lait. Doping naturel” (see figure 17.2). The underlying assumption here is that cyclists generally rely on drugs—coded in the ad as artificial and unwholesome—for the strength and endurance that allow them to test the very limits of human performance.



Figure 17.1 Spectators at the 2002 Tour de France took turns passing around an enormous syringe. This one is sporting a makeshift cape (à la Superman); another dressed up in a white lab coat. This playful mockery of the riders' dependence on medical teams suggests that doping is widely acknowledged and accepted as an integral part of the spectacle. Photo courtesy of the author.



Figure 17.2 In 2002, the Swiss milk board seized on the association between cycling and drugs to promote its product as a healthful—and natural—alternative to doping. Photo courtesy of the author.

While participants in all elite sports push their bodies to the limits, in some sports, this is the entire point of the endeavour. In this respect, cycling is like weight-lifting: the point of both sports is to push the body to the limits of its strength. The effects of doping on strength and endurance are very direct, so the appeal of doping for cyclists is apparent. Insofar as doping is *not* natural—a form of cheating—it tarnishes the sport and creates a negative image for cycling. At the same time, long-distance stage racing is all about defying death, about pushing the human body to achieve the superhuman. The athletes who do this are heroes. Doping can thus be condoned by spectators and accepted by athletes as the price to be paid by those who wish to be great.

A doping culture that values performance above all, even at the cost of destroying the body, and that operates through peer pressure and secrecy would seem to be inherently unsustainable, yet it continues. Can the current physiological demands of the Tour de France be justified? Can the “special medical requirements” be defended, on principle, against outside criticism? The logical inconsistency regarding health leads many to question whether professional cycling essentially abandons medical concerns by virtue of what it does—leaving riders to fend for themselves. In France, at least, there appears to be no pressure for change.

THE TOUR DE FRANCE AS CARNIVAL

In *Rabelais and His World*, Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin describes medieval European popular culture as a culture of carnival, one that evolved out of ancient folk ritual. Whereas comic and festive ritual was once integrated into culture as a whole, the development, over time, of formal state and ecclesiastic structures, as well as the solidification of class divisions, had the effect of excluding this comic and festive element from the “official” culture, such that it became the alternative folk culture of carnival. In contrast to the culture of the church and feudal court, with its emphasis on pomp and circumstance, this alternative culture was one of feasts, fairs, pageants, clowns, fools, jugglers, profanity, trained animals, monsters, laughter, and parody, in which sacred rituals were mimicked and mocked by comic inversions.³¹ Carnival was, Bakhtin argues, a second world—a second life existing outside official life, a different way of living, a realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance:

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms,

and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. . . .

. . . All were considered equal during carnival. . . . A special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. . . . People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind.

This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival a special type of communication impossible in everyday life.³²

In the world of carnival, ordinary boundaries could be transgressed, and standard hierarchies were inverted. The world was turned upside down and inside out, a transposition that was celebrated in the medieval feast of fools, as well as in the choosing of the carnival King. During carnival, nothing was sacred, and no one was exempt. As Bakhtin argues, carnival “does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators”; it “is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people.”³³ Carnival produced cultural forms characterized by their grotesque realism, the type of folk humour that degrades all that is high, spiritual, ideal, and abstract and that brings life back to the material, to the people and to the social body.³⁴ Even though the laughter and excesses of carnival were clearly antithetical to the rationalism ushered in by the Enlightenment, the tradition has survived, especially in the annual festivities in the city of Nice.

Fundamental to the roots of Carnival was the worship of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, who was associated with madness, frenzy, and ritualized forms of ecstasy, as well as with the masking involved in theatre. As Elizabeth Vandiver observes, Dionysus, as “a god whose domains include possession, behavior inconsistent with one’s normal character and acting out of things that one would not normally do, is an appropriate god for a theatrical tradition in which masked actors put on the face of another character before taking part in a drama.”³⁵ Similarly, the Carnival in Nice offers a way to step outside of oneself, to assume personae and indulge alter egos, to lose oneself in the moment and revel in collective rapture.

The concept of “licensed transgression,” which is what carnival has always been about, can help to explain why many French people tacitly accept doping in the Tour de France, a celebration that shares certain features with the tradition of carnival.

This association was illustrated in Nice Carnival 2012, which centred on the theme “King of Sport”: the parade included a float featuring a Tour de France cyclist trailed by his medical team (see figures 17.3 and 17.4). Like Carnival, with its parades, the Tour is a participatory event, a nationwide festivity that spills beyond French borders. Quite apart from the massive television audience, spectators crowd the streets, much as they might for the appearance of royalty, some of them standing so close to the race that they have been known to reach out to touch one of the riders.



Figure 17.3 The theme of Nice Carnival 2012 was “King of Sport.” One of the floats in the parade featured a Tour de France cyclist preceded by a phalanx of syringes—the drugs on which these “Kings of the Road” rely. Perhaps not coincidentally, Carnival 2012 took place while Lance Armstrong was still under investigation by the US Anti-Doping Agency. Reproduced with permission of the photographer, Sara Lee.

The carnival is alternative, lying outside of and opposing officially sanctioned forms of behaviour. In the spirit of drunken revelling, doping is, in the context of carnival, no longer proscribed. Carnival is ambivalent: rather than imposing judgment, it embraces both the positive and the negative, celebrating this ambivalence by transforming the one into the other. This also describes the Tour de France, in particular the public’s ambivalence in France to the doping scandals.



Figure 17.4 Behind the lead cyclist—wearing his badge of honour, the yellow jersey—we see a gleeful Tour official (on the right) and the team doctor, looking more like a mad scientist than a healer. The float underscores the association between doping and the commercial success of the Tour: spectators expect a never-ending series of records broken. Reproduced with permission of the photographer, Sara Lee.

Carnival degrades the purity of the abstract and the ideal and celebrates the profane and the material. Similarly, one could argue that the commercial nature of the Tour degrades the ideals of competition: it is no longer “pure sport.” But, of course, the Tour was never anything but a commercial enterprise, and the use of performance-enhancing drugs (sugar cubes soaked in ether) played a part from the outset. At the same time, Carnival has a utopian aspect, liberating both imagination and experience from the orthodox and the conventional and revealing the possibility of transformation. The potential for transcendence is clearly expressed by the doped rider and his “Dr. Frankenstein” medical team—doctors inverted, transposed into mad scientists, with the body of the rider forever unfinished, never limited by its humanity but instead constantly transgressed and transfigured, as the object of an ongoing scientific experiment: the monster created.

It appears that, among the French, doping is generally condoned, at least in the case of Tour de France riders. In many other societies, however, it is not. This descriptive observation certainly seems to run counter to the idea of universal moral norms and thus to offer support for moral relativism, according to which the rules of morality can be entirely constructed by culture. In this view, those who judge one society by the norms of another make an error.

All the same, we must ask whether relativism is truly a satisfying answer to ethical conundrums. Moral relativism has a prescriptive, or normative, component. If no universal principles exist across cultures, if there are no grounds according to which we can judge one culture's code of ethics to be better or worse than another's, then we are also obliged to accept even personal actions that we find abhorrent, provided they are acceptable within the other person's culture. After we have made an honest effort, in accordance with the principle of charity, to suspend judgment and attempt to render another person's actions intelligible by situating them in their proper context, are there no moral absolutes by which we can then evaluate those actions? Many in France do not judge riders negatively when they dope for the sake of professional survival and because they are trying to win the Tour de France. Doping is perceived as necessary for the continuation of the event, which benefits French society as a whole, both economically and as a key source of national pride.

This perspective flows from the utilitarian principle—the “fundamental axiom,” as Jeremy Bentham described it—according to which morality is founded on the pursuit of whatever produces the greatest good for the greatest number.³⁶ If such a fundamental principle exists, its existence clearly refutes the claim by the moral relativist that no universal moral principles exist. But, if we accept this principle, then we must extend it to the international sporting community. Most countries do not sanction drug use among athletes, and scandals surrounding the use of performance-enhancing drugs damage the reputation of the sporting community. One can argue, then, that bans on doping produce benefits for the greater international sporting community and that these benefits must override any one country's assessment of the utility of doping.

To return to the Armstrong case, some Canadians may forgive him for doping to win the Tour de France on the grounds that every rider who has won the Tour has doped. That is, they may recognize that, within the culture of cycling, doping is ethically unproblematic. They may also have a personal sympathy for him because,

as a cancer survivor, he has cheated death. But these same people might also agree with the argument that for the greater good of international sports, doping should be banned. Furthermore, it is unlikely that very many Canadians (or Americans or citizens of most other countries) will be prepared to forgive Armstrong for the “collateral damage” he left in his wake—the people whom he “ran over,” as he called it, in his mission to keep the fraud alive so that he could continue racing and winning the Tour de France.

Although belief systems vary, and cultural relativists warn us about the danger of assuming that our preferences are based on some absolute standard, all societies, including the international sporting community, do recognize certain shared moral rules simply because those rules are necessary for society to exist. If Armstrong’s actions provoked no feelings of disapproval, this absence of ethical judgment would, as James Rachels suggests in his critique of relativism, call into doubt the very idea of moral progress.³⁷

NOTES

- 1 Armstrong had been implicated in doping allegations since 1999, but it was only in 2012 that the US Anti-Doping Agency successfully compiled definitive evidence against him. In October 2012, he was formally stripped of his titles by the Union Cycliste Internationale, and, in January 2013, he finally confessed.
- 2 In other words, if a statement that purports to state a truth seems mistaken or incoherent to us, we should not assume that the speaker is in some way irrational; rather, we should assume that the speaker is attempting to articulate a meaning that most people would, in fact, recognize as true. See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
- 3 In “Three Varieties of Knowledge” (1991), Davidson distinguished two components of the principle of charity: the principle of coherence, which “prompts the interpreter to discover a degree of logical consistency in the thought of the speaker,” and the principle of correspondence, which “prompts the interpreter to take the speaker to be responding to the same features of the world that he (the interpreter) would be responding to under similar circumstances.” As he noted, “one principle endows the speaker with a modicum of logic, the other endows him with a degree of what the interpreter takes to be true belief about the world.” Donald Davidson, “Three Varieties of Knowledge” (1991), in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 211. See also the essays in the section on radical interpretation, as well as Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

- 4 Richard Grandy, "Reference, Meaning and Belief," *Journal of Philosophy* 70, no.14 (1973): 445.
- 5 For a useful introduction, see Chris Gowans, "Moral Relativism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2015, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015/entries/moral-relativism/>.
- 6 This position, often referred to as cultural relativism, was described by Ruth Benedict in "Anthropology and the Abnormal," *Journal of General Psychology* 10, no. 1 (1934): 59–82. "Morality differs in every society," Benedict wrote, "and is a convenient term for socially approved habits" (73).
- 7 Union Cycliste Internationale, *The Essence of Road Cycling* (Aigle, Switzerland: UCI, 2001). I quote from the English version prepared by the UCI.
- 8 For additional discussion, see Angela J. Schneider, "Cultural Nuances: Doping, Cycling and the Tour de France," in *Doping in Sport: Global Ethical Issues*, edited by Angela J. Schneider and Fan Hong (London: Routledge, 2007), 36–50.
- 9 UCI, *Essence of Road Cycling*, 23–24.
- 10 John Hoberman, quoted in Schneider, "Cultural Nuances," 46.
- 11 I am drawing here on discussions that took place during meetings I attended as director of Ethics and Education for the World Anti-Doping Agency.
- 12 As Singler and Treutlein observe, "One of the remarkable aspects of the physicians' self-image is their constant boasting about their moderating influence, at the same time that they claim to be helpless when confronted with the prevailing [social] conditions." *Doping—von der Analyse zur Prävention* (Aachen: Meyer and Meyer Verlag, 2001), 40–41; the translation was provided by John Hoberman.
- 13 Ivan Waddington, *Sport, Health and Drugs: A Critical Sociological Perspective* (London: E & FN Spon, 2000), 167–68.
- 14 Schneider, "Cultural Nuances," 38.
- 15 Jean-François Quénet, *Le procès du dopage: la vérité du jugement* (Paris: Éditions Solar, 2001), 142.
- 16 Quoted in Bill Gilbert, "Something Extra on the Ball," *Sports Illustrated*, 30 June 1969, 32.
- 17 Quoted in "Intern Dynamit," *Der Spiegel*, 30 June 1980, 183.
- 18 Verner Møller, *Dopingdjæveln—analyse af en hed debat* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1999), 88–89.
- 19 Quoted in Schneider, "Cultural Nuances," 39.
- 20 Møller, *The Doping Devil*, 130.
- 21 In 2013, organizers claimed that the viewing audience reached 3.5 billion. For an analysis, see Anthony Reuben, "Small Data: Are There Four Billion Tour de France Viewers?" *BBC News Magazine Monitor*, 13 July 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-28264183>.
- 22 Schneider, "Cultural Nuances," 41.

- 23 Roland Barthes, "The Tour de France as Epic" (1957), in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 79, 80, 87.
- 24 Ibid., 86, 87–88.
- 25 Ibid., 83. Also with reference to the divine, Verner Møller offers precisely the opposite interpretation: "In our culture the use of doping has fallen under a taboo. By violating this taboo within certain limits, the athletes open a portal to that which is 'sacred.' It is in doping that one finds a worthy analogy to the myth of the titan Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and gave it to men, thereby reducing the distance between the human and the divine." *The Doping Devil*, 108.
- 26 Barthes, "Tour de France as Epic," 85.
- 27 Quoted in David Walsh, "Saddled with Suspicion," *Sunday Times* (London), 8 July 2001.
- 28 I draw here on John Hoberman, "Pharmacy on Wheels," an unpublished paper written in 2002.
- 29 Møller, *The Doping Devil*, 107.
- 30 Hoberman, "Pharmacy on Wheels."
- 31 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 4–7.
- 32 Ibid., 10.
- 33 Ibid., 7.
- 34 Ibid., 24–25.
- 35 Elizabeth Vandiver, "Classical Mythology," lecture 10: "Hermes and Dionysos," Great Courses series, The Teaching Company, 2000.
- 36 This principle is most commonly associated with the utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Bentham called it a "fundamental axiom" that "*it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.*" Jeremy Bentham, *The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham: 'A Comment on the Commentaries' and 'A Fragment on Government,'* ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart (London: Athlone Press, 1977), 393.
- 37 James Rachels, "The Challenge of Cultural Relativism," chap. 2 in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 3rd. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1999), 26.

AN INSIDER'S LOOK AT THE VANCOUVER 2010 LUGE TRAGEDY

Regan Lauscher

The 2010 Olympic Winter Games were going to be my last. My decision to retire at the close of the Vancouver Games was never contingent on my result, the possibility of a big sponsor, or even the temptation of that next adrenaline rush that comes with racing on a new track (for the 2014 Games in Russia). I considered retirement after the 2006 Games in Torino after feeling disappointed with my tenth-place finish, but I couldn't manage to pry myself away from the chance to compete in a third Olympic Games in front of a home crowd. I wanted to give my best performance and to finish my seventeen-year journey on a high.

However, the four years leading to Vancouver 2010 presented me with some of the toughest physical and mental obstacles of my career, and, as the Games drew nearer, it became obvious that this, my swan-song Olympic race, would be less about chasing that elusive podium and more about personal triumph. I had come back from a multitude of head injuries and shoulder surgeries in good enough form to realistically finish in the top seven, but I suspected that my initial dream of a medal on home soil was in need of adjustment. I prepared for the final race of my career with more determination, drive, focus, effort, and tears than ever before. Nothing I had done, though, prepared me for what happened on the day of the opening ceremonies of my final Olympic Games.

On 12 February 2010, I was waiting for the shuttle to take me back to the athletes' village after picking up a few things that morning in Whistler, when our team's media attaché notified me that Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili had just died during a training run that morning and instructed me to return immediately to our team house so that we could all meet and debrief.

In complete and utter shock, and with tears burning hot on my cheeks, I boarded the bus and struggled to keep my composure for the next twenty-five minutes. When I overheard two people sitting across from me say how luge is "a crazy sport" and how awful it was that someone had to die, I instinctively hid the massive accreditation I was wearing, which announced to the world my name and my sport.

Moments later, I ignored a call from a familiar member of the press who was obviously hoping to bypass the proper channels of athlete access during the Games for an interview. Given my background in journalism, my relationship with the media has always been one of mutual respect and candidness. It surprised me that the person was calling my personal cellphone, given the fact that our team was already in a media blackout—we weren't giving any interviews, except for at the track in the designated press areas after training or racing was over.

At that point, I knew the story had exploded. News of the luge death had gone viral in less time than it took to ride the bus back to the village. I took a few deep breaths and tried to prepare myself for what lay ahead. In paralyzing disbelief, our team stood united as we supported each other through one of the most heart-wrenching moments in our careers. Sobs of sorrow suffocated me, and a cocktail of emotions surged through my veins. I was flooded with waves of alternating sadness, guilt, anger, and shock. We awaited our fates helplessly as whispers of the race being delayed or cancelled started to circulate. As we worked through our grief, we tried to remain calm and focused. We needed to retain the mental competence for a safe descent down the track in the upcoming days.

Then we were dealt another devastating blow, with the announcement that the starting heights would be moved lower down, shortening the course. In a sport that is measured and executed in fractions of a second, the move essentially wiped clean our team's four years of strategic preparation. To give ourselves the best chance of success, we had left no stone unturned—obsessively dissecting the fastest track lines, researching and tuning the fastest equipment, training in a variety of conditions, and becoming stronger than ever. The one thing we hadn't prepared for—or even imagined—was having to race from a lower height. The women and doubles were left, on our home track, with no idea of how to navigate the first (and most critical) corner of the track, the starting curve.

We watched the Olympic race that we had been training for, and the hopes that went along with it, circle the drain and disappear. Instantaneously, we were thrust into the vortex of a dizzying whirlwind of media reports, some insinuating that the Canadian team and the Whistler track had contributed to Nodar's death. With the results of the investigation and coroner's report still to come, we were already being blamed for an unsafe track: the overall tone of the coverage began to frame us as villains with un-Canadian values by implying that we had denied other nations (including Georgia) adequate access to train on our track.

Media coverage manipulated our motivation to "Own the Podium" into appearing as though we had cheated and/or intentionally set out to sabotage everyone else. With the media's momentum and its ability to influence public opinion in full tilt, we athletes on the Canadian team felt that we were left with little choice but to remain silent. Even mentioning the words "accident," "mistake," or "driver error" became sensationalized in the mainstream media, causing huge public backlash, as is illustrated by David Letterman's comments on late-night television, reported by *Entertainment Weekly*:

"A mistake?" said Letterman witheringly. "I just wonder if it had anything to do with those exposed steel girders . . . Don't blame the kid, for god's sake" . . .

"For them to say that he made a mistake, that just stinks," continued Letterman. Why is it, he asked, that "they then repaired the track and covered up the girders and started [the race] from the women's starting point?"

"You know what it is? It's hypocrisy, ladies and gentleman."

A video of the entire crash, including Kumaritashvili's death, was played repeatedly, provoking a mass emotional reaction in the public. Immediately, hate mail started to appear in my email inbox accusing me of being "heartless."

Pitchforks in hand, the media and a growing number of the public were already on a hunt for scapegoats, and it seemed that nothing we could say would change the direction of the fingers pointed at us. We felt like the media storyline had gone too far, that it wasn't possible to undo the damage that was already done. Luge is a sport that most people know little or nothing about and that generally only gets coverage every four years at the Olympics: how could we possibly explain and demystify the complexities of the sport in a five-minute interview?

As the world mercilessly fired at the Canadian luge teams, we remained focused on the race. It simply wasn't our job at that point to investigate, hypothesize, or weigh in on the accident, or to justify ourselves and convince the world of our innocence. Our job was to scrape together what little dignity we had left and hold our heads high. In my opinion, the media as a whole, in a frenzied race for the latest

scoop, missed the mark altogether. The stories that surfaced seemed nothing more than the low-hanging fruit on the tree. I was frustrated that no one appeared to be interested in or willing to dig deeper into some of the more fundamental issues that continue to plague the sport. Instead of finger-pointing and filling gossip columns, the press could have used the tragedy as an opportunity to bring to light some of the real problems faced by luge in hopes of prompting positive change.

The knee-jerk reaction from the International Luge Federation (FIL) to move the start gate down, a response in part to the media's pressing scrutiny, not only had an irreversible and devastating effect on the Olympic race but also perpetuated an image of luge and the Whistler track as "unsafe" in kamikaze proportions. Moving the men's race to the women's starting height and the women's and doubles race to the kids' starting height (where they currently remain) not only diminished the integrity of the race and called into question the competence of all the athletes, track crews, and coaches, but it also validated unsubstantiated suspicions and accusations about the track being too dangerous, as well as the belief that the Canadians had denied other countries adequate training.

Reports of the track's allegedly excessive speed and its technically demanding nature produced harsh criticism in the media regarding the height of the track walls and the unpadded steel beams at the finish. Minimal research would have demonstrated that these are common at nearly every track around the world. Often, it can be the older, less efficient tracks that raise safety concerns because of antiquated architecture at a time when the technology of sleds have made them faster than ever. Even if the steel support beams had been padded, what guarantee is there that the outcome of the crash would have been different? Severe crashes occur at every track at every speed. No track in the world has every beam padded. Through the media's incessant focus on details like padding, the Whistler venue was portrayed as having ignored standard safety measures within the sport, which was simply not true.

There is nothing particularly unusual about Whistler's design, with the exception of its vertical drop, which made it the fastest track in the world at the time of the 2010 Games. Not surprisingly, generic reports of "excessive speed" surfaced as the culprit for the fatal crash. A sport where athletes race unarmoured bodies down ice tracks with no brakes on millimeter-wide edges and have minimal course vision has inherent risks. When, then, does speed become "excessive"? Is 130 kilometres per hour acceptable? Who determines what speed is considered "safe"?

The truth can be painful. It can be ugly. And often the truth is exactly what people don't want or aren't prepared to hear. At the time, nobody seemed satisfied

that driver error was a likely cause of the accident and death of the Georgian athlete. It appeared that an angle of gore and malice was too delicious for the press to pass up.

In my opinion, the most pertinent story that failed to emerge is the issue of athlete eligibility for the Olympic Games, a topic that has been debated for years with no definitive conclusion. An extreme and inherently dangerous sport like luge demands many years of training and racing (an accumulation of thousands of runs down the tracks) for an athlete to be considered at the world-class level and to be able to navigate, in any and all situations, his or her way safely down a course. There is no denying that because of the growing cost of building and operating these facilities, track designers are now combining the elements of high speed and technically challenging curves—factors that had been kept separate in older tracks.

A track was often known to be either a high-speed “gliding” track or a slower, more technical track. As these components are combined in one track, and as the sport evolves in terms of both the technology of the equipment and the competence of the athletes, tracks are becoming more demanding than ever. This alone requires athletes to have more experience than ever before—the cost of which many teams (including the Canadians until recent years) simply cannot shoulder. Smaller nations, especially, struggle to finance the travel, training, equipment, and coaching that the realities of the sport now require. The level of expertise needed by both the athlete and the support staff make the days of athletes and nations with minimal experience (who show up to compete only at the Olympic Games every quadrennial) a thing of the past. It’s simply not realistic any longer for nations that cannot ensure adequate training because of limited budgets and/or lack of adequate access to appropriate training facilities to compete in the more extreme sports. It’s a real conundrum for a sport like luge, whose continuation at the Games depends on growing participation and mass Olympic representation.

Legitimate issues within the sport such as athlete eligibility for World Cup and Olympic events, as well as track accessibility and broader standardization of equipment, need to be actively addressed on a permanent basis rather than with short-term Band-Aid solutions on a “per race” basis. I believe that for the safety of all athletes, the rule makers and criteria setters such as the FIL need to re-evaluate their standards for World Cup and Olympic entry.

Undeniably, the rest of the world is trying to play catch-up to the Europeans with regard to luge history, knowledge, and experience. The increased use of the technically demanding tracks that exist outside the European perimeter, such as those at Whistler, Lake Placid, and Sochi, is vital to luge’s growth and survival. Routinely inviting non-European nations that have challenging tracks—such

as Canada, the United States, Japan, Russia, Norway and Latvia, as well as other nations in close proximity to these venues—to host competitions would begin to even out the field of play. Of course, owing to the astronomical costs, not every country has the resources to build or sustain such facilities.

The Germans alone have four tracks, more than any other nation. Often, all four of those tracks are included on the yearly World Cup race circuit, while the countries with the other challenging tracks host events every second, third, or fourth season. This gives the Germans a clear advantage at nearly half of the World Cup races every year. The remaining nations whose tracks are included on the race schedule also take home advantage, including the Canadian team at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver and the Russians in the 2014 Olympics. Smaller nations without tracks and with extremely limited budgets will always be at a disadvantage.

Furthermore, as in any sport, international success in luge is the key to financial opportunity for nations that need to increase their budgets for technological research and development, for the acquisition of qualified coaching and support staff, and for the funding of five months of worldwide travel, training, and racing. A strong finish by Canadian lugers at the 2010 Olympics was an opportunity to secure the country's luge program for future generations. The condemnation of the Canadians by international media for using our home track to an unethical or immoral advantage was completely unfounded. Other countries also have the advantage when races are held at their venues. The media coverage created the perception that because Canadians had more runs on the Whistler track (a geographical and mathematical certainty), the rest of the world was denied adequate opportunity to train. Following the rulebook, Canada offered all nations the required amount of training—whether countries took full advantage of the training opportunities was up to them. If opportunities for other countries to train were thought to be inadequate, questions should have been directed toward those responsible for drafting the rules, not toward the Canadian team for following them.

Absent from news reports that I saw was the success of the World Cup held in Whistler the season before the Games, as well as the fact that the track had been tested, inspected, and approved on multiple occasions by the FIL and all other appropriate governing bodies. Members of the US luge team and media were very vocal in their anti-Canadian comments about the safety of the Whistler track and our home track advantage, yet nowhere was it mentioned that some of the top-ranked sliders voluntarily pulled out of the 2000 Goodwill Games in Lake Placid after questioning the track's safety. Coming into the 2002 Games in Salt Lake City,

no one seemed to ostracize the US team for maximizing its home track advantage by having more runs than other teams at its venue.

The significant problems associated with the luge track in Italy before the 2006 Olympics in Torino also flew under the radar. An accumulation of crashes and injuries leading into the World Cup test event in 2005 led officials to cancel the World Cup. Boiled down, like it or not, accidents are inevitable. It's in the nature of the beast.

Tracks have different designs, weather conditions are constantly changing, and the evolution in the technology of the sleds has made it possible for athletes to go faster than ever before. There is no possible way in a sport like luge to predict and/or avoid every potential chance for injury for every slider at every venue, especially given the diversity of athletes' experience and access to training. There are simply too many variables that even a modified rulebook could never entirely address.

Anyone who has ever been on a luge sled has also fallen off it. Even the world's most experienced sliders aren't exempt from ice burns though paper-thin speed-suits every now and then. That's why it becomes even more critical that the athletes who compete in luge (and other extreme sports) are fully prepared to be there. Crossing the finish line a few times at slower, less technically demanding tracks doesn't provide an athlete with the skills needed to make confident split-second decisions at the most challenging venues. At the Olympic level, it's not about knowing what to do when conditions are favourable: it's about knowing what to do when they're not—something that requires more than two short years of experience in world-class competition.

The physical, technical, and mental demands of the Whistler venue for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games track weren't a surprise to anyone who showed up to race on the track. Even so, accidents can happen. Whether you are a luge athlete, a doctor, a pilot, or simply a commuter on your daily drive to work, human error is an unfortunate part of life. The Olympics are about competition between the best athletes in the world. They are not an open invitation event for all to compete, and maybe now, at the immeasurable expense of a life, the issue of athlete eligibility will be taken more seriously.

NOTE

- 1 Ken Tucker, "David Letterman Calls Olympics Officials 'Hypocrites' After Luge Death," *Entertainment Weekly*, 16 February 2010, <http://watching-tv.ew.com/2010/02/16/david-letterman-olympics-luge/>.

19

COMMUNICATING TRAGEDY

The Death of Nodar Kumaritashvili at the Vancouver Olympics

Jeremy Berry

On 2 July 2003, I was working as a radio reporter on Vancouver Island. This was no ordinary on-air shift, though—it was on this day that I got to announce that Vancouver and Whistler had won the bid for the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. From that point on, I was fascinated by the prospect of the Games coming to Vancouver, though my relationship with the Olympics has deeper roots.

I was just a kid when the 1988 Games came to Calgary, where I lived at the time. Unfortunately, I was too young to take in the experience properly; the only memory I have is an Andy Moog shutout against Poland. Growing up in and around Calgary, however, I was surrounded by the legacies of the Games: the Oval, Canada Olympic Park, and Canmore Nordic Centre are all constant reminders of what was. When I announced that the Games were coming to Vancouver, I knew that I would need to be there: I knew I needed to create some lasting memories. As the 2010 Games drew closer, I set out to expand my knowledge of the Olympics, which included writing a master's thesis about social marketing strategies for the Vancouver Games. In the period leading up to the Games, I also stayed in close contact with a friend of mine, Regan Lauscher, a luger who had already competed in two Olympic Games. Vancouver 2010 would be her homecoming and retirement ceremony all in one. So I was determined to get myself to the Games. In late 2009,

I managed to secure a volunteer opportunity at the International Media Centre at Robson Square—the place where representatives of media outlets that hadn't received press accreditation from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) would gather to get stories and share them with the masses.

I flew from Calgary, where I was now teaching at Mount Royal University, to Vancouver on 12 February 2010, putting me on the ground a day before the start of the Games. En route to Vancouver, I learned that Georgian luger Nodar Kumaritashvili had crashed in a training run at Whistler Sliding Centre. The coroner subsequently determined that the luger had died on impact.¹ Before I even stepped off the SkyTrain, the Games, which had not yet officially started, had suffered a serious blow. As details about the fatal accident were reported, I found myself wondering how Kumaritashvili's death would affect my friend Regan. As a public relations educator, I was also keenly interested in the official response to the event and the subsequent media coverage.

While the coroner eventually ruled the death accidental, following the crash the Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC) and the International Luge Federation (FIL) made modifications to the track, moving the men's start to the women's start and the women's start to the juniors' start, as well as padding the steel girders near the finish line.² As with any tragedy of this magnitude, fingers were pointed at those in charge. However, given the global stage and international media attention, this particular news story moved quickly. Was the media coverage positive, negative, or neutral? The answer depends on whom you ask, but I will say this: the attention on luge, a sport not well known to audiences outside of Europe, was unprecedented, if not completely overwhelming, for the sport and its athletes.

In what follows, I will examine the media coverage immediately after the accident to better understand why the story was told a particular way and why certain storylines were ignored. In the process, I will also reflect on Lauscher's perspective and my own feelings about the situation.

MEDIA COVERAGE

Immediately following the crash, I witnessed an explosion of tweets and Facebook posts, with many people sharing the link to the video of the accident. And, of course, the traditional media carried numerous stories about Kumaritashvili's death. Reviewing the coverage in the *Vancouver Sun*, Marianne van Oosten found that stories following the crash expressed sympathy for Kumaritashvili while being critical of the track and VANOC.³ *Sun* columnist Cam Cole wondered out loud

whether Canada, in “its zeal to protect its athletes’ home-course advantage,” might have “inadvertently contributed to the likelihood of crashes involving lower-ranked athletes who hadn’t had sufficient opportunity to train on such a wild, fast run.”⁴ Comparing the *Globe and Mail’s* Olympic coverage on 13 February 2010 with that of the *Sun*, van Oosten found that, although the *Globe* ran roughly the same number of articles, “the focus was not on the death of the Georgian luger”: only two articles referred to the accident, as opposed to “more than a dozen” in the *Sun*.⁵ Some of those column inches in the *Globe* were filled instead with articles on Canada’s Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium (of which the *Globe* was a member), including one article featuring promotional comments from the head of the consortium that, van Oosten noted, made the story read like a news release.⁶ This is perhaps an indication that members of the consortium were—consciously or otherwise—focusing more on the positives, while other, unaccredited media followed the tragedy. At one point, a reporter asked VANOC officials at a news conference whether this was the “worst start to any Olympics ever.”⁷ I was asking myself the same question.

As I looked further into the media coverage, I found an Associated Press story from 12 February 2010 that highlighted the safety concerns associated with the speed of the track but also included a comment about the Whistler track from three-time Olympic luge champion Georg Hackl: “My opinion is that it’s not any more dangerous than anywhere else.”⁸ Hackl’s thoughts seem to echo Lauscher’s comment, in the previous chapter, that the media’s relentless focus on details of track design created the false impression that Whistler officials had ignored standard safety measures, making the track unusually dangerous. Yet the coverage, on balance, did not seem to reflect the perspectives of Hackl and Lauscher.

Also on 12 February, journalist Rob Longley wrote, “There is outrage from many athletes and officials who blame Canadian organizers for not allowing other sliders extended pre-Olympic access to the course.”⁹ In April, Lauscher, probably the most vocal of all the Canadian sliders, argued in a *Calgary Herald* column that the coverage was neither fair nor balanced—two principles she had learned as a journalism student at Mount Royal University:

Conveniently absent from news reports was the success of the World Cup held there last season [2009], which is more than can be said for the track in Italy leading into the 2006 Games, when the World Cup was postponed after a host of problems, including track safety and accumulating injuries. Also, nothing was mentioned about the top sliders dropping out of the 2000 Goodwill Games in Lake Placid, N.Y., after the track raised eyebrows about “safety concerns.”¹⁰

As Lauscher observed, the media framed the issue in a way that showed Canadians denying others access to the track for their own competitive advantage. But, she pointed out: “Of course, we have more runs on our own track. So did the Italians in 2006, the Americans in 2002 and the Germans every single year with four out of the nine World Cup races being on their home tracks.”¹¹

While many of the articles I looked at cited the dangers associated with luge and other sliding sports, there was very little mention of the one previous death in luge, at the 1964 Innsbruck Games (though it was noted by the *Prince George Free Press*’s Allan Wishart).¹² Furthermore, as Lauscher argues in the previous chapter, the biggest missed opportunity for the media was in telling a story about athlete eligibility for luge—specifically, the fact that just because an athlete has qualified *for* a race does not mean that they are qualified *to* race. Harry Hiller, in chapter 8 in this volume, argues that the Olympics are a heavily mediated event and that the media have the power to “create a sense that the Games are a huge success, but they can also create images of an event filled with controversy and conflict.” Lauscher notes in the preceding chapter that moving the start gates down was “a response in part to the media’s pressing scrutiny” and that the change “not only had an irreversible and devastating effect on the Olympic race but also perpetuated an image of luge and the Whistler track as ‘unsafe.’”

In reflecting on this tragedy, I was left pondering two questions: Did the media tell the right story? If not, what prevented them from presenting a fair and balanced account? While these questions have no simple answers, a variety of factors can be considered—starting with the immediacy, power, reach, and impact of social media.

“THE FIRST TRULY DIGITAL OLYMPICS”

CTV’s Marc Dinsdale proclaimed Vancouver 2010 to be “the first truly digital Olympics.”¹³ Indeed, the VANOC website had 275 million online visitors; in comparison, Beijing 2008 had 105 million visitors to its site.¹⁴ The television audience worldwide for the 2010 Games was an astounding 3.5 billion, but the social media implications are perhaps even more far reaching.¹⁵ As noted earlier, immediately after the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili, footage of his fatal accident was spread far and wide online. In fact, the video went viral before media could even confirm the death and collect biographical information on the luger.¹⁶

Historically, the International Olympic Committee has maintained tight control of its Olympic content, but social media and the events of 12 February 2010 challenged that control. As traditional media and the broadcast consortium tried

to catch up with the story, it was moving fast on Twitter.¹⁷ Some outlets, such as the *Vancouver Sun*, chose not to post the video to its website, while others did. CTV—which, like the *Globe*, was part of the Olympic Broadcast Media Consortium—decided it was “proper” to run the video of the accident, a choice that seems to run counter to the *Globe*’s very scant coverage of the death.¹⁸ A complaint regarding CTV’s use of the video was filed with the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council, which subsequently found that CTV had not violated any standard codes and had given viewers proper warnings.¹⁹ All the same, some, like Gillian Shaw, dubbed the sharing of the video “death porn.”²⁰ Further consideration of the video reveals what is perhaps the more fundamental issue for journalists, one that concerns traditional codes of ethics and good taste.

In her thoughtful analysis of media coverage of the 2010 Olympics, Leanne Ritchie notes that traditional media follow written and unwritten rules.²¹ According to one of the most important unwritten rules, once reporters’ questions regarding the luge tragedy had been answered and officials had made changes to the track, there was no justification for continuing to air the original video. In other words, “anyone who went on airing the video after that was not following the norms of traditional media.”²² According to Ritchie, social media users who continued to share the video were breaking with traditional media and “showing evidence of having no ethical standards to apply to their content.”²³ As the line between traditional journalism and online reporting continues to blur, this debate gets tougher to moderate. It is becoming harder and harder to separate traditional media from so-called new media and trained, ethical professionals from amateurs. According to Sada Reed, the growth of social media has challenged journalism at its very core: “Journalists struggled in the last decade to see how a profession based on selecting and vetting information before disseminating it might fit in a world where anyone can easily and instantly publish anything.”²⁴ This is also a problem for consumers of media—who should we trust in times of crisis?

Are these ethical challenges, coupled with the immediacy of social media, to blame for the lack of context (real or perceived) related to the death of Nodar Kumaritashvili? As with most debates, the answer is not black and white, as was illustrated in a study of tweeting during the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. If, as noted above, social media adhere to standards that are less ethical than those of traditional media, then the difference should be visible in the ways in which social media users engaged with this particular video. What Anatoliy Gruz, Sophie Doiron, and Philip Mai found in their analysis of forty-six thousand Twitter messages during the Games is surprising. As they discovered, although “sad” messages

were tweeted during the 2010 Olympics, most of them relating to the death of Kumaritashvili, the majority of the tweets relating to the Games were positive, with three positive tweets for every negative one.²⁵ Positive tweets are not always the norm when it comes to mega-events and Twitter, specifically in the area of presidential elections.²⁶ Gruzd, Doiron, and Mai also found that “positive messages are 3 times more likely to be forwarded than negative messages.”²⁷ This suggests that Twitter users would be more likely to retweet positive news than the “death-porn” footage of Kumaritashvili’s death. Personally, I find this conclusion somewhat counterintuitive, given what I see as Web 2.0 society’s voyeuristic tendencies, to which gruesome images such as these so often appeal.

The immediacy associated with online news has also affected accuracy, specifically in relation to posting a news story online and then making modifications throughout the day. Michael Karlsson has studied the issue extensively:

It will probably prove difficult to convince an audience that the news is accurate if they read conflicting drafts of news or witness a news anchor reading one thing from a script while simultaneously seeing something that contradicts their statement. If this occurs several times a day, it is not difficult to imagine the impact that this can have on the perceived trustworthiness and associated authority of the news outlet. On the other hand, users’ appreciation of immediacy indicates that they are willing to trade accuracy for speed, although users’ tolerance zone for errors needs to be investigated.²⁸

Even in conventional news coverage, of course, accuracy is an ideal that is not always met. William Wary Carney cites a Columbia School of Journalism study that found that close to 20 percent of news media stories “were viewed by the reporters who wrote them to be defective either because the headline was inaccurate or because errors had occurred in the editing process.” As this finding suggests, and as Carney goes on to point out, while “journalists do make errors, they are also very reluctant to concede them.”²⁹ The reluctance of media personnel to concede—and correct—errors is probably one factor that contributed to the silence of the Canadian luge team in the aftermath of the accident.

In Carney’s view, inaccuracy consists in a reporter making a factual mistake, not simply interpreting the fact in a way that differs from the reader’s preferred interpretation.³⁰ Lauscher argues, however, that the media narrative surrounding Kumaritashvili’s death was inaccurate because it focused on certain details to the exclusion of others and failed to contextualize the incident adequately. In other words, even though the information presented in the media may have been

accurate, the coverage was not balanced: it did not convey the whole story. One must ask, then, at what point the omission of information becomes an act of interpretation, one that creates a misleading impression.

Social media and new information technologies certainly affected the coverage of the luger's death at the 2010 Olympic Winter Games. However, other factors need to be analyzed before determining why media focused on a "faulty track" instead of addressing such issues as eligibility rules within the sport of luge.

THE CHANGING FACE OF SPORTS JOURNALISM

Over the years, I have witnessed a decline in the importance of sports coverage, especially from a local perspective. Jeffrey Halliday's study of sports on American television confirms this. He found that three-quarters of the sports reporters interviewed agreed that their roles are diminishing and that there is a high level of anxiety within their profession.³¹ *Globe and Mail* TV critic John Doyle agrees: "Olympic TV coverage is what it is—traditional sports TV on a gigantic scale. It's not the TV news. It's not a vehicle for investigative journalism."³²

Except during the Olympics, luge is not a popular sport in Canada. Having been to World Cup races in Calgary, I can tell you that crowds are small and media coverage minimal. Every four years at the Olympics, however, journalists are tasked with covering sports, like luge, that they know little about. Similarly, every four years, fans of the Olympics are viewing sports, like luge, that they also know little about. Developing true fans (and, for that matter, knowledgeable journalists) for a sport that receives media attention only every quadrennial is challenging. While, in my experience, journalists generally seem to strive to get the story right, no matter what the topic, US broadcaster Bryant Gumble provides a counter perspective: "Try to blot out all logic when announcers and sportswriters pretend to care about the luge, the skeleton, the biathlon and all those other events they don't understand and totally ignore for all but three weeks every four years."³³ As figure 19.1 shows, luge was most frequently mentioned in newspaper reports on 13 February 2010, the day after the Georgian luger's death. Moreover, it appears that luge's popularity in Canadian media is linked directly to the Olympic cycle. A search of the Canadian Newsstand database, which archives the text from approximately three hundred of Canada's newspapers, revealed that, in 2010 (the year of the Olympics), luge was mentioned in newspapers almost twelve hundred times; in 2011, that number was less than two hundred, and, in 2012, just thirty-seven.

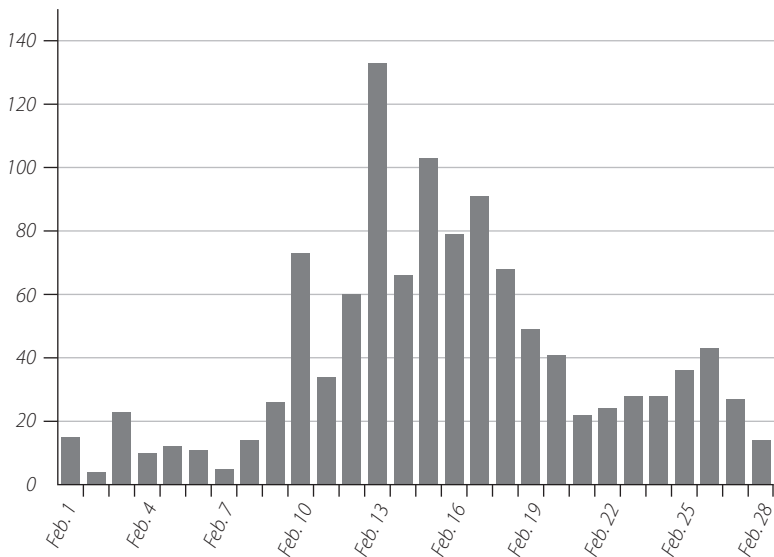


Figure 19.1 Newspaper references to “luge,” February 2010. Source: Canadian Newsstand database.

Even in sports that journalists do cover consistently in this country, like hockey, the narrative is changing and diminishing. As *Globe and Mail* columnist Roy MacGregor notes in chapter 1 in this volume, now more than ever before sports media are interested in statistics and injuries and not in true storytelling. Of course, comparing luge to hockey is not fair, given that one is a fringe sport with minimal Canadian participation while the other is firmly entrenched in our national identity. Still, the luge coverage, the argument goes, becomes more about numbers, injuries, and even death and less about the will and skill of the athletes. Furthermore, there were significant layoffs in “Canadian traditional media just prior to the Winter Olympics in Vancouver.”³⁴ As Lauscher explains in the preceding chapter, a lack of understanding of luge and an appetite among reporters for simple, superficial stories—the “low-hanging fruit on the tree”—left her feeling frustrated: it was not possible to “demystify the complexities” of a sport like luge in a media sound bite, especially when the narrative had already been written. A lack of resources contributes to a lack of depth in coverage and a diminished understanding of a fringe sport, but the power dynamics among journalists, media organizations, and the governing bodies of the Olympics also play a role in the type of story a journalist is willing—and able—to tell.

Why didn't the media question the moving of the start line or address the issue of qualification standards for luge? For a reporter to question the IOC or FIL is challenging from two perspectives. First, the convergence of media in Canada "allows large companies more control over journalists and encourages journalists to practice self-censorship."³⁵ Second, for reasons of revenue, the International Olympic Committee is extremely protective of broadcasting rights and the overall message.³⁶ Ritchie notes that it can even be career ending for a journalist to openly criticize the Olympic Games.³⁷ Given these challenges, credit should be given to any reporter bold enough to question the governing bodies of sport. However, it is also important to ask how much influence, if any at all, this power dynamic can have on a story. Additionally, these challenges fit hand and glove with the desires of the nation hosting the Games. In Canada's case, as in the case of other host countries, there is a desire not only to win but also to be seen in a positive light. As Ritchie observes, "It has been well documented that control over media content during the Olympics is not just important to the IOC, but also to countries looking to enhance their reputations, also called soft power, at the global level and traditional media corporations looking to capitalize economically off the Olympic frame."³⁸ If the local media are seen as overtly challenging the Olympic movement, they are essentially biting the hand that feeds them.

CONCLUSION

This chapter outlines one micro-level 2010 Olympic story relating to the tragic death of Nodar Kumaritashvili. Inevitably, more questions than answers arise, and I still ask myself, What if members of the Canadian luge team had come out and spoken their minds to the media? Would that have changed the narrative? While the answer will never be known, what is known is that the media, Canadian and otherwise, gave our lugers little encouragement to speak out and challenge the narrative. Many factors contribute to this finding, including lack of media resources, lack of understanding of luge, the immediacy of social media, and the complicated power dynamic among the IOC, the FIL, the Olympic Broadcasting Media Consortium, and the host country.

While this chapter focused on media coverage immediately following the crash, it is worth noting that as the Games went on, the coverage became much more positive, a change that I witnessed firsthand. After Canada's Alex Bilodeau's gold medal performance, it seemed like the tide changed and a wave of excitement and goodwill rolled in. Steve Burgess, writing for *The Tyee*, sums it up rather succinctly:

It was the Olympics of the streets. The narrative that was building in early media reports—a tale of tragedy followed by comic screw-ups—got swamped by the massive grassroots buy-in that was evident every day around the epicenter of Robson Court. Add to that the mysteriously long queues for even the crappiest pavilions and the eternal willingness of the idle to jump up and down behind TV reporters, and you were seeing solid evidence of the public verdict on the 2010 Olympic Games.³⁹

As Hiller says in chapter 8, this wave of goodwill, community participation, and medal success could make the Vancouver Games “a watershed moment in Canadian history.” The day before the Games officially started, it certainly didn’t feel that way. To give credit to the media, though, as the tone of the Games changed from the tragic to the triumphant, so did the coverage.

I have not watched the video showing the terrible death of Nodar Kumaritashvili, nor will I. My memories of the 2010 Olympics are still crystal clear. I, like many, mourned the loss and then went on to celebrate a true Canadian success. Like the organizers of the Games and the athletes themselves, my relationship with the 2010 Games was long, personal, and sometimes trying, but extremely worthwhile in the end.

I feel for my friend Regan, though. Despite the energy she dedicated to luge and to the Olympic movement, whenever she tells someone which sport she competed in, they almost invariably ask her about the events of 12 February 2010. It is a sad irony that, when luge finally came to the attention of the media, it was only because someone died, and that made a good story.

NOTES

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20

THE HALF A MILE OF HEAVEN'S GATE

Aritha van Herk

On 1 June 2006, at Grande Prairie, Alberta, two chuckwagon drivers had occasion to reflect on the sport that defines their summers if not their lives. Mark Sutherland and Jason Johnstone, both second-generation members of two venerable chuckwagon racing families, were competing in the same heat when their wagons collided, resulting in a spine-chilling, hair-raising ride that beggars the excitement of any Roman chariot race, ancient or modern.

Competing in that heat were Buddy Bensmiller, his son Kurt Bensmiller, Mark Sutherland (son of Kelly Sutherland), and Jason Johnstone (son of Reg Johnstone). These are the royalty of chuckwagon families, names that ring on every track across the West. That day, the horses were restive at the barrels, refusing to stand, nerves and excitement making them eager to go. And take off they did, even though before the horn went, Sutherland, fighting to control his horses, yelled for the other wagons to pull out, pull out for another start. But the klaxon sounded, and, coming out of the infield, Sutherland discovered that the harness on his right wheeler had broken. In a vain effort, he tried to hold back his horses, but they were already in race mode. Jason Johnstone, with only a split second to make a decision, thought he could get past Sutherland on the rail, but he couldn't. His wagon slammed into Sutherland's as they were going around the first turn. A collision between two wagons, pulled by that horsepower at those speeds, is extravagantly forceful. It knocked Johnstone

off the seat into the back of his wagon box; unable to fight his way back to the seat, he desperately tried to control his raging horses from the box for the rest of the race. But Sutherland was knocked from his seat onto the ground. Which might seem anti-climatic—a wicked bump and the end of a race. Except that between wagon, horses, and a *mélange* of dirt and hooves, Sutherland was in mortal danger. “I landed on my head pretty good and bounced. When I was going under and saw the wagon box coming down on me . . . saw the wheel, I thought, ‘this is it.’ But I kept my wits about me . . . I pushed away from the wagon and luckily, I pushed the right way.”¹ As if that wasn’t enough of a challenge, Sutherland’s right leg had the reins wrapped round it; the left front wheel of the moving wagon struck that same leg. Knowing he had only one chance to survive, Sutherland grabbed the reach (the pulling pole under the wagon) and hung on, all the while trying to kick the reins off his foot. They caught on his boot, and, holding the reach with his arms, he kicked with his left leg, trying to free his foot. When he managed to pry off his boot, he swung both legs around the reach, and then tried to figure out how to climb out from under the still racing wagon. He couldn’t get out at the front because the horses’ hooves were too close, and at the back he was stopped by the stove box, so he had no choice but to hang on to the reach of that careening wagon, still pulled by thundering, unstoppable horses, to hang on for dear life—and not metaphorically. His outriders raced beside, trying to keep the horses running straight and shouting encouragement to Sutherland to hold on, hold on. When they finally pulled the horses to a stop, far past the finish line, Sutherland emerged, bruised but alive. He gave a thumbs-up to the crowd and rode back to the barns on a quad. Anxious about his horses’ welfare and determined to check on them first, he declined a trip to the hospital.

Sutherland and Johnstone weren’t engaged in some exaggerated feats of showmanship that were artificial more than real. They demonstrated, in the heat of a race gone wrong, the powerful strength and quick thinking that separates gladiators from gumshoes. Accidents take only a split second to happen; they take dedicated intelligence and athleticism to manage. That both men emerged with only bruises and that no horses were hurt speaks volumes about chuckwagon racing as a sport that requires strategy and style as well as speed.

The “chucks” are fast, dangerous, and distinctive. Combining the skittish strength of thoroughbred horses with a driver’s rein-control requiring the finesse of a weaver, they demonstrate an intricate skill that is not always evident in the mud and the dust and the shouts and the thundering hooves of horses and wagons after the klaxon has sounded. To a novice observer, each heat looks chaotic, a jumble

of harness and canvas and hats and horses in the infield before the wagons careen around the barrels and then hit the track. To the discerning fan, outrider, or wagon racer, it is an incredible spectacle, and it is our own, born and bred in the West. Mark Sutherland himself has described it best, in a famous summary, almost understated for its precision. "Picture yourself in a ready-made coffin tied by tooth-floss to the tails of four charging dinosaurs. That's wagon racing."² Sutherland, clinging to the reach under his wagon in the dust of the horses' hooves, and with his own mortality singing in his ears, probably thought those lines would be inscribed on his tombstone. Or didn't bother to dwell on death. Instead, he used strength and skill to survive, relying as well on trained and sensitive horses.

Chuckwagon racing, or "wagon racing," as the aficionados call it, is the sport of kings adapted to the wiles of the Canadian prairie. Complex and challenging, it is history, technology, the open range, and contemporary horse breeding all rolled up together with sheer speed, nerve, and psychological taunting. While thoroughbred races are simply composed of a race between different horses, each horse ridden by one man, wagon races are as tangled and dramatic and earth-bound as their reins. This race is not just a simple test of speed. The chucks require stamina, skill, spirit, and teamwork. And the true athletes are the horses, the drivers merely their partners.

The goal of this equestrian sport is for a wagon to win (the fastest around the track) without penalty. But this end is remarkably difficult, a chuckwagon race being forty times as complicated as a regular horse race. At the Calgary Stampede, the über-competition of these races, four outfits compete in each of nine heats. The men, horses, and wagon of each chuckwagon constitute an "outfit." An outfit includes a team of four horses, two of them wheelers (the rear pair), two of them leaders (the front pair). Those four horses are hooked up to a 1,300-pound wagon, which is precisely weighed and measured and certified to a rigid standard. No more the plywood boxes of the past: these are state of the art vehicles, still square and wooden but precisely measured. Wagon boxes are 38 inches wide, 24 inches high, and 11 feet, 4 inches long. A wagon must weigh a minimum of 1,325 pounds with its driver and equipment. The driver, who sits on a hard bench with only a tight spring for bounce, manoeuvres four heavy leather reins to control the horses. Complicated enough? There's more.

At the Calgary Stampede, until 2011, every outfit was supported by four outriders. That year, citing safety reasons, the Stampede, falling in line with the World Professional Chuckwagon Association and the Canadian Professional Chuckwagon Association, reduced the number of outriders assisting each wagon to two. That

took eight men and eight horses out of the melee at the start and presumably reduced the potential for accidents, the continued bane of the sport and the source of ongoing opposition from animal welfare groups and objectors. In earlier races, one outrider held the two leaders steady until the starting horn sounded. Three outriders were positioned at the back of the wagon. Two tossed in a pair of tent poles and a canvas, and a fourth outrider pitched a (plastic) stove into the stove rack at the back of the wagon. With the rule changes, one outrider now holds the two leaders steady at the front, and only one outrider, positioned at the back, tosses in the stove; the tent poles and canvas have been eliminated. The outriders, having completed these necessary tasks, then leap onto the backs of their individual horses and follow the wagon, which must turn a tight figure eight around two barrels in the infield before coming onto the track proper and settling into a lane to gallop around the track.

Gazing down into the infield, a spectator would, up until 2011, see a confusion of colourful wagons with drivers, each pulled by four horses, and on the ground four times four outriders, each with his own horse. That made four wagons, twenty men, and thirty-two horses, milling between eight carefully staggered white barrels. Sixteen of the horses were harnessed to the wagons, trigger-happy to run. Four drivers controlled the wagons; sixteen men were busy with the work of split-second assistance. Teamwork was essential and timing crucial. Every human involved had to be able to multi-task while remaining aware of his own position as well as the position of every other animal and wagon in the infield. Outriders might hold their horses' reins between their teeth at the same time as they pitched a tarp or the stove. After 2011, the sheer quantity of man and horsepower—and the potential for collision or interference—was reduced, with only eight outriders instead of sixteen. But those outriders still have to accomplish very precise tasks before springing onto their own horses' backs and chasing the dust of a thundering wagon setting a blistering pace. In sum, there is nothing simple about this sport. It defies any reduction to a mere horse race. It is instead a distillation of skill, experience, nerve, risk, speed, and manoeuvrability.

Historically, chuckwagon racing was less sport than diversion. Chuckwagons were the movable kitchens that centred rangeland camp. During joint roundups or cattle drives, every ranch was expected to contribute to the enterprise a wagon with a cook, food, and bedding. When the largest general roundup was held in Alberta in the late spring of 1885, it included a hundred riders, fifteen chuckwagons, and five hundred horses.³ They gathered some sixty thousand cattle over several weeks from a huge territory. The men would start as early as 3:00 a.m., fuelled by a quick

breakfast at the chuckwagon. Then the hands would catch their horses and begin to move the herd in the agreed-upon direction. Wagons, horses, and riders would shift, before noon, to the place designated as the next campsite. Once there, the chuckwagons would set up and the cowboys would ride off to gather the scattered cattle, sweeping a huge circle about ten to fifteen miles from the camp inward. When the riders returned late in the day, all the cattle were merged in a large open area, and the chuckwagon served as the workers' home base. The combined effort was so complex that large roundups were quickly abandoned in favour of smaller ones, although the same structure of gathering animals applied. And three times a day, the camp cook (or camp boss) served up coffee, beans, bread, and bacon or beef from the wagon; cowboys had to be fuelled as much as the horses that they rode.

Charles Goodnight, a Texas cattleman, is credited with inventing the portable kitchen in 1866 by adapting a surplus Civil War army wagon to supply cooks and workers at roundup time. The so-called prairie schooners, which Art Belanger claims were the early forerunners of chuckwagons, "sailed through the waist-high buffalo grass from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth."⁴ These heavy, durable wagons had to carry all that migrating settlers required, and so became the moving vans of an earlier era. But as part of cattle drives, the chuckwagon followed the herd and provided a nomadic rest station, with water, food, coffee, and a bit of shade. A rough box on the back served as a pantry to carry food, mostly sourdough, coffee, and beans. A toolbox and a water-barrel, with a long canvas tarp drawn over top, completed the travelling kitchen. The wagon also carried harness, slickers, and bedrolls (to keep them dry), while a cowhide stretched underneath carried wood and buffalo chips for fuel. The cook drove the wagon horses, made three meals a day, and might even provide haircuts and shaves. At night, the cook's last job was to "point the pole of the wagon toward the North Star, providing a compass heading for the trail boss in the morning."⁵ Chuckwagons were used from the 1860s to the 1900s. And of course, despite providing elemental necessities, the wagons and their drivers contributed to the roistering stories of the increasingly mythopoeic West.

The idea of races between these wagons blossomed slowly. All moving vehicles archetypically suggest the possibility of a race or a competition, with the first arrival across a finish line earning the cachet of winning. Roman writer and statesman Pliny the Younger wrote in his Letters, in the first century CE, of the chariot races:

I am the more astonished that so many thousands of grown men should be possessed again and again with a childish passion to look at galloping horses, and men standing upright in their chariots. If, indeed, they were

attracted by the swiftness of the horses or the skill of the men, one could account for this enthusiasm. But in fact it is a bit of cloth they favour, a bit of cloth that captivates them. And if during the running the racers were to exchange colours, their partisans would change sides, and instantly forsake the very drivers and horses whom they were just before recognizing from afar, and clamorously saluting by name.⁶

In contemporary terms, the crowd in the bleachers at the Calgary Stampede might not forsake one favourite for another merely for their colours—or in current terminology, their canvasses—but there is enough enthusiasm for the gaily coloured wagons to make it seem as if two thousand years have not passed. The informal wagering (legal betting on the chuckwagon races is not permitted at the Stampede) in the stands and at the track level is largely based on visuals or vernacular knowledge, with predictable loyalties. And the wagons incite spectator loyalty, too: visitors can vote for their favourite driver, and the top rookie driver wins the Orville Standquist Award, while the Guy Weadick Memorial Award is presented annually to the chuckwagon or rodeo competitor who best typifies the Stampede's spirit of showmanship and sportsmanship. More germane, statistics on those watching the Rangeland Derby are huge. During the ten days of the Calgary Stampede approximately 200,000 people watch the chuckwagon races at the track, and hundreds of thousands more watch them on television every night.

But that is merely the human element. The true stars of the races are the horses, and more and more, horses are celebrated as the premier athletes of the event. In 2013, the Stampede launched the Equine Outfit of Excellence program, awards honouring the top six horses participating in the Rangeland Derby. The six awards recognize the positions of right leader, left leader, right wheeler, left wheeler, and two outstanding outriding horses. Points accumulate over the first eight nights of racing and are measured not only by standings but also through microchip technology implemented by the Fitness to Compete program. That program arose out of the intensity of demands that the sport be “controlled.” A microchip is implanted in every horse competing in the Rangeland Derby, allowing veterinarians to monitor performance and to evaluate their health and stress levels. Over time, the rules have become increasingly precise: horses are inspected by veterinarians on arrival at the track, drivers must submit detailed inventories of horses, pre- and post-race inspections occur every day, and all horses are prescribed mandatory rest days.⁷ They are treated, in human terms, like royalty.

So how did those ancient horse races arrive in the outpost of the West, Calgary, Alberta, and the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth? Early Stampede promoter Guy

Weadick was determined to provide the Calgary Stampede crowd with thrilling events. He was also determined to include racing. Wild horse races were fine, but Weadick could imagine even more compelling competitions. Belanger suggests that “Weadick was looking for a replacement for the Stagecoach Race,” a previous entertainment, or that he was inspired by a race he had seen at the Gleichen Stampede, when several farmers “ran their farm wagons with four horse hitches in an exciting match race.”⁸ They knew too the lore of the American land rush, when the United States opened up thousands of acres in land lotteries. Once a prospective homesteader had won the right to make a claim, he lined up and waited for a starting gun to fire before racing across country to stake a piece of land. And the tradition, at the end of a long roundup, of cooks racing one another to the nearest saloon for a drink was common as well. That informal cross-country race was rough and ready, accompanied by jangling pots, dust from bags of flour, and rattling tin cups, a source of much merriment. One story contends that in 1892 in Fallon, Montana, when the cooks from the Hog-Eye and the L-Cross ranches were in town to stock up on supplies, someone made a bet on the relative speed of his cook’s team of horses. Everybody was well lubricated, and the wagons were loaded with supplies, but they agreed to the six-mile race, and a blaze of gunfire signalled the start. The wagons ran across country, frying pans rattling, everybody shouting, and the Hog-Eye outfit won by one hundred yards. They got the case of whisky, but one of the cowboys recalled: “The aftermath of the race was felt and tasted by us for at least the next ten days. We had beans, sugar, coffee, and mica axle grease in our grub.”⁹ Other races were spurred by chuckwagons eager to reach ranch house or saloon, with the last one to arrive required to buy everyone else drinks.

In search of an exciting event to cap his hyperbolic rodeo, Guy Weadick figured that some kind of wagon race would be crazy and chaotic enough to guarantee audience interest. The chuckwagons could answer popular desire for a competition. Weadick put out a challenge to the surrounding ranches, and despite understandable reluctance on the parts of ranch owners, he managed to taunt, challenge, and cajole the ranchers of the area into participating. The entrants in that initial race were a variety, mostly “pool” wagons run collectively by several owners from a district: the Mosquito Creek Pool Wagon (representing ranches owned by Jim Cross, Dan Riley, Jack Drumheller, and Rod MacLeary); the Double Dishpan (Sid Bannerman and the Hodgkins Brothers); the VU outfit (from Permez Creek), which was driven by well-known competitor Clem Gardner; the Sheep Wagon (put up by Jack Butler and Ora Demille from Sheep Creek); the V Quarter Circle Ranch outfit (from the Langdon district); and “Sundown” Morton’s Gleichen outfit.¹⁰ Six

wagons (there were supposed to be two others, but they either threw in with the others or withdrew) constituted the original competitors in the first set of races. These races ran daily, and each outfit had to carry every item necessary to the chuckwagon's traditional job: a water barrel, a stove, a canvas cover, a fly, and a branding iron. Every wagon was pulled by four horses, and each driver was to be assisted by four outriders. Those early wagons weighed about a ton, two thousand pounds, meaning that the horses had to be large and strong. Since then, the contents of the wagon have been much modified, and now many more strictures attend the races themselves.

Running rules for that first race were decided on the ground just before the start. To make the task more difficult, each wagon would cut a figure eight around two barrels set to lead away from the track in front of the grandstand. The wagons would then cut across the infield and enter the racetrack in the middle of the backstretch, which meant that they ran a quarter mile, not the current half a mile. At the end, the wagons would turn back into the infield, stop beside their first barrel with the wagon-back to the grandstand, and set up camp, requiring that the crew unhook the team from the wagon, stretch the eight-foot fly, unload the stove, and build a fire in it. "First smoke decides winner," stated that initial contest. In races to come, lighting the stove incited interesting pyrotechnics, some drivers stuffing the stove with kerosene-soaked straw and tossing a match from a safe distance.

Six wagons meant that the first race was divided into two heats, which ran five nights of the week-long Stampede. The prize money was \$300 total, "\$15.00, \$10.00 and \$5.00 for the first, second and third running times for each evening of racing."¹¹ The winner overall was long-time Yukon stagecoach driver Bill Somners, in charge of the Mosquito Creek rig owned by Riley, Cross, Drumheller, and MacLeary. Somners's outriders, Dan Fraser, Gus Sonnie, Laurel Millar, and Bill Livingstone, were familiar names in the ranching circuit.¹² For winning the greatest number of races out of five, the Mosquito Creek outfit took home a \$25.00 John B. Stetson hat. But that was an understated outcome to the course set that Friday, 14 July 1923. The first ever professional chuckwagon races signalled the launch of a most unusual sport. Spectators loved it, and Weadick knew he had a crowd pleaser.

From those rather rude beginnings, the "chucks" have gotten faster, more exciting, and less forgiving. Changes were implemented quickly. In the interests of time, the requirements that the team be unhooked, the tent fly stretched, and the campfire started were dropped in 1925, but gestural elements of those actions remain, although the wagons are streamlined and the equipment is engineered for safety. For example, the stove, originally a heavy ranch stove, was replaced by a metal

replica, then a wooden one, and now a rubber imitation (and like the barrels, collapsible), the last remaining echo of the wagons as cooking sites. Until 2011, outriders tossed a tarp and tent poles into the back, but those details were erased with the reduction in the number of outriders. As the years rolled along, rules proliferated. The teams tried to improve speed by lightening their load, and smaller, lighter wagons and faster horses appeared immediately. The fastest track time in 1923 was two minutes and fifty seconds, but although the race was doubled in length in 1924 (to the whole track, or half a mile), the fastest time that year was one minute and fifty-two seconds. And to balance the inequity of distance, the barrels were repositioned in 1925, with the starting positions fanned out in front of the grandstand.¹³ The chuck box and water barrels came off the wagons in 1946. Whips were outlawed in 1947. In 1948, a growing awareness of safety introduced the rule that each wagon must run in its own lane and could “cut for the rail” only at certain places.¹⁴ The unruly game was becoming a sport.

That transformation was effected by a combination of fast, carefully selected horses and strong, skilful men—and yes, they are all men. Wagon racing is a male sport, requiring powerful upper-body strength, although wives and mothers, daughters and sisters do a huge amount of behind-the-scenes work, feeding, watering, and caring for horses. The drivers appear to love risk and to embrace speed and danger without much regard for peril or bodily damage. And this is a sport where age and experience are greater assets than youth; drivers can stay in the game until their sixties, and horses have been known to compete for more than fifteen years.

How does a driver start or train? It helps if he has chuckwagon ancestry, belonging to those families who have driven outfits for generation after generation. Sutherland, Bensmiller, Glass, Vigen, Dorchester, Cosgrave, Walgenbach, Nevada, Willard, Knight, and Lauder are names that ring with their own chuckwagon genealogy and glamour, and many of the competitors are related to one another. In 2013, among the drivers were “five father/son combinations, three sets of brothers, five sets of cousins, and two drivers with sons-in-law.”¹⁵ That familial kinship appears to be a requirement for competitors. Most important of all, a driver has to be a horse person, has to know horses, their habits and their harness, to be able to hold the reins and imagine a perfect combination of driving and running. As an intergenerational sport, drivers are mentored by fathers, grandfathers, and other drivers—Kelly Sutherland often cites Ralph Vigen—or they begin as outriders, a training ground that offers on-the-ground experience and a real test of toughness.¹⁶

The work of the outriders may be unclear to spectators, but they are indispensable to racing and its outcome, and an outrider can make the difference between

winning and losing. When tent pegs and flies were still thrown into the back of the wagon, the peg man closest to the barrel had to ensure that his horse didn't back into that barrel. Now that the tent pegs have been eliminated, the stove man has more room to do his job and to mount his horse. The outrider holding the lead horses at the start has to be agile enough to let go of the reins and to scramble out of the way when the klaxon sounds, simultaneously leaping onto his own horse, negotiating the figure eight around the barrels, and following the race to cross the finish line within a prescribed 150 feet of his wagon team. From afar, these movements look effortless, but the athleticism required is astonishing. To identify themselves with the appropriate wagon, the outriders wear matching colours, based on the barrel position. Now the colours are standardized and unmatched shirts result in a penalty (Barrel 1 is white, Barrel 2 is red, Barrel 3 is black, and Barrel 4 yellow), although in the past, outriders and drivers selected their own colours. As is more than evident from Mark Sutherland's Grande Prairie accident, outriders are essential to the safety and cohesion of the race, and they can make or break its outcome. And they are subject to exacting rules. An outrider must continue straight ahead at the sound of the horn, may not assist the driver after the race starts, must follow the proper figure eight pattern, must not miss a barrel or knock over a barrel, and cannot force an injured horse or finish ahead of the wagon team. Every one of these regulations target infractions that will be penalized. And outriders have to work in tandem with the driver, reading one another's body language like semaphore.

The wagons and drivers also face a particular set of measurements. Stringent controls test drug and alcohol abuse. And the equipment must meet certain criteria of weight and size. On the track, potential violations abound. Wagons that start ahead of the horn or line up ahead of the barrel are sanctioned with added seconds. Creating a false start, missing a barrel or knocking over a barrel (the most common penalty), interfering with another wagon or with other outriders, failing to cooperate with the starter, or moving out of an assigned lane are all subject to penalty. With wagons moving at speeds of more than sixty kilometres per hour, the need for such specifications is understandable. Largely due to its history of accidents and even fatalities for both man and horse, this has become a much-regulated race. In effect, spectator sports both abhor and scream for blood, and the chucks do not disappoint. Chuckwagons have overturned, drivers and outriders have been dragged or ejected, horses toppled or injured and consequently euthanized. In 1986, one chuckwagon cut off another, leading to a spectacular pile-up and claiming the lives of six horses. A crash during the 2007 Calgary Stampede that killed three horses and hospitalized a driver led officials to review the safety of the

sport and to implement changes. Between 1986 and 2015, approximately sixty-five horses have died in the chuckwagon races.¹⁷ Even onlookers have been injured and killed. Since 1960, four men have died, and many more have suffered injuries.

The animal rights movement is vocal and vociferous, arguing with increasing zealotry that the sport is vicious to horses. It is true that the races are dangerous. Almost every year, at least one chuckwagon horse dies.¹⁸ There is continued compromise: the Humane Society and the SPCA together inspect the horses, observe the races, and keep a watchful eye on the sport. The Stampede officially contends that it has always worked to protect animals and that part of the ethos of this celebration is the powerful relationship between humans and animals. Yet the races are called cruel and insensitive, and the controversy surrounding their enactment is fierce and ongoing (see any Internet site for endless discussion about the subject). In response, the drivers argue that thoroughbreds culled from the racetrack face certain euthanasia and that becoming chuckwagon horses gives them a second lease on life. Glen Mikkelsen reports Jim Nevada's riposte to accusations of reckless endangerment: "We don't pay four or five thousand dollars for a horse and try to kill it. You don't win money if you don't take care of your horses. We're drug tested, both us and the horses. Those horses would be in a dog-food can or on a plate in France, if it wasn't for wagon racing."¹⁹ That, too, is a truism. Good wagon racing horses are treasured, even pampered.

Horses are the body of the sport, and it is horses that give the races their excitement. They need, for this particular challenge, to have a certain character and drive. These animals are hooked together in a four-horse hitch in tandem. The leaders, lighter and faster, are in front. The right-hand leader is key to the team: that horse has to be able to carry a line, has to be quick turning, with a will to run and a ready intelligence. On the outside of the first turn, that lead horse must be able to run faster to make the U around the top barrel, must be prepared to turn sharply on the bottom barrel. Only one in twenty horses make good right-hand leaders. The pole team, or wheel team, closest to the wagon are the muscle, pulling the load behind them. Wheelers are chosen for their size and stamina, while leaders are chosen for speed and intelligence. This combination is difficult to configure and even more difficult to measure. It requires careful attention to each horse's skill, training, and ability, a genuine equine partnership. And preparing to race takes practice and patience, the drivers hooking their horses in different combinations in the spring when they begin to train, observing carefully their animals' talents and responses.

Most of the horses now are thoroughbreds, pure blood, although some cold bloods are still used. Some are culled racehorses, saved from the glue factory to

enjoy a distinctive and prolonged life, others purchased at the source. And they are coddled and cared for, through winter and summer, a chuckwagon family's most valued assets. Some horses stay with individual families for ten to twelve years. Their job is to train in the spring, to run something like a minute every few days in the summer (between the Stampede, the World Professional Chuckwagon Association circuit, and the Canadian Professional Chuckwagon Association circuit, horses do about twenty-five to thirty races each year), and to relax in the fall and winter. And it is obvious that the horses love to run: the race is as exciting for them as it is for humans. Outriders' mounts must be fast as well, good saddle horses with speed and dexterity. Every outfit will carry forty to sixty horses, training them, evaluating them, and choosing to run different animals depending on track, temperature, and temper. Drivers will juggle and gnaw over these combinations, trying to achieve the perfect mix. Equipment too is key, and must be cared for and maintained. A chuckwagon outfit moves between different rodeos as a major entourage, requiring a wagon, feed, tack, and horses. The gypsy energy of travelling from event to event, hauling horses in semi-trailers and living in motorhomes beside barns and corrals, requires a flexible temperament on the parts of humans and animals alike. Most important, the whole undertaking of running a chuckwagon is a team effort. One rogue horse, one careless rider, one slip of the driver's reins, and all is subject to failure—or worse, disaster.

Despite its difficulty and mysterious chaos, its ineffable cachet, chuckwagon racing is not a well-sponsored sport and is definitely not internationally known. Relatively free of commercial inflection, except for the sponsorship of those companies that buy advertising rights to a wagon tarp, the culture has developed without the extreme monetary pressure and rewards that accrue to other professional athletes. This distinctive activity is flavoured by domesticity, related partly to the powerful family connections that seem essential and partly to the race's origins of being a kitchen on the move. Research on rodeos and on the iconic image of the cowboy (lone, stoic, and individual) tends to sidestep the carnival of wagon racing, as if it does not fit into the historic triangle of man, horse, and cow. Instead, this is a team effort, a community investment, a family undertaking. As Glen Mikkelsen points out, "The chuckwagon cowboy personifies the co-operative spirit of Western Canada." Such cowboys, he argues, "remain independent spirits in a communal enterprise. And their sport, which embodies team sportsmanship, community, and collaboration, is an apt mirror of the Canadian West and a symbol of the character of western Canadians."²⁰ The young child standing between his dad's knees and holding the lines of a chuckwagon team in the Calgary Stampede parade might be

a more iconic reference for this sport than the buckles and trophies of the competitive rodeo cowboy. More than anything else, chuckwagon racing requires a steady and observant horse-person and the patience of practice, practice, and practice.

Still, commercial interest, while it is nowhere near the money tossed at hockey or football, has begun to accelerate. A chuckwagon first carried advertising in 1941, when the Buckhorn Guest Ranch paid Marvin Flett to promote the ranch on his wagon. In 1956, Lloyd Nelson was the last driver to win while driving a wagon under his own name.²¹ But the expense of racing crept upwards, and in 1979, the first annual canvas auction was held. Organized and formalized by the Stampede, it has accelerated into a gala event. In 2012, the Stampede's centennial year, a total amount of \$4,015,000 was bid on the thirty-six drivers and their canvasses. The highest bid went to "the King," Kelly Sutherland, whose canvas sold for \$300,000. Those who purchase chuckwagon tarps share a unique experience, which goes far beyond the canvas as marketing tool. The social and philanthropic aspect of advertising and the wagon drivers' public appearances and general participation in Stampede celebrations together weave a strange tapestry of rivalry and cooperation. In 2002, Professional Wagon Racing Inc. introduced chuckwagon races at the Las Vegas Stampede, hoping to establish an annual event. The venue and the arena seemed right, but the event has not been repeated. Even Vegas, it seems, does not know how to accommodate the strange extravaganza of wagon racing.

The characters surrounding the Rangeland Derby both embody and amplify a compelling eccentricity, the layers of a powerful mythology that has accrued for almost a century, yet for all its hyperbole, is a virtual mystery beyond the western Canadian world. In the early years, the most colourful or foolhardy driver was easily "Sundown" or "Wildhorse" Jack Morton. He was famous for throwing his reins on the ground and grabbing his horses' tails to make them run faster. To light the cook stove, he carried gas on his wagon, but it exploded and made his horses even crazier. Morton broke his leg, rammed the barrels, and lost a wheel, but he retired only when he was close to sixty, in 1938.²² Various stories credit him with starting the downtown pancake breakfasts served from the back of the wagons. Joe Carbury, the voice of the Rangeland Derby from the 1960s until he retired in 2008, announced the races for more than forty years, and his trademark cry, "They're Offffff," became a benchmark for the event. Dick Cosgrove, who won first in 1926, would win the Derby nine times before retiring twenty years later. His record has been beaten only by "the King," Kelly Sutherland, who has won an incredible twelve times. These champions are not young men, but wily veterans who have learned from experience. They carry the talismans and markers of gladiators: Kelly's long

black feather, the checkered wagon of the Glass family, Dallas Dorchester wearing his father's old felt hat. They are the heroes of inside stories, and yet they are eternal in terms of their own playful dodges with mortality.

Ultimately, chuckwagon racing is about staring at mortality, the possibility of death always hovering, the thunder of hooves an apocalypse. Jim Nevada recounts, "I was fifteen years old, it was my second show outriding, and I was nervous. Veteran driver Orville Strandquist said to me: 'Jim, when your card's laid, it's played. It could be on the racetrack or in a car on your way to Calgary, but as long as you're doing something you like, that's what you do. You don't know when you're going to die, and don't push it, but when your card's played, you're dead.' After that I was never nervous."²³ Such fatalism might belong to the world of unpredictability, but it also speaks to an acknowledgement of danger as a companion to the adrenaline of risk. That calm acceptance might have been what enabled young Mark Sutherland to hold on to the reach of his runaway wagon all the way around the track.

What, then, to conclude about this unique extravaganza, played out as part of the Calgary Stampede and many different rodeos in the West, an event powerfully rooted to place (not just Calgary, but the greater West) and an iconic ethos (ranching and riding). Is chuckwagon racing truly an equestrian sport, or is it some barbaric throwback tournament grandstanding human dominance over animals? Archaic in its origins, shyly naive in its development, accidental and local rather than part of the international jockeying that accompanies soccer or basketball, wagon racing is unique in every aspect of its risk and its achievement. It is a living anachronism, and yet indisputably performative, exciting, and at its best, beautiful. Most of all, every event articulates a hope that out of the complicated danger of these competitions will come a persuasive story of man and horse, both athletes and both competitors. This legend might indeed hark back to the ancient chariot races, but it also echoes a yearning to witness and experience the long-lived haunting of a western tradition.

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in "Driver Survives 'Slide' of His Life," *Calgary Herald*, 3 June 2006 (ellipses in the original).
- 2 Quoted in Glen Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa: The Cowboys of Chuckwagon Racing* (Toronto: Balmur Book Publishing, 2000), 2.
- 3 Warren Elofson, *Cowboys, Gentlemen, and Cattle Thieves: Ranching on the Western Frontier* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 51.
- 4 Art Belanger, *Half Mile of Hell* (Aldergrove, BC: Frontier, 1970), 3.

- 5 Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa*, 3.
- 6 Quoted in H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 220–21.
- 7 See “Fitness to Compete,” Calgary Stampede, 2012–14, <http://corporate.calgarystampede.com/animal-care/fitness-to-compete.html>.
- 8 Belanger, *Half Mile of Hell*, 6.
- 9 Quoted in Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa*, 4.
- 10 Belanger, *Half Mile of Hell*, 8.
- 11 Ibid., 11.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., 14.
- 14 Ibid., 43.
- 15 *Evening Show Program*, Calgary Stampede 2013, 26.
- 16 Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa*, 26.
- 17 Micah Luxen, “Calgary Stampede: Why Horses Die on the ‘Half-Mile of Hell,’” *BBC News* (Canada), 14 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33511970>. See also “New Techniques Used to Ensure Horse Safety at Calgary Stampede,” *Globe and Mail*, 1 July 2012.
- 18 For 1986 to 2012, see “Vancouver Humane Society—List of Stampede Animal Deaths Since 1986,” *CTV News* (Calgary), 11 July 2013. Since then, six more have died: one in 2013, another in 2014, and four in 2015.
- 19 Quoted in Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa*, 82.
- 20 Ibid., 19.
- 21 Glen Mikkelsen, “Greasing the Wheels,” in *Grandstand Souvenir Program* (Calgary: Calgary Stampede, 2004), 19.
- 22 Joan Dixon and Tracey Read, *Celebrating the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede: The Story of the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth* (Canmore, AB: Altitude, 2005), 101.
- 23 Quoted in Mikkelsen, *Never Holler Whoa*, 147.

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