COMMUNITAS AND COHESION ON A MEN'S RECREATIONAL SLOW PITCH SOFTBALL TEAM IN ST. JOHN'S NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

ROBERT JOHN CLARENCE DYKSTRA

Communitas and Cohesion on a Men's Recreational Slow Pitch Softball Team in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

by

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Abstract

Teamwork and cohesiveness are understood to be important elements for sports teams. This research explores the construction of unity on a men's voluntary, non-professional, recreational slow pitch softball team in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador by linking Victor Turner's concept of *communitas* with the notion of *cohesion* in sports psychology. The social and symbolic aspects of egalitarianism are considered throughout. The team is discussed as a form of friendship, while also recognizing that team structure may influence the development of relationships between players. The ways that participants balance discourses of fun and competition are described as key elements relating to the sport and to team identity. Drinking alcohol and uses of humour are also discussed in relation to the expression of meaning within the game and in terms of social interaction among the players.

Preface

My interest in research about slow pitch softball is directly related to my own experience and background growing up in rural and urban areas of southwestern Ontario, Canada. I have had a lifelong relationship with baseball and softball as both a fan and as a player - playing regularly in formal, organized leagues as well as in informal, improvised games with friends and family throughout my life. Over the years, it has become as integral to my self-identity as my British, Frisian, and Canadian ancestry.

As I pursued my goal of attaining an undergraduate degree in anthropology, I began to look at aspects of my own life as possible interests of research. More and more, as 'playing ball' was such a large part of my life and that of many other men and women with whom I have played, I began to look at the game of softball and attempted to apply anthropological theory to something in which I was regularly and enthusiastically engaged on an almost daily basis. Similar to the unresolved questions that Barbara Myerhoff (1978) asked of herself at the beginning of her study of elderly Jews in California, I am not entirely certain where anthropology and personal quest begins or ends in my own interest in softball. It is probably more the case that the two are intimately intertwined in this study. Not only am I able to draw upon my own experience playing softball but, by studying the role of softball in the lives of the men in St. John's, I am also exploring the place of softball in my own life.

The relation between 'self' and 'other' in fieldwork is constantly being re-evaluated in anthropology and the boundaries are often vague and indefinable. As anthropologist Robert Sands (2002: 25) points in *Sport Ethnography*, for those who both play and study sport, research may involve "being *self* among *self*" [original emphasis]: "In other words, participant observation may involve doing fieldwork with a group of athletes in a sport in which the ethnographer participated. Those interested in sport studies may already have an intimate knowledge of the sport and athletes through exposure in lived experience, if not from active participation."

This holds true for my study. Although I had played softball thousands of kilometres from St. John's, I arrived with nine years of playing experience and knowledge, well aware of many of the rules and strategies involved, and could easily consider myself a 'relative insider' with all of the benefits and problems that accompany this position. The distinction between self and other, participant and observer, anthropologist and softball player is blurred throughout my research, as I began to re-examine my own past experiences in relation to the ideas that emerged in my study. I have left out most of my own softball history in the writing, in the interests of both space constraints and continuity, yet I appreciate that this experience has helped me to recognize aspects of the game in my own life that had gone unnoticed, and to appreciate anew much that I had taken for granted. Nonetheless, my previous softball experience has helped to shape this research, and my future playing experiences will no doubt be shaped *by* it.

I have chosen to use the term *slow pitch* throughout my research to reflect a generic form of softball that bears important similarities throughout its history. Browsing through the literature, readers will quickly discover an array of terms used to describe this sport, including: slowpitch, slow-pitch, slo-pitch, and even lob-ball. By far, it is slo-pitch

that is most commonly used today, but I argue that this refers to a specific form of the sport that has emerged in the contemporary period and can not adequately be applied to other forms that have coexisted with it, such as lob-ball or sixteen-inch (the latter played in Chicago), nor can it be usefully applied to earlier incarnations of the sport. My choice of terms is designed to suggest a similarity among all the historical forms of the sport by referring mainly to its pitching style. Thus, while slo-pitch refers to the most common form of the sport in North America today, I suggest that the term slow pitch encompasses *all* forms of the sport, in its many variations over time, while noting that future studies would benefit from examining distinctions between them.

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This study belongs in part to each of you!

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List of Main Participants in Research: Primary Players on Molson's*

Joe: A 38 year old engineer. He is divorced, but now in a long-term committed relationship with woman that he refers to as his 'wife' though they are not married. They have two young daughters, ages one and three years.

Frank: A 39 year old real estate agent who is most involved in organizing the slow pitch team. He had worked as a clerk for the provincial government until being laid off five years ago. He is married, with a five-year-old daughter.

Adam: He is 38 years old and has a university degree in engineering. He is the Atlantic Region vice-president for a national telecommunications company. He and his wife have twin five year-old daughters.

Chuck: A 40 year old engineering technologist with a public utility company. He worked in the construction trade in Labrador and at the dockyards in St. John's before returning to college and changing careers. His wife has a Master's degree in education and they have three children, ages four, seven and nine years.

Eli: He is 35 years old and works as a recreational therapist in a senior's home. He has some university education, but finished his career training at a local college. He is married, and his wife works in the same field. They have a young son who is about a year old.

John: He is 39 years old and has an animal care technician diploma from a local college. He is self-employed and works out of an office and workspace in the basement of his home, where he grooms and cuts the hair of dogs for his clients. He has been with the same woman for many years and refers to her as his 'wife' though they are not married; they do not have any children and are not planning to have any. Their house overlooks the softball diamond at Victoria Park, which is the very reason they bought it.

Scott: A 36 year old warehouse clerk with the provincial government. He used to work with Frank until the latter was laid off and changed careers. He is married but does not plan to have any children.

Mike: He is 34 years old and runs/owns the family automotive business. He is unmarried and has no current plans to wed. He was in a casual relationship with a 'girlfriend' during the research period, but their relationship ended shortly thereafter.

Todd: A 38 year old labourer who worked as both a construction worker and a 'bouncer', providing security for various concerts and public events across the city, throughout the summer. He is married and has an eight-year-old son.

Ed: A 38-year-old engineer who works at the same company as Adam. He is married and has two sons, ages eight and eleven.

Will: A 41 year old radiologist. He is married and his wife is also a doctor. They have three young children, the eldest of whom is six years old. For various reasons, Will only occasionally makes it to the slow pitch games.

Roger: A 28-year-old electrical technician who is single and works at the same company as Ed and Adam. He was laid off when the company experienced financial difficulties part way through the summer, and stopped coming to the games not long afterwards.

* A thirteenth man, Max, began the year with the team, but quit coming to the games after the third week so he is not included in this list. All names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

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Chapter 1
Theoretical Review, Research Setting and Methodology

1.1 Theoretical Review

1.1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I examine communitas and cohesion on a voluntary, non-professional sports team in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. The study is based on research conducted with an all-male recreational slow pitch softball team from June to October 2002. I am particularly interested in the degree to which the characteristics of communitas may be applicable to the construction of unity. Exploring the symbols that are invoked to create and foster team unity, the interaction between the players on the team, and the role that participation plays in the everyday lives of the men are all essential to understanding this process. As participation on the team is voluntary, specifically selected by individuals, and is also imbued with feelings of responsibility, emotion, and dedication, the ways that these men experience slow pitch softball as leisure, or as embodying deeper levels of commitment, is a significant aspect of this analysis.

Contemporary sport expresses many ideas prevalent in industrial societies - competition, proficiency, aggression, strength, individual fame, and prosperity - but also reflects the desire for change through the pursuit of upward class mobility, the surmounting of biological and cultural barriers by women and the disabled, and the search for ethnic and racial equality (Krawczyk 1996: 423-33). Sport moves participants and spectators in a personal and emotional manner as they invest time, energy and money into playing or watching; it is an industry that generates huge revenues and employs large

numbers of people worldwide, directly and indirectly; it is used politically to enhance national prestige and to direct the health and education of citizens; and, it impacts the environment through its use of land and scarce resources (Maguire 1999). Sport is an institution in which the structure and values emerge and change historically, often involving power struggles between groups (Messner 1992: 8). It is influenced by and reflects the wider social and cultural context in which it is situated; it influences and effects change in this same context; and, it generates internal values essential to the production of meaning for participants and for understanding the significance of participation (Sands 1999a). As a result, sport is now recognized as an important social and cultural phenomenon meriting serious study within the social sciences (Blanchard 1995: 21) as relationships, interactions and symbols developed in sport have wider implications beyond its enjoyment as a leisure activity, and can include such issues as economics, colonialism, nationalism, and globalization.

In the past, sport has been studied as a 'subculture' in social science research (see, Donnelly 1981, 1985; Donnelly & Young 1988; Murray 1991), though use of this term is not unproblematic (see Crosset & Beal 1997). However, Noel Dyck (2000a: 31) warns that the 'compartmentalization' of sport has allowed it to be interpreted as separate from other social, cultural, political or economic issues, thereby limiting its investigation:

> Once safely enclosed in the impermeable conceptual containers offered by such notions as 'false consciousness' or 'sub-cultures', sporting phenomena and relationships can be safely ignored or, alternately, put to selective use as suits the taste and purpose of the analyst. Accordingly, football, baseball, cricket or any other game can be categorically styled as an 'opiate of the masses', a means of 'killing time' in a 'world without meaning', or as a potential launching site for 'rituals of rebellion' directed toward larger and less tractable structures of control.

Instead, sustained ethnographic inquiry by anthropologists into the "activities, relationships and meanings of sport" can speak not only to interests shared by other sport researchers, but also to issues deemed to be of fundamental interest within the discipline of anthropology such as those related to the body and embodied action, work and leisure, emotion and 'play', and identity and boundary maintenance, to name but a few (Dyck 2000a: 31).

In anthropology the concept of 'culture' no longer represents a reified, unified whole bounded by geography and primordial identity able to be used as a description in and of itself. To a certain extent, it is now understood that the notion of culture depends on where the conceptual boundaries are drawn, by both members and researchers, and not simply as an object that is clearly distinguishable from others. So, anthropologist Robert Sands (2002: 53-56) writes that we can speak of a *culture of athletes* who exhibit shared boundaries, common behaviour, and a collective identity made up of traits, values, artifacts, traditions, knowledge and patterns of behaviour that bind them together. It is also conceivable to speak of the culture of a specific sport, or even of a sports team[1], in which behaviours, rituals and practices reinforce and reflect a distinctive group identity, as well as the multitude of cultural spaces that occur in the lives of many people in industrial societies (Sands 1995; 2002: 53, 57).

My overall focus is similar to Fine's (1985: 40) discussion of Little League baseball in that I do not attempt to trace the impact of slow pitch softball on the larger

[1] Sociologist Gary Fine (1985a: 126) uses the term 'idioculture' to discuss the cultural characteristics of small groups such as sports teams. It consists of a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviour, and customs shared by members of a small interacting group, to which members can refer, serving as a basis for further interaction, and holding symbolic meaning and significance for group members (Fine 1985a: 125-126).

society, nor the impact of that society on softball, but instead treat the sport as a "world in itself" and address the symbolic and social aspects of participation as it relates to the production of ideas about team unity. I explore the link between the social space of slow pitch softball and the expression of collective understandings for these players: the performances played out within the game; the practice and discourse which frames the game and through which 'the team' is expressed; the material and symbolic investment involved in participation; and the not unproblematic role associated with playing softball in particular, and participating in leisure activities in general.

1.1.2 The Anthropology of Sport

Noel Dyck (2000a: 1) argues that the anthropological perspective can be employed in sport "to examine the intricately interconnected activities, relationships, and purposes that inform the organization, performance, discursive construction and consumption of games and sports in a range of contemporary cultural settings". Anthropologists have done this very thing through cross-cultural studies of 'fun', games and sports of all kinds, addressing such issues as: the construction and contestation of multiple social identities within a seemingly homogeneous cultural group (Werbner 1996); notions of agency, local identity, and the shaping of everyday social reality (Jonsson 2001); class, gender and national identity (Carter 2000); cultural colonialism, hegemony, and resistance (Klein 1991); borders, nationalism, and transnationalism (Klein 1997); and, the ways in which sport reflects unique cultural values and ideals which can be quite distinct from its original form though the rules and structure are much the same (Kelly 1998, 2000; Whiting 1977, 1989).

Such research contributes to our understandings of "the ways in which sports influence, define, and assist in the creation and contest of identities, and do so at a series of levels and along a range of cultural domains" (MacClancy 1996: 17), including the "microtechniques" of bodily practice and the discourses involved (Brownell 1995). Clearly, sport is now recognized an important cultural domain and research has identified the myriad ways in which sports and games become implicated in the construction of everyday social identities including class, gender, ethnicity, age and nationalism - constructing, reinforcing, and resisting such identifications.

In addition to its importance for anthropological theory, Geertz's (1973) "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" emphasizes the significant relationship between sports and games and the symbolic expression of ideas valued within a society. Sport and games provide a rich world for symbolic interpretation because ritual and symbolic elements are important for understanding both the enjoyment and continuing participation of those involved, as well as contributing to wider theoretical understanding (Blanchard 1995: 51-56; Duthie 1980; Fine 1986b; Moore & Myerhoff 1977; Sands 1999b: 194-200).

For example, George Gmelch (1972) demonstrates the symbolic dynamics involved in the actions of professional baseball players who attempt to positively influence their performances using "baseball magic." He does this by discussing the ways that players use various rituals, taboos, and fetishes to reduce anxiety and uncertainty, to control elements of chance in the game, and to improve their own possibility of success. In a similar study, Mari Womack (1992) examines individual and team rituals in professional baseball, suggesting that they act as a form of social control contributing to increased interaction and cooperation within the group. She concludes, in

part, that: (1) Ritual helps establish a rank order among team members and promotes intragroup communication; (2) Ritual helps in dealing with ambiguity in interpersonal relationships, with other team members, and with people on the periphery of the team; (3) Ritual contributes to self-expression and can be used to reinforce a sense of individual worth under pressure for group conformity, without endangering the unity of the group; and, (4) Ritual directs individual motivations towards achieving group goals (Womack 1992: 201).

All of these can be linked to the development of team cohesion but I argue that they can also be a source of segmentation. The establishment of a team rank, or hierarchy, can create difficulty in intragroup communication, and the expression of self may conflict with the group identity. Ritual and its symbolic elements, while remaining a possible tool for the establishment of unity, may also have the opposite effect resulting in the segmentation, and possibly the dissolution of an existing team.

The creation of meaning in sport, and the way that these meanings can influence play, emerge through social interaction and are continually modified and altered through a constant, and ongoing, interpretive process (Fine 1986b: 159). As such, "team values, norms, rituals, chatter, signals, plays, statistics and reactions to performance are a particularly appropriate arena" for symbolic analysis, particularly in terms of the social interaction of the players themselves (Melnick 1986: 192). Melnick (1986: 194) raises some very important questions concerning the relationship between symbols, social relations and cohesion in sport that are pertinent here:

> How do sport rituals, sport rhetoric and team cultures, for example, affect losing, cohesiveness, leadership, intramember conflict, clique formation and scapegoating? Are there certain group-generated meanings that have a direct bearing on a team's

performance? For example, is a collective sense of team momentum a perquisite or a corequisite for a winning streak?

These questions relate directly to my research as sports teams utilize rituals, rhetoric, and 'team cultures' to influence both performance and other social experiences. Collective understandings of both the game and of 'the team' are linked in the experience of slow pitch, and in the construction of meaning by and for participants, in the pursuit of cohesion that is often expressed in terms of 'camaraderie' or 'team chemistry'.

1.1.3 Communitas and Sport

It seems inevitable when talking of ritual production to turn to Victor Turner's notion of 'communitas' because of the emphasis he gives to the way ritual generates moral, social and spiritual unity, particularly in a religious context. Victor Turner wrote extensively on 'liminality', 'liminoid' phenomena, 'communitas', and 'anti-structure' in many of his works (see Turner 1969, 1982, 1985; Turner & Turner 1978). Drawn from van Gennep's analysis of 'rites of passage' consisting of three phases - separation, transition (or *limen*, signifying a threshold) and reintegration - Turner extended the notion of liminality from the middle transitional stage to other areas outside of ritual (Turner 1969: 94). Representing a period of being "betwixt and between" states, the liminal phase is characterized by 'ludic' creativity wherein familiar elements are defamiliarized and recombined to create new possibilities.

Turner applied the attributes both of the liminal phase and of those within it, including ambiguity, general equality and release from social conventions, to characteristics of more secular activities that he termed liminoid (Turner 1982: 27-29; Turner 1969: 95). Liminoid phenomena resemble the liminal, retaining many of the

same characteristics, but are separated from the context of rites of passage, are largely secular, and are as much individualized as collectively experienced (Turner 1982: 32, 52). Turner (1977: 38-39) also distinguishes between the sequestered liminality of initiation rites, in which initiands are humbled and levelled in preparation for transition to another status, and public liminality, such as seasonal feasts involving the entire community, which is more a temporary abrogation of status than a transition between them.

The primary example of a liminoid phenomenon in Turner's work is Christian pilgrimage (Turner & Turner 1978). It involves many of the same characteristics as liminality but is not obligated by normative social structural rhythms, nor is it necessarily a transitional phase between changes in status. Pilgrimage, as a voluntary enterprise undertaken by individuals for a variety of reasons, is a matter of choice rather than obligation and thus exemplifies the liminoid (Turner 1982: 55).

Turner's concept of 'communitas', as a primary aspect of the liminal phase of 'rites of passage', could be a way to approach the kind of unity taking place in the secular sphere of a competitive sports team. In Turner's analysis 'communitas' becomes more than a property of a ritual phase and becomes instead an end to be pursued in and of itself often through participation in liminoid phenomena. Communitas is "[a] relational quality of full mediated communication, even communion, between definite and determinate identities, which arises spontaneously in all kinds of groups, situations, and circumstances" (Turner & Turner 1978: 250). This is closely related to the ideas surrounding cohesion outlined here in that it represents a strong feeling of unity within the group and a fleeting recognition of a generalized social bond based on undifferentiated and egalitarian relationships (Turner 1969: 96).

Turner (1969: 132) describes three forms of communitas: spontaneous or existential communitas - an immediate "happening" of affect and emotion; normative communitas - an attempt by a group to preserve and maintain the spontaneous form in a continuing social system; and ideological communitas- a utopian model of ideal society based on attributes of the spontaneous form that may become an impetus for challenging the existing social system. It is significant to distinguish between the three forms of communitas because they do not represent the same form of experience. Spontaneous communitas represents the *feeling* of unity in the moment, while the other two forms attempt to replicate and maintain this fleeting experience within groups by establishing a framework and environment conducive to its experience and/or continuation. Normative communitas is most closely related to the notion of team cohesion and refers to the sharing of these individual experiences and the generation of group meaning to re-create or incorporate them. In comparison, ideological communitas refers to broader social movements that reflect these same values. Cohesion can be viewed as interplay between the affective experience of individual, spontaneous communitas and the construction of symbols and structure to replicate it within a group activity. In this respect, an important dynamic of communitas is that it is fleeting, never quite being realized as a permanent state, as both the individual and the collective attempt to impose their cognitive schema on one another resulting in a striving towards, and a resistance against, communitas (Turner 1985: 190).

Communitas exists in a direct relation with - in contrast, not in active opposition to - 'social structure'. This 'social structure' consists of the roles, statuses, and relationships that are enacted and recognized within a given society and closely bound up

with particular legal, economic and political norms and sanctions (Turner & Turner 1978: 252). As 'anti-structure' communitas dissolves, inverts, and reinterprets everyday relations, able to create them anew, thereby providing the possibility to effect change in the normative 'social structure':

> It is as though there are here two major "models" for human interrelatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of "more" or "less". The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (Turner 1969: 96).

Turner characterizes social life as a dialectical process between these two "models" of human relations that involves successive experience of "communitas and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality" (Turner 1969: 97). The movement of experience back and forth between 'social structure' and 'anti-structure' is an essential element and a continual cycle (Turner & Turner 1978: 252). This relationship is important to this study as the extent to which team-related identity needs to do away with, reflects, or influences everyday social identities is an underlying component.

In this analysis, participation on a non-professional competitive slow pitch team can also represent a liminoid phenomenon. It is voluntary rather than obligatory and is continuously generated as "leisure," seemingly separate from everyday activity, rather than being cyclical in nature. As a result, the symbols generated in sport are often more idiosyncratic and may compete with one another for prominence much more so than in ritual activity (Turner 1982: 54). This symbolic component is significant to my research

as communitas and liminoid phenomena, such as pilgrimage and sport, are rich sources for the generation of symbols, myths, ritual and other forms of aesthetic representation (Turner 1969: 128). The study of these phenomena benefits from their study in praxis; as "symbols in social action" and enacted by real people in concrete social relations (Turner 1982: 55). Echoing Turner & Turner (1978: 27) in their study of pilgrimage, one of my aims is to examine the dynamic symbolic and social processes associated with cohesion and communitas on a competitive non-professional slow pitch team, and to examine their influence on the players, both as individuals and as a group. Additionally, while Victor Turner discusses communitas most often in a religious and ritual context, I am applying the concept to particular events in a secular sport framework.

The unifying capability of communitas has not gone unchallenged in the literature. A critique must not only be taken into account but also incorporated as a tool to examine the effectiveness of a link between communitas and cohesion in my research. Turner's model, and his claim that communitas is the primary goal of his most recognized example, pilgrimage, has been challenged both for representing an oversimplification of a complex relationship between communitas and structure, as well as for ignoring conflict and reducing pilgrimage entirely to the satisfaction of emotional needs (Bilu 1988: 304-5; Sallnow 1981).

Michael Sallnow (1981, 1991) writes that pilgrimage is inseparable from the social historical context from which it is produced and in which it occurs. In his work, Andean pilgrimage is linked both with the construction of indigenous meaning as well as colonial occupation, is interconnected with the construction of both common identity and differences, and involves conflict and factionalism as much as the idea of equality and

fraternity. As such, he argues, the notion of "anti-structure" fails to adequately explain the process whereby the normative social structure may be abrogated, leading not to communitas but instead to the development of 'new' social relationships that may stimulate factionalism, conflict and hierarchy (Sallnow 1981: 180).

On a more personal level, Bilu (1988: 323) suggests that the institutional ideal of communitas that is a part of the culturally endorsed version of pilgrimage may encompass a wide range of "inner experiences," which may be more covert but just as integral to the experience of pilgrimage, including feelings of rivalry, envy and self-aggrandizement as participants attempt to reconcile conflicting feelings of equality and competition. While coordination is most often achieved, there is a great range of individual freedom and a variety of practices that shape the process. Communitas may signify the ideal and the main inspiration for pilgrimage, but the reality is that the celebration of unity co-exists with inequality, conflict and tension between and among participants (Eade 1991).

Further, while there may remain a collective ethos, a communal ideal emphasized through discourse and social practices in pilgrimage, it exists within a "complex mosaic of egalitarianism, nepotism, and factionalism, of brotherhood, competition and conflict" (Sallnow 1981: 176). As Sallnow (1981: 177) points out, egalitarianism is not the same as communitas and can be based as much on competition between evenly matched opponents or reciprocal exchange as the undifferentiated equality of communitas. The competition and conflict involved in such liminoid phenomena makes the development and expression of cohesion and unity more complex than it seems in Turner's model.

Eade and Sallnow (1991: 5) articulate their argument that communitas, as the primary goal of pilgrimage, is highly problematic due to the ways that the anti-structural

relations that are established may reinforce social boundaries, or create other forms of distinction, rather than dissolving them. Rather than viewed simply in a dichotomy of communitas and structure, pilgrimage is not only a "field of social relations" but also a "realm of competing discourses" (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 5). Communitas may be impossible to achieve as the social-structural backgrounds of its participants, and those who shape its experience, impact the construction of meanings from which people draw (Eade & Sallnow 1991: 15). Cohesion may constitute not a unification of discourses but a capacity to entertain and respond to a plurality (Eade and Sallnow 1991: 15).

The research of Eade, Sallnow and Bilu correct the notion that pilgrimage is characterized primarily by undifferentiated unity and draw attention to the conflict and factionalism that is just as much a part of the experience for many. Communitas may represent a symbol, discourse or ideal rather than a concrete reality (Bilu 1988: 303; Eade and Sallnow 1991: 5). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize both the ideology of equality and communitas on the one hand, and the latent, or even apparent, conflict and hostility that pilgrimage engenders. It is also significant that, in addition to the inter- and intra-group conflict that can result, the social ethos and spirit of communitas is still the collective ideal that is pursued and publicly displayed even if it is not successfully accomplished. Through "symbols of communitas" and "communitas-like relationships" (Bilu 1988: 307, 309), the celebration of unity coexists with conflict and tension in the representation of the pilgrimage experience.

This analysis of communitas in pilgrimage relates directly to my examination of its applicability in sport. The construction of meaning that takes place surrounding the notions of 'the team', cohesion, and communitas may be infused with a multitude of

varied and conflicting representations surrounding equality and inequality, social status and team identity, spontaneous and normative communitas, cooperation and conflict, and various positive and negative aspects of competition. As Turner indicates, there is an inherent instability within attempts at normative communitas (such as a sports team): As its form rigidifies to replicate the spontaneous experience, communitas "develops a structure, in which free relationships between individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae" (Turner 1969: 132).

The relationships developed within a sports team structure do not preclude conflict and competition and a competitive contest does not necessarily preclude the development of feelings of togetherness. Sharon Kemp (1999) highlights the emergence of communitas within the sled-dog 'community' through the construction of liminality in the race using a ritual and symbolic framework and through the marginal and structurally inferior positions of the musher in relation to the mainstream social structures. She examines the dynamics of one major event and illustrates the manner in which outside roles and statuses such as gender and class are levelled among participants, and cooperation and helpfulness become celebrated such that communitas emerges among mushers. The ways in which this is enacted during the race to subvert 'mainstream' values of "competitive individualism" emphasizes the importance of communitas, and the rituals that frame it, as an organizing principle for a sport that draws participants from a wide range of social positions (Kemp 1999: 94). She warns, however, that: "Although elements of communitas exist in many sports, the concept may not be appropriate for an analysis of all sporting activities" (Kemp 1999: 94). Communitas cannot simply be taken for granted in the context of sport.

As Lithmann (2000) points out structure is often needed to achieve success on a sports team. This appears to contradict and prevent the achievement of equality and unity characterized by communitas. In relation to sport, he encourages an understanding of the relations between normative social organization, the social relations of sport and the management of meaning that occurs in sport. He points out that an element of hierarchy and control is a significant aspect of team success as each person is accorded a place in the team structure. The result is more an emphasis on rank than equality. While he admits that communitas *may* exist in sport, it probably does so *in spite of* other factors that effectively undermine or challenge it. Competition, then, as a key component for success, does not coexist comfortably with the notions of egalitarianism contained in Turner's notion of communitas. The ideal of unity associated with the generation of team symbols and notions of communitas may not reflect the reality as expressed in competing, conflicting discourses and the ongoing relationship with 'social structure'.

What I explore here is not whether or not communitas, as undifferentiated unity, is developed in actuality within the sports team context, but instead the social and symbolic processes that the group relies upon to generate these "communitas values" that many players perceive to contribute directly to their own enjoyment of the activity and to success within the game. As part of this analysis, I also realize the potential, and actual, conflict and differentiation that occurs as part of these processes.

1.1.4 Cohesion and Sport

I borrow the notion of cohesion from studies in sport psychology, defined as: "A dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of it goals and objectives" (Carron 1982, cited in Carron

1993: 112). Studies of cohesion and sports teams have been ongoing in the fields of sport psychology and sociology for well over twenty years (Brawley 1990). Research in this area has attempted to refine more precise definitions of cohesion, more accurate forms of its measurement, and a more clear understanding of the feedback relationships surrounding cohesion and its causes and effects (Brawley 1990; Carron et al. 1985, 1987). Generally speaking, cohesion is characterized by the development of relationships between individuals, the ability to work together as a group, and the formation and maintenance of a group identity as participants pursue athletic success (Stolte et al. 2001: 402, Brawley 1990).

Typically, teams are automatically associated with cohesive attributes, since it is understood that for a group to exist some level of cohesion must already be present (Carron 1993: 112). Yet, I do not believe that cohesion can be treated as a 'given'. Thus, the elements that either help or hinder a team in their attempts to work together *as a team* become central issues to be explored. Cohesion becomes something that must be accomplished and achieved, not always successfully. It can be viewed as an ongoing process of creating and reflecting solidarity amongst team members through social and symbolic interaction. It is understood by athletes, coaches, management, and trainers alike, at many different levels of sport, that a relationship exists between social interaction and athletic performance on a sports team. As a result, participants in community recreational leagues, as well as athletes on professional sports teams, speak of the importance of team-building, team-bonding, team chemistry and other such terms that suggest this process and, in so doing, actively seek to achieve it.

The virtues of cohesion within a competitive sports team have been linked to a variety of beneficial attributes such as greater success in terms of both individual and group performance within the game, heightened levels of satisfaction, better communication, decreased absenteeism, lower turnover rates, increased self-esteem, and the successful development and achievement of individual and team goals (Widmeyer et. al 1985: 4-5; see also Boone et al. 1997, Brawley et al. 1993, Spink 1995, and Prapavessis et al. 1996). These effects are by no means uniform and no doubt vary across age groups and gender, between competitive and recreational sports teams, between different sports and cultural environments, and between professional sports and those that are a voluntary form of leisure.

Brawley (1990: 364) reveals two major distinctions related to cohesion: the first is between individual and group interaction, and the second is between social and task aspects of group involvement. The first distinction involves relationships between the individual and the group, relations with other individuals, and the interaction of the entire group as a whole within a sports team. The second distinction refers to two interrelated goals of teams: The social element "is represented by the activities associated with the development and maintenance of social relationships," and the task aspect represents "activities associated with task accomplishment, productivity, and performance" related to the game or sport (Carron 1988: 158). The interrelationship between these two is essential to an understanding of cohesion for a sports team as it is believed that each affects the other: Playing well and being successful as a team positively influences social interaction, and getting along well contributes to increased athletic success.

While studies have contributed to more 'precise' measurements of both the levels of cohesion and its indicators (Carron et al. 1985, 1987), the specific relationships between its causes and effects, and the process by which individuals on a team achieve cohesion, remain to a large extent unclear. Lawrence Brawley (1990: 365), examining cohesion research, recognizes that "there may be other categories of perceptions that are part of a multidimensional cohesion, but as yet, how they would be included in the model has not yet been conceptualized." Knowledge of cohesion and its influence on various levels of group behaviour, and on the individuals on a sports team, remains both "fragmented and limited" (Brawley 1990: 368), only partially understood but of continuing importance.

Donnelly et al. (1978: 72) warn that the creation of a universally applicable 'recipe' for cohesion is unrealistic. Nevertheless, studying *how* cohesion is pursued in varying contexts can contribute to additional understanding of the processes involved. I suggest that an examination of the role of social relationships, the use of symbols, and Turner's concept of 'communitas' may contribute to further conceptualizations of this multidimensional process of cohesion as it occurs on a recreational, voluntary softball team.

1.2 Research Setting

1.2.1 Population and History

Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada in 1949 as the country's tenth province. The lucrative cod fishery has been the driving force behind the settlement and growth of Newfoundland throughout its history. St. John's, situated on the eastern coast of the Avalon Peninsula, jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean from the southeast corner of

the island, is the province's capital. Between 1951 and 1971, the population of St. John's, mostly of Irish and English background, grew from 52 873 to 88 100 residents, though growth has since slowed in favour of communities just outside city boundaries (Baker 1994: 33). Some of these were incorporated into St. John's in the 1980's, though a large part of the labour force continues to reside outside the city limits (Baker 1994: 33). According to the most recent census, the population of St. John's in 2001 was 99 182. When the residents of nearby communities are taken into account, the population of the region rises to 172 915 - approximately one-third of the population of the entire province (Statistics Canada 2001).

1.2.2 Softball and Slow Pitch in St. John's

The establishment and development of slow pitch softball in Newfoundland and Labrador has seen its popularity and organization grow across the province over the last two decades, with the 1980's being the formative period. Part of the attraction, in Newfoundland and throughout its general history, has been its inclusivity - the notion that "anyone can play" softball regardless of skill levels, age or gender.[2] Its flexibility in terms of time and playing space have also been referred to often although, with the increase of specialized aluminum bats which improve the capabilities of batters to hit the ball greater distances, many of the fast pitch diamonds on which games are normally played are now far too short and no longer considered suitable for slow pitch games. Finally, whereas fast pitch softball, to which it is regularly compared, is considered to be a competitive sport that demands greater ability for all aspects of the game, slow pitch is most often described as a sport that one plays "for the fun of it" which, in turn, adds to its

[2] For example, see the comment made about softball in 1912 by Henry S. Curtis (Cole 1990: 293).

appeal. All of these historical factors are important to the contemporary experience of slow pitch for the men in St. John's.

Softball originated in the United States in the late nineteenth century as a form of indoor baseball and the sport spread fairly quickly across North America (Cole 1990; Hall 2002; Kneer and McCord 1991; Plummer 1996). Softball was first introduced to St. John's in 1929, though the league failed after only two years due to a lack of interest from players and spectators alike (Graham 1988: 183). A second league was formed in 1936 that struggled until World War II when softball was able to generate and sustain local interest due in large part to the presence of American soldiers stationed in Newfoundland who played the sport both on the military bases and in the surrounding communities. The U.S. military personnel at Fort Pepperell, which was built in 1941 on the hills overlooking the north shore of Quidi Vidi Lake, were influential on the local social and sporting life of St. John's and, along with other American military sites, were instrumental in the development of softball across the province (Bates, Morgan & Cuff 1994: 273; Baker 1994; O'Neill 1975: 332).

Both the increasing organization of softball and the numbers of people participating in the sport continued to grow throughout the 1960's and 1970's. As a liaison between local leagues and Softball Canada, the national organization overseeing the sport, Softball Newfoundland and Labrador (SNL)[3] was formed during this time and is the officially recognized governing body for the sport in the province. SNL currently

[3] The provincial organization was formed in 1963 as the Newfoundland and Labrador Softball Association, which was changed later to Softball Newfoundland (SN) before becoming SNL.

oversees the development, promotion and regulation of both fast and slow pitch softball throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Fast pitch softball was the dominant form of the sport played in St. John's until the 1980's, when it was overtaken in popularity by slow pitch, much as had occurred in many other areas across North America (Plummer 1960: 963). This is a familiar pattern: As the levels of skill required for one form of the sport increased, people turned to other forms.[4] In the late 1970's, slow pitch softball leagues were formed in Newfoundland consisting of former fast pitch softball and baseball players who wanted to continue to play despite their increasing ages. The purpose of these leagues, as described at the time, emphasized both enjoyment and competitive play by promoting "friendly competition and maximum participation for everyone involved" ("St. John's Oldtimers ready to play ball, *The Evening Telegram*, March 23, 1979; "Former softballers return to the diamond, *The Evening Telegram*, June 2, 1979, p.32).

The popularity of slow pitch continued to grow across the province throughout the 1980's. By 1983, it was estimated that there were at least ten slow pitch leagues in St. John's, already more than the number of local fast pitch leagues. 'Mixed' slow pitch, with teams consisting of both men and women, was also growing in popularity. Slow pitch softball was incorporated into the SNL program in the early eighties and introduced into the high schools shortly thereafter. Different divisions of play according to skill level, age and gender were added by SNL in recognition of the growing numbers playing

[4] William Humber (1995: 8) explains: "As the skill level of baseball improved and threatened to chase away the casual player the game proved incredibly adaptable. Softball was gradually introduced between the First and Second World Wars and it expanded the participation base for baseball-type games. The slow pitch variation would have similar effect in the 1970's and 80's." In Newfoundland, for example, Vince Withers, a founding member of SNL, turned to softball because baseball had become a sport for 'elite' athletes ("Ex-softball hero makes long-distance catch," *The Evening Telegram*, February 11, 1990, p.18).

the sport. Some people were concerned that, as participation and interest in slow pitch increased, it was replacing fast pitch as the primary form of softball played across the province. Its influence was felt within fast pitch as each relied on the same playing facilities[5] and drew upon the same pool of players. This was exacerbated somewhat by new SNL regulations which prohibited anyone from playing both fast pitch *and* slow pitch in the same year, while also limiting the number of slow pitch teams allowed to compete in tournaments ("Slowpitch softball added to minor program," *The Evening Telegram*, November 26, 1984, p.18; "Softball Executive elected by acclamation," *The Evening Telegram*, November 26, 1984, p.18).

In 1989, Slo-Pitch National (SPN), a new national organization formed the year before, arrived in the province and quickly rivaled Softball Newfoundland's governance of the sport. SPN organized local, provincial and national tournaments with its own regulations and registration, provided insurance coverage to players in case of injury, and ran clinics and training programs for coaches and players much as Softball Newfoundland did. However, the arrival of the new organization in the province was not without controversy stemming from both conflict and competition with SNL and from having competing sponsors in the brewing industry.

The announcement by Molson Breweries of Canada Ltd. that it would sponsor slow pitch tournaments run by SPN across the country, including 24 tourneys in Newfoundland, was met by a stern response in the province. Bob French, Softball

[5] In 1986, a dispute arose in Conception Bay South when the local slow pitch league attempted to gain increased access to the town's best softball diamond, Ted Nugent field, used primarily by the fast pitch league, but had their application denied by the local recreation committee ("CBS slo-pitch league protests decision over use of field," *The Evening Telegram*, June 4, 1986, p.20).

Newfoundland president, quickly announced that any player or team affiliated with the sport's governing body who plays in a tournament sponsored by Molson's would be suspended from play for up to one year, explaining that he was acting to protect their own corporate sponsor, Molson's largest competitor, Labatt Breweries (Don Power, "Full steam ahead with slo-pitch tournaments despite warning from Softball Newfoundland." *The Sunday Express*, May 21, 1989, p.17). The competitive relationship that emerged between the two organizations was felt later that year by a team from Portugal Cove who were denied permission by Softball Newfoundland to raise funds through a team lottery in order to pay for the trip to represent Newfoundland at a national over-35 SPN tournament in London, Ontario.[6]

According to Ed Clarke, provincial coordinator for SPN in Newfoundland, there were approximately 340 teams registered with the organization in 2001. With twelve to fifteen players per team, he estimated that between four and five thousand people were registered with SPN to play slow pitch in the province. This estimate refers only to players registered with SPN, though it was suggested that there is a lot of overlap of membership. This also does not take into account industrial or other recreational leagues and teams that are not registered with any organization. He notes further that the current trend in Newfoundland, as in the rest of Canada, is towards declining participation in fast pitch and an increase in the numbers of slow pitch players, with the greatest area of growth appearing to be for mixed teams that allow men and women to play alongside spouses and family members.

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[6] See the newspaper article written by Gord Follett: "Legion softball team should be given permission to raise funds for tournament," *The Sunday Express*, October 1, 1989, p.14.

While SNL remains the officially recognized governing body for softball in the province, SPN continues to attract teams and players who often register with both organizations in order to compete in the necessary tournaments. In 2002, SPN and SNL remain separate entities - each requiring registration for participation in their tournaments, the former sponsored by Molson's and the latter by Labatt's - coexisting in the ongoing development and organization of slow pitch in Newfoundland and Labrador

1.2.3 The Caribou Complex League

According to Ron Thorne, an employee of the St. John's Recreation Department who is directly involved with booking indoor and outdoor facilities in the city for public use, there are currently 24 public softball diamonds in the city of St. John's. These facilities are divided into three types of sites: those that are rented, those that are leased, and those diamonds that are open for general community use. In all, there are twenty different softball leagues, most of them slow pitch, that rent the various diamonds from the city for use throughout the summer.

The team at the centre of this study played for ten years - 1991 to 2000 - in a league organized by the Church of England Institute[7] (commonly referred to as CEI), and sponsored by Labatt's brewery, whose games were played on public diamonds situated at Victoria Park and Mundy Pond. They were quite successful in this league, winning the league championship seven times, and finishing second twice more.[8] The games for this league were played on Sundays, with game times being scheduled from late morning

[7] The history of sports in St. John's is closely related to the different religious groups in the city and many current sports teams continue to bear names derived from that past (Bates, Morgan and Cuff 1994: 267).
[8] The team was sponsored by Labatt's brewery for the first nine years in this league before changing sponsorships in 2000 to Labatt's largest rival, Molson Breweries.

through to late afternoon. The men from this team, as others in the league, would often drink beer in between their games and afterwards in the CEI clubhouse that is situated partway up the hill that overlooks the playing field.[9]

In 2001, the team moved to the Caribou Complex to be part of a new league being organized. The Caribou Complex is a softball facility built in 1994 to host the World Women's Softball Championship which served as a qualifying event for the 1996 Summer Olympics - the first year that women's fast pitch softball was included in the Olympic program. Consisting of two softball diamonds - Pepperell Field and Legion Field - and a small two-storey building housing a Canteen that sells refreshments, the Caribou Complex sits on the northern shore of Quidi Vidi Lake in the northeast part of St. John's known as Pleasantville. Overlooked on hills to the north and west by buildings formerly belonging to an American military base, and rocky hills to the east beyond which lie the cold waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the complex provides a striking setting to play softball despite the often fickle and unpredictable weather.

Until 2001, the Caribou Complex was leased from the city of St. John's by Softball Newfoundland and Labrador and occupied by the St. John's Senior Fast Pitch League. In 2001, the lease was taken over by a group called PlayTime Sports for the purposes of turning the complex into a full-time slow pitch facility. All together, forty-six teams play at the complex in six different leagues. Further, several additional teams were turned away and an application for another league rejected because of space

[9] The CEI clubhouse now acts largely as a semi-private club that requires a membership fee to be paid. The club incorporates a banquet hall on the second storey and a bar - complete with horseshoe pits outside and video-lottery terminals, dartboards, and pool tables inside - on the first storey. All slow pitch players in the CEI league must pay for a partial club membership as part of their league fees that allows them to buy alcoholic beverages for a reduced price.

constraints ("Caribou complex expanding: Softball group has permission to construct another field in Pleasantville," *The Sunday Express*, June 12-18, 2002, p.30).

Only two of these leagues - the 'A' and the 'B' leagues - are run by PlayTime Sports. The Molson's team played in the B league, along with eleven other teams sponsored by local businesses (see Appendix A). Local companies such as Newtel, a large telecommunications company, and Country Ribbon, a chicken processing plant located across the road from the complex, organize the other leagues for their employees. The final league is reserved for players at least forty years of age and, like four of the other five leagues, is all male. Only the four-team league sponsored by Country Ribbon has both men and women playing together on the same team. A breakdown of the weekly league schedules shows which leagues use the fields on each evening:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Pepperrell Field	A	B	Newtel	B	<-----tournaments------>		
Legion Field	A	B	Newtel	40+ & Country Ribbon	<-----tournaments------>		

A sixth league plays occasionally on Sunday evenings, when it is not pre-empted by tournament schedules.

The move to the Caribou Complex was the result of two key factors for these men, one familial and the other economic: (1) They were beginning to receive additional pressure from their wives to spend more time with their families and young children on the weekends; and, (2) two of the men from the team were part of the group which was now leasing the complex from the city. Also, as a result of family responsibilities and job commitments, some of the men were feeling additional pressure on their free time so that

the team was beginning to have increasing difficulty fielding a team with enough players on any given Sunday.

The Molson's team experienced a measure of difficulty in this new league, as the fields were significantly larger than in the CEI league. The reason for this, as described to me, was largely related to their age. As a team with an average age near forty, they were slower than many of the younger teams that they were playing, which was only exacerbated by the larger outfield dimensions that required more area to cover and more running as a result. They explained that the desire to expend great amounts of energy and effort to make the required plays has diminished as they have 'matured' and they felt that the significance of winning the games, though still important, was less for them than for the younger teams. In 2002, they sought to add some younger, faster players to their team who could play the outfield positions to counteract this disparity, which played in a role in how I joined the team. I discuss this relationship in more detail below.

1.2.4 The Molson's Team

The Molson's team has been together as a group for twelve years and was comprised of thirteen men, other than myself, at the start of my research. Five of these men played together on a junior baseball team in St. John's in the late 1970's, and early 1980's, where they won the St. John's junior baseball championship. The men forged friendships on that team that were maintained as they aged and pursued various personal and professional goals that took some of the men out of St. John's, and others out of the province altogether. The slow pitch team is itself a renewal and extension of the friendships and relationships developed on that team twenty years ago.

For many of these men, the only time and setting in which regular interaction between them takes place is at the games, or when they get together for socializing as a team. Those men involved in the team from the outset, who had played together in youth baseball, remain a friendship group outside of the team, but most others do not socialize regularly. The men live in numerous neighbourhoods in and around the city of St. John's (in houses that are owned or on which they are making mortgage payments for that purpose) though they do not live in close enough proximity to one another to be termed neighbours.

Only one of the men is under the age of thirty, with the other twelve ranging in age from 34 to 41. The age of the men is a significant element of their team identity as they regularly refer to it at games in relation to other younger teams. The difference in ages is expressed in ways that these men talk about playing slow pitch: Young men are considered to be more physically aggressive, more competitive, and more concerned about winning than the men at the centre of this study; young men are also able to spend more time and energy focusing on slow pitch, making it a central activity in their lives, because of fewer responsibilities related to either jobs or families. In contrast, while the Molson's players are still competitive and want to win, they deliberately place the game in perspective with other aspects of their life when discussing slow pitch. As Chuck, a member of the Molson's team, expressed it after losing our final game of the year: "It's better that they win. Tomorrow morning when we go to work we'll have forgotten all about this game. If they had lost, they'd be upset for a year." 'Maturity' in this sense is linked to ideas about age, but also to regular employment, marriage, and having children that involves a balancing of responsibilities and commitments.

All but two of the men are either married or in a stable, long-term relationship with a woman, and ten of the men have at least one child. Their interest in playing slow pitch is 'balanced' by the men in relation to responsibilities to their wives and children, as well as their job, each influencing the other. Zussman (1989) suggests that obligations related to husbandhood, fatherhood, and work all fit together (like a "jigsaw puzzle") in a manner indicative of the "new middle class." I argue that, as for the working-class men in Dunk's (1991) study, leisure activities are a key aspect of this formulation, used by these men to identify themselves according to their age, their 'class' and other interconnected aspects of their everyday lives.

These men did not use 'class' as a term to identify themselves during our conversations. When inquiries were made, I usually received a general classification that could be best described as being, as one informant stated it, "somewhere in the middle." Often, such inquiries resulted in a discussion of their occupation, income, leisure activities and social interaction, the relationship with their wives and children, and even their age, particularly in reference to other members of the team. This is not especially unique, as discourse about class has been shown to be 'displaced' into "other categories of social difference" (Ortner 1991: 164) including non-class practices, relations, and discourses such as gender and sexual relations in the United States (Ortner 1991), and regionalism, ethnicity, gender and leisure for the young working-class men in Thunder Bay (Dunk 1991).

The members of the Molson's team exhibit a variety of socio-economic backgrounds and occupations representing a wide range of income levels (from less than $20 000 a year, to over $100 000 per annum) and different 'lifestyles', this latter term

often being used to describe what the men did in their free time in comparison to other men on the team. All the men except for Todd have some level of postsecondary education (degree or diploma from either university or a career college) for their employment. Further, the majority of the men chose their respective job fields according to their own interests (though not always from the outset), and they express a general level of satisfaction with their current occupations.

These men recognize both similarities and differences among themselves in the various behaviours and discourses through which they identify one another. Thus, the men rely on notions of age and their shared identifications as Newfoundlanders, as well as understandings about their jobs, family and participation in leisure activities, to describe themselves in similar terms. However, they also perceive differences in terms of 'lifestyle', income and occupation. The 'team' incorporates both. As Adam explained when I asked him about social and class issues on the Molson's team: "We've got a mixture . . . there's all kinds of people on our team. It just doesn't matter."

1.3 Methodology

I had been informed about the slow pitch leagues at the Caribou Complex from a young man in his early twenties (who worked with my girlfriend, Tracey) who had described it as "the best league in St. John's." After my first attempt to join a team failed when they could not find enough eligible players, I contacted the organizer of the complex, Craig Tuck, by email and informed him about my research, my playing abilities, and my interest in joining a team in the league. He passed this information along to members of the Molson's team with whom he has a shared business interest in the complex and whom he knew were looking for younger and faster players for the

outfield positions. After a brief conversation with Frank, I was invited to join them at their first game of the year. It is these experiences, playing as a new member of the Molson's team, which I refer back to throughout this thesis.

Participant observation, interviews and casual conversations were key elements of my research. I attended and observed slow pitch games at the Caribou Complex, and other sites in St. John's, and participated as a player on one of the teams in the Caribou Complex B league. All together, I played in 31 slow pitch games and observed 78 more.[10] I attended games in various leagues, with different calibres of play, speaking briefly to players before and after the games and to spectators (when there were any).

Brawley (1990) suggests that understanding the link between cohesion and the social process within a group would benefit from studying the primary interactions of sports teams, not just in competition, but also in practices and other functions that occur with even greater regularity. In his words: "[I]t is these interactions, with their high frequency of communication, contact between players, practicing of team tasks and goals, and sharing of team frustrations that contribute to the development of group cohesion" (Brawley 1990: 370). Noel Dyck (2000b: 27) suggests a similar approach for anthropologists, particularly by "attending, documenting and analyzing training sessions, game events and athletic competitions, sometimes as active participants but always as attentive observers" we are uniquely suited to contribute to the growing body of sports research. In recognition of this, I took part in various team functions and social events

[10] I played 24 games in the Caribou Complex League and 7 in the CEI league. The breakdown of the games that I observed are as follows: Caribou Complex 'A' League – 12 games; Caribou Complex 'B' League – 31 games; Newtel league – 14 games; Country Ribbon League – 3 games; 40+ league – 7 games; CEI league – 2 games; Provincial tournaments – 9 games.

that occurred throughout the course of my research, including two birthday parties, a weekend spent at a cabin, and two league banquets at season's end.

All league games are played in the evening, occurring at 6:00 p.m., 7:15, 8:30, and 9:45 p.m., most often with teams playing a doubleheader (i.e., two games played back-to-back, one right after the other) depending on the number of games on any given night. Molson's played all their games at 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday evenings. This time was specifically chosen because the regularity of the schedule minimized the possibility that a player might forget when the next game occurred, and thus fail to show, as well as making it easier for the men to avoid tardiness or absence as a result of work obligations. This scheduling was in response to the previous year in which players found it difficult to get to the earlier games on time due to hours of work, and was reserved solely for this team as a result of having two members involved with the business of running both the complex and the league.

During these games, I quickly discovered that my roles as player and researcher, as participant and observer if you will, were not easily reconciled. Within the first few games I realized that trying to observe as much as I could about what occurred during the game often diverted my attention from the game itself, and thus negatively affected my performance. Despite the fact that every member of the team was aware that I was there for research purposes, I also had a responsibility to play as well as I could for them while the game was in progress. While I continued to jot down notes about significant issues and events that I observed within the game, most often by making a quick trip to the washroom in order to be as unobtrusive as possible, I also made a significant effort to

involve myself in the game and focus as much as possible on maximizing my performance. This was particularly the case when I was in the field, playing defense.

While in the dugout during our time to bat, I took the opportunity to note as much as possible about what the players did or talked about during the only part of the game where the majority of the team is gathered together. In theory, a team will spend half of the game in the dugout while batting and the other half playing their individual positions on the field, though interaction continues to occur throughout, and it is in the dugout that much of the interplay that takes place amongst team members occurs during games. As such, I took advantage of the punctuated nature of action in the game (similar to baseball, see Fine 1986a: 184) to record the interaction between players during these periods of 'inactivity'.

I also took great interest in the time periods before each game, when the men from the team would gather together before walking to the diamond as a group, and after the game, when the men would drink beer and talk about a variety of topics. Using my fieldnotes to identify issues of interest, I spoke to eight team members in informal, open interviews in order to gain additional insight into their participation with the team that did not emerge through the games themselves. While much of this thesis is derived from research with the Molson's team, it also includes conversations and discussions with male informants beyond the team, including players on other teams and in other leagues, spectators, umpires, and league organizers. In this manner, both a general analysis of the slow pitch playing experience and the dynamics of a specific team were explored.

I conducted the majority of my research in the vicinity of the ballpark. I was concerned with understanding the significance of slow pitch softball participation in

relation to other aspects of the men's lives but the main research focus remained on cohesion and social interaction amongst the players *as teammates*. As such, I was particularly interested in the relationships that were developed and expressed by the men when they were together as a group. As this occurred only at the ballpark on nights when they were to play a game, or on special occasions planed for the team to get together, it is this context that was essential for exploring the processes of cohesion and communitas in slow pitch. Nevertheless, the context of softball in relation to other aspects of the lives of these men emerged through interviews, conversations and interaction at the games. They openly spoke about the game, their jobs and their families to one another, and they displayed these interconnections each and every time that they chose to come to play. In this manner, what goes on at these slow pitch games speaks also to issues in the players' everyday lives.

Chapter 2
Friendship

> "But, what I get out of the ball, I mean, there's, I suppose it's competitive even though it's, whatever. I mean, I'll always be playing *something*, and as long as, I mean, that's a bunch of people that I've played ball with for a long time and, you know, they're all my friends." (Frank, Interview, September 7, 2002).

2.1 Egalitarianism and Informal Team Structure

The Molson's slow pitch team is formed around four or five players who form "the core" of the team, and who have been with the team at or near its earliest inception ten years ago. This term represents not only their role in the team's formation, but also in its ongoing maintenance by ensuring that the fees are paid, finding new players when needed, and making sure that the regular players are going to make it to the games. These five players - Chuck, Frank, Adam, Joe and Will - met while playing baseball in the late 1970's and early 1980's. All the men value this relationship, though the extent of regular interaction among them varies, and they draw upon it to define themselves as a sub-group within the team. It is significant that an ongoing friendship was developed on the baseball field, and that this relationship was integral to the initial formation of the slow pitch team. The notion of 'the core' also appears to be somewhat flexible as it was occasionally expanded to incorporate other players as well, especially those men who joined the team within the first few years of its existence, thereby including another five of the men on the team. The other players are familiar with this pre-existing relationship between these players, its place in the formation of the team, and in the "team history."

The fact that some of the players, including those who essentially looked after the team affairs, had played baseball together in the past was regularly referred to in the

recollections, stories and conversations that the players related about the team. In one way, this united some of the men in a common bond, based on a shared sporting experience from their late adolescence and early adulthood, from which regular social relationships and meaningful friendships had developed. However, this also served to set them apart from the other players who joined the team in subsequent years and contributed to a form of team structure, albeit in an informal sense, in an otherwise loosely organized framework. While certain players are generally associated with specific positions, those which they played most often, and there are some attempts to maximize the effectiveness of the batting order by placing the best batters in the spots that would most likely contribute to scoring runs, the team lacked both a strict hierarchy of players and any deliberate attempt to organize the team in a fashion that stressed the importance of winning, such as having practices for skill development or choosing team leaders to make strategic decisions. Nonetheless, the emergence of an informal structure is apparent, as some players are involved in the strategies of play, while some take part in team maintenance and organization; some take the role of team clown and insert humour and levity into the team, while others act only as players and have little to say in the flow of the game.

Although a general egalitarian ethos predominates in the interactions between the players, those players constituting "the core" of the team carry an unofficial status in reference to their relationship with other players, and to the team itself. Their place at the 'center' of the team involves a number of different behaviours: (a) two of these men are involved in the daily activities of ensuring that we have enough players to field a team on any given night by asking in the weeks ahead who would be at the game, by finding

someone to fill in temporarily as a 'spare', and by calling players who said that they were going to be at the game but had not yet shown up; (b) this group of men are most often involved in deciding the batting order and the position where each player will play for the game; and (c) these players are also very much involved in the flow of the game, giving out both defensive and batting advice to players such as myself, and addressing concern when other players appear to be experiencing difficulties.

The term "first among equals" comes to mind here.[11] The lack of formal leadership structure bears some similarity to the social structure of small-scale egalitarian societies often attributed to hunter-gatherers in which group leaders are not elevated above others. Such leaders may develop influence on group decision-making but do so using subtlety, modesty and suggestion rather than outright commands (Lee 1993: 94-96). Leadership is based on ability and personality rather than ascription, and relies on advice rather than authority (McMillan 1995: 50). Decisions are supposedly made by consensus, with everyone given a voice and, despite not being bound to the decision made, failure to comply can lead to criticism, ridicule and other social sanctions that encourage conformity (McMillan 1995: 74). Leadership is often based on ability and experience for the duration of a specific activity being undertaken in which an individual is recognized for being highly skilled and knowledgeable (McMillan 1995: 239).

Such authority is ephemeral, specific, and exercised by persuasion rather than the ascription of power. While there may be a limited number of group members who possess the necessary attributes to assume a leadership role in particular situations, so that they repeatedly assume such roles, the acquired prestige does not extend automatically to

[11] My thanks to Dr. Mark Tate for bringing this to my attention.

other activities (Silberbauer 1972: 317). Though some men may combine skill and knowledge in enough activities that he appears more influential than others, such 'leadership' remains informal and can best be characterized as 'charismatic': It depends on the capabilities of the person - and not an the authority of a formal position - who is respected, whose advice is sought and heeded, and who advises and influences rather than commands (Service 1979: 51).

As egalitarianism is stressed, a structurally defined institution of leadership is absent and individuals come to be respected on the basis of their personal qualities (Damas 1972: 32). Care is taken to neither claim one's own superiority within the group, nor to allow others to proclaim their own, and social mechanisms and sanctions such as levelling, ridicule, gossip and joking are used to relieve conflict and reinforce cooperation and harmony (see Silberbauer 1972: 316-19).

The ethos of the slow pitch team is also egalitarian and, since participation is voluntary, dissatisfaction is sometimes expressed by leaving the team. Though an informal structure may develop, with social sanctions that stress conformity, care is taken to maintain the ethos of equality. The men should not overtly seek leadership or prestige, but should instead achieve recognition among their teammates through their own abilities in the game. Recognition for skill, knowledge and experience in a particular area carries no direct power or authority over others and the equality of all players on the team is continually reaffirmed both symbolically and in social relations.

Though 'the core' is recognized as a key aspect of the team identity, it does not carry with it any formal authority. Instead, players are recognized for a diverse array of abilities, experience, and knowledge within the game including such things as hitting,

defense (outfield, infield and specific positions), pitching, strategy, humour and even conflict reduction or consensus building. Recognition of a leadership position in one area does not necessarily translate into another, though each unofficial position carries with it a measure of prestige within the group.

2.2 Formation and Team Identity

Interestingly, the friendships developed within the sports team framework as youths, supported in some instances by either living in the same neighbourhood or attending the same educational institution, were maintained well after the time in which these men had left the sport. Though they had maintained their relationships in the intervening years, continuing daily interaction was not always involved as some of the men left either the city or the province in order to work or to pursue their education. In a sense, their coming together to form a slow pitch team years later can be viewed as a renewal and reaffirmation of their friendship allowing them to retain and strengthen their interaction and overall relationship. For Joe, this is a very significant aspect of the team and his participation as a player. While he knew some of the men from high school or the local neighbourhood, it was in the context of the baseball team that the friendships developed with the other boys he played with. In 1981 their team won the St. John's Junior baseball championship which, for Joe, was a key moment in their relationship that contributed to the "bonding" process: "That was what really cemented, you know, everybody together. That was the bond, right."

The formation of the team, its successes and failures over the years, and the addition of subsequent players are all drawn upon as part of the team history that the men talk about amongst themselves. Gary Alan Fine (1985b) points out that the season in

team sports constitutes an evolving historical narrative drawn upon by players to construct an ongoing team identity by retrospectively applying significance to past games, or giving added importance to the outcome of upcoming games. Players also refer to and utilize significant events that occur in the games themselves; in the case of slow pitch, such events are as likely to be errors or other comical moments as they are displays of hitting or fielding prowess. Fine (1985b: 300) argues that "team sport gains its meaning from the memories and typifications that players develop over the season":

> Baseball (and other team sports) is composed of events (plays) that are strung together in a game. Some of these plays have a lasting impact on participants and spectators . . . Baseball is composed of meaningful sequences of events. As in all interaction sequences, not all parts have equal immediate or future relevance. Those particularly salient events provide memory markers around which evaluations of future performance and memories of the essence of the season can be based. Most teams have had a few plays or games to which they often refer long after the event itself. Along with the more objective features of records and statistics, these great moments ground baseball in the history of the season. They permit the players and the spectators to construct meaningful typifications of the season (Fine 1985b: 301).

Not only are games and events within the season used by the players to construct an ongoing narrative of the team but recollections from previous seasons also become a resource for team identity. Although less significant for the Little League baseball teams studied by Fine (1985a), which have a large turnover from year to year, often as many as half the players, this is increasingly salient for recreational teams such as Molson's which have not only temporal continuity (in continuing existence for ten years) but also continuity in the players themselves as the majority of them have been with the team for seven years or more. Drawing upon a shared past made up of previous seasons and successes, past games won or lost, and those plays and events which are given due significance, the players can be seen to "believe the team character remains constant from

season to season" (Fine 1985b: 302), and are able to locate themselves within that team identity.

While many of the stories are shared, and the players claim an ongoing group identity as the team continues from year to year, they also recognize that this identity is an evolving one, changing according to the passage of years, as players come and go from the team, as the team itself moves to a new league, and as they find themselves aging as both individuals and as a group. Thus, while new stories and memories find their way into the repertoire of narratives employed by the men to identify both the team and their own place within the team over the years, there is also a constant nature to these memories due to the relatively unchanging nucleus of the group.

I argue here, that the early baseball experiences of "the core" of the team, and its role in the subsequent formation of this slow pitch team, constitutes just such a resource. However, while all the players know the story behind the formation of the team, or learn about it as I did through the conversation that occurs before and after the games, not all the men were members at the time that it occurred. Instead, they learn to incorporate its importance into the collective meanings generated by the players as they recall the team in its present form, and to include themselves into the narrative through various means. For John, this includes fictitiously connecting himself to the original group in such a way that emphasizes his own exclusion from it in the present, but doing so through the use of humour. Eli, who joined the team only the year before, draws upon his own stories from other teams, as well as those memories of playing against this team in the past as an opponent.

Besides the continuity of being a part of the team, the men also draw upon the significance of baseball and/or softball in their own life histories. Twelve of the fourteen men that began the season on the Molson's team have been playing some sort of ball game - either hardball/baseball or fast pitch softball - since they were quite young:

> Adam: Now, I played minor softball . . . as a kid. I mean, I started playing that when I was old enough to lift a bat, basically . . . and then, when I moved into town, for some reason I just went to baseball . . . And, I played right through, I think there was one summer that I didn't play because I was actually in university and the workload was too high.
>
> Edgar: We've got a history of, obviously, playing a lot of softball. We've probably been playing since we've been five or six years old. So, I mean, that carries through.
>
> Joe: It's more than just the game, right. Because, and maybe it's been bred into me, I mean, I've been playing some form of ball since I was about, probably about, no I'd have to be in school, so six, right. Every summer since I was six, right. For the last thirty-three summers I've played some sort of, whether it be competitive softball when I was a kid, or in the park, and then I picked up baseball. Played softball in high school a little bit, you know. This was in St. John's as a kid. And so, you know, it's just been something that's been with me, you know.

To varying extents, the men grew up playing baseball/softball along with other sports including ice hockey, ball hockey and soccer. Drawing upon their own experiences across the sports categories, the men are able to discuss slow pitch softball in a generalized sports framework by referring to their own pasts uniting them as athletes and men who grew up playing sports, as well as 'ball-players'.

The connection to the youth baseball team remains a key element of the Molson's team identity, through its formation as a slow pitch team, its continuation over the years, and its maintenance in its current incarnation and each successive year. As my conversation with John suggests, other players are able to claim a piece of that history

through various narrative means, even if they were not involved with the team from the outset, by referring to it themselves or even, as John had done, by placing themselves into the narrative in reference to their own past. In speaking to the players, they refer to the role of this past baseball team and the existing friendships in relation to the inception of the team. This occurred not only in one-on-one conversations and in more structured interviews, but also in the post-game conversations that occurred after our games were completed as they stood around together drinking beer. On two separate occasions my attention was explicitly drawn to it as the players deliberately pointed out that, "I should hear this," and then proceeded to retell the story of the first slow pitch tournament played by them as a team and its subsequent transition to a weekly league team. As the story unfolds, various other players, who joined the team later, offer recollections, however brief, relating to their own introduction to the team and some of their other experiences.

In an interview with Frank, he explained the connection between the baseball team and the softball team, as well as the impact that their early experiences with slow pitch had on their developing team identity. In his own words, he explained that, "actually, the softball team evolved from our baseball team." Though the five core members of the softball team had met playing junior baseball, they did not play together on the same team throughout the entire period of time they spent in organized baseball. This was largely due to differences in age, the onset of injuries, and relocation for work/education - as well as playing originally for other teams - all of which resulted in individual withdrawal at various stages of their lives. Nonetheless, they felt that their success at the junior level helped to bind them as a team even as players came and went, though they would later go their separate ways in their early twenties as they refocused

their time and energy on pursuing their education, on other athletic pursuits, or on jobs located in other areas of the country. When they met to play in that inaugural softball team, their earlier friendships were renewed:

> Frank: But the way the softball team started was after, when Chuck had moved back from Churchill Falls, and I hadn't played anything for awhile. Adam was, Adam had been up in Ottawa and moved back. And Joe had been wherever and back. And, Chuck was working at the dockyard . . . and there was a couple of guys playing there and they used to have a slow pitch league. So Chuck started playing in that. And then there was a tournament, one weekend with the dockyard, and Chuck asked myself, and Adam and Joe to play. They needed some bodies. We hadn't played before, we figured it was easy [laughs].

The early difficulty that they experienced in hitting the ball was also an ongoing reference to their team identity, as they quickly learned not only to hit the ball but to hit the ball well, which, when combined with the defensive skill and strategies developed from playing baseball, helped them to become the most dominant team in the league that they joined the following year.

The reference to past events and games is an essential element in the formation of the historical continuity that contributes to the collective identity of the team itself (Fine 1985b).

> Frank: So, we played that tournament that weekend and had a laugh, and somehow or another, Adam's brother-in-law I think it was, or cousin of Lilly's [Adam's wife]. Actually, I don't think it was his brother-in-law, I think it was Lilly's cousin who was managing the CEI club . . . So, they had a slow pitch league, because we said we should try to get into a league, this is a bit of fun. So the way we started it, Paul spoke to his, to Lilly's cousin or whatever, who told us there was a meeting every spring.

Through his relationship with his wife, Adam was able to get the necessary information to, if not actually get them into the league, at least help get them in touch with the people who organized the league. The players I spoke to recognized the value of

"knowing somebody" at this stage of their team as well as its later significance in finding new players. Joe explained: "At that point in time it was very difficult to get in, right. They didn't accept new teams or anything like that. Adam knew somebody who knew somebody. You know, the old connections, right." These social "connections" helped them to find a league in which to play together.

As Frank points out, the baseball team of their past then became the basis for the formation of the slow pitch team:

> So, we tried to, initially, we tried to make our team all our old baseball team. We tried to get as many fellas who played baseball with us as we could. And, we did get, there was some that, I can't think of names now, but I know there was some others played with us first that did play baseball with us. And, when we couldn't get baseball fellas then we just tried to get whoever.

Similarly, as Joe explained, "at that point in time we had the core, but we needed a whole bunch more, right. So we grabbed players from everywhere and put in a team."

Although they began with quite a few players with previous baseball experience, they also had three or four men with very little experience. Most of these latter men did not tend to stay with the team, as Chuck explains:

> We had three or four fellas who played very little organized ball. I think they got squeezed out over the years and, what the best thing is then, I suppose, when we were winning, and we'd lose a player, it seemed like whoever we picked up was better than the fella that we lost. Every year we were getting stronger and stronger.

The notion of being "squeezed out" is an important one and refers to an informal method of removing players from the team. When players choose to withdraw from the team, new players are required so that the team can continue. Over time, there is an ongoing cycle of players joining and leaving the team that is related to both social

relationships outside the team, as well as the ongoing maintenance of a team structure that emphasizes success in the game.

2.3 Team Maintenance and Continuity

The recruitment of men to play on the slow pitch team utilizes the different social relationships of various members of the team, particularly those identified as "the core." These "connections" include not only friendships, but also more distant acquaintances, family ties, and work relationships. Drawing upon these extended social relations players are added to the team each year as others leave, individuals are sought out to act as 'spares' in order to play occasionally when needed, and also to recruit someone on any given evening to fill in for a regular player, or two, who is going to be absent. In an interview with Adam I asked him how they find guys to play on the team: "It's usually extended friendships, or whatever, right. That's how the team was built. There was never any recruiting that went on. You know, someone could say - there's probably a list of another four of five people that have wanted to play on our team for a long time." It is through these "extended friendships" that the men on the team are able to find new and additional players as the need may be.[12]

Plainly, a number of the players' social relationships are drawn upon in order to seek out new men for the team. As noted by Chuck: "So everybody got this fella or that fella." Co-workers, kin relations, friends, friends of friends, and even more distant acquaintances (such as Eli, who knew the men, but did not interact with them outside of the occasional softball game) were all potential sources for new members of the team.

[12] This process can be illustrated by examining the manner in which each current Molson's player, not including those who constitute the core, became a member of the team (see Appendix B).

Additionally, these same relationships are used when the team was short players, which occurred when enough of the men were going to be absent - for reasons such as family vacations, work responsibilities, or other leisure activities - to require additional players. As a result, there is little diversity among members of the team.

The recruitment of new members from existing social relations (such as asking a brother, cousin, friend or workmate to play) occurs in other group leisure activities as well. For example, Stebbins (1992: 379) describes the process for barbershop singers: "new members are recruited almost exclusively through personal channels, through word of mouth between friends, acquaintances and, more rarely, relatives." The result is that members are often based on similar occupations, common age, and shared life experiences: "[t]his means that they usually come from the same social level as existing members, since friendship networks, not to mention family circles, tend to be socioeconomically homogeneous" (Stebbins 1992: 379).

The same holds true for the slow pitch teams. Though there is some degree of variation, players tend to be relatively homogeneous in terms of age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, and even community origin. For example, one of the teams that play at the Caribou Complex, 'The Islanders', consists of young men whose families are originally from Fogo Island, off the north coast of Newfoundland. For the Molson's team, there is some variation regarding income and 'lifestyle,' as well as marital status, yet homogeneity can be seen in terms of their age, ethnic background and even former neighbourhoods. More particularly, when players who are friends, relatives or co-workers are compared - this relationship being the reason for the invitation to join the

team in the first place - general homogeneity appears to be the case (for example: Joe, Frank, Adam and Chuck; Adam and Ed; Scott and Mike).

There were no longer any male kin of any of the men playing regularly on the Molson's team, yet some of these were available to fill in when needed. Eli plays with his brother on his other slow pitch team, and I spoke to other men throughout the summer who played, or had once played, with brothers, cousins, uncles and fathers. However, while these relations are used as a source for both permanent and temporary players, individuals are not selected based entirely on a pre-existing relationship with one of the regular members; they are not invited to become permanent members *solely* on the basis of being friends or kin of existing players.

In a conversation with one player, Barry, he explained that his brother had been asking to play on his team for years. However, his brother is not a very good ballplayer and Barry explained to me that they "don't ask just anybody to play." To a varying extent players are sought who will add to the team, either on the playing field or socially, rather than inviting men based solely on their relationships with others who were already members of the team: "Over the years, we always got better, but we didn't ask just anybody." Thus, his brother was never asked to play because he "wasn't any good." Friends and family are invited to play, but they have to be able *to play* to be asked to stay; that is, new players, even family and friends, are required to have at least some modicum of skill to be asked to become a permanent member of the team.

The very basis of the Molson's slow pitch team, then, is founded upon pre-existing friendship relations formed in late adolescence/early adulthood when some of the men played baseball together in the junior leagues in St. John's. This friendship was

integral both to the formation of the team itself, as well as being a key element in the ongoing team identity as expressed in the social interaction of the men before, during and after the games. Further, the historical continuity and continuing maintenance of the team relied upon the 'extended friendships' of all the members, especially those of 'the core' who were most influential in the day-day-day operation of the team. Nonetheless, the friends and family of other members were asked to play when players were needed and, clearly, as a recreational sports team, these outside relationships were as an essential part of the team continuity as were the relationships created within the confines of the team itself.

2.4 "Situational friends"

It might appear that such relationships are very selective and limited by the team and the sport. Generally, the men from the team rarely see one another as a group during the winter period. Most see one another regularly during the slow pitch season but not otherwise, while some of the men continue to interact socially all year long. Despite being limited to a four to six month period as defined by the slow pitch softball season, this interaction is particularly valuable to the men involved - even if it is only for a selected portion of the year. Some of the men also play either ice hockey or ball hockey during the winter months and are equally associated with a different group of men in another sports team environment that defines the winter months. Not all the players do so and, while some players recognize differences in the relationships between their hockey teams and the softball team, others see distinct similarities between the two.

For Chuck, hockey and softball provided similar benefits, but also very different reasons for playing. I asked him why he plays, and what he gets out of each activity:

> I'll answer the hockey one first. It's something to do, for one thing. I like sports. I'm not, I'm a good hockey player, but I'm not a good *ice* hockey player. I used to play a lot of ball hockey. I couldn't play ice hockey when I was younger because of asthma. So that has limited my skating ability . . . But, hockey, the fellas I play hockey with now, besides Frank, I don't see any of them outside the arena. I sort of went there because Frank knew a lot of them. And I don't know if it's just a different group or not, but I just don't tend to socialize with them. So it's not a social thing. And, I know 'em to say, "What are ya doing?" and to have a laugh, but there's no social aspect. It's more for the exercise and to break up the winter.

In contrast, particularly because of the pre-existing bonds of friendship he has with some of the players, but also because it is closely associated with his own past, he views softball as having much more of a "social" aspect:

> But, the softball now, I love softball more than hockey, but it's more of a social thing too, right, because we tend to associate. But, I think if you didn't want to play softball, you'd miss the social part of it, like the parties and getting together to have a laugh. It's sort of the benefit. You knew a lot of the fellas for a long period of time. Everybody's pretty close on the team. You can pretty much say anything you want to anybody. So, I enjoy the softball more than the hockey, but it's more of a so-, it's more enjoyable, you know.

His enjoyment of slow pitch softball is aided by the fact that they "tend to associate"; that is, they interact with one another in selected social activities outside of the game, as well as at the game itself. His enjoyment of the game of softball is also linked to his own history playing baseball, and his opinion that hockey, even 'recreational hockey', is much more of a physically risky sport ("It's more of a risk sport"; "As soon as you keep score, well, fun hockey comes out of it altogether") in comparison to slow pitch.

For others, the relationships developed on their hockey teams are very similar to those on the softball team. Frank's description of the enjoyment he receives from the 'camaraderie' of his hockey team, playing the game and then enjoying a few beers and a few more laughs in the dressing room afterwards is compared directly to his experiences

playing softball and the activities that occur in the post-game period in the parking lot of the complex. His enjoyment of the post-game interaction is so great that he relegates playing the game to being of lesser importance than what goes on in the game, and afterwards: "And the hockey, I've made the comment before, that I think if I couldn't play hockey this winter coming up, I think I'd still go up and pay my money to be in the dressing room and have a few beer, and talk after because it's some of the most fun you'll have." This comment was echoed by other men on the team in relation to slow pitch; that, even if they were physically unable to play, they would still be willing to pay their fees as if they were playing and take part in the interaction that occurs as part of the game.

For Frank, the attraction is both the enjoyment generated from playing sports that he likes, as well as the relationships he has with his teammates: "It's the camaraderie and the sport."

> Frank: But, what I get out of the ball, I mean, I suppose it's competitive, even though it's, whatever. I mean, I'll always be playing *something*, and as long as, I mean, that's a bunch of people that I've played ball with for a long time, and, you know, they're all my friends, and you know, I'll play until I can't, and that might be next year (laughs) . . . You know, if I can go, if I can catch, or play first base, or just bat for awhile . . . I just, I enjoy getting out with the guys for a beer . . . Having a beer with a bunch of the guys and just being out. The camaraderie is what I enjoy.

Frank stresses the relationships developed on the team while recognizing that the social and physical experiences of hockey and softball also contribute to his enjoyment of both sports.

Joe sees many similarities between the two sports as well, but further recognizes that there is a very specific relationship that is developed within the sports team

framework that is different from the friendship that he has with Frank, Adam and Chuck. It is, nonetheless, highly significant to his life. Referring first to hockey, and then to softball, Joe explains that the guys he plays with, as "situational friends" and "situational buddies," and the social interaction that results, are more important than the quality of the game itself:

> It's like, I know who I'm going to see, pretty much. You know what to expect and it goes beyond just the game, right. You probably could find a better game, or a better ice surface, or something to do, but it's *beyond* that. It's the, then it goes to the people you're going to see there, right. And it's hard to describe other than that, right - seeing the boys. Now they're becoming buddies, but they're buddies in, they're situational buddies, right.

As an example, Joe describes the relationship he has with one of the men with whom he plays hockey, a local car salesman, who he might see only twice a year outside of their weekly hockey game: "It'll be, 'Hi, how're ya doing? What's new?' That kind of stuff. You talk to him every now and again, but I'll see him every Thursday for the rest of the winter and probably talk to him once or twice a week and that's it." Though the interaction on the team does not necessarily result in the development of an emotionally intimate friendship, the regularity of the interaction, and the comfort of seeing, talking to, and playing alongside the same group of men every week, provides a very valuable experience and a distinct level of emotional commitment in its own right.

> You go up and you expect to see, and there's half a dozen guys there, same ten or twelve, half a dozen guys there, that you expect to see every week, and it's *beyond* just the game, right. It's, you know, the boys. It's, they're situational friends, right. And you sit down and it'll be the same jokes, and it'll be the same sort of ribbing, and you'll pick up right where you left off. And, why? I have no idea (chuckles). And it's all sitting around and shooting the shit. You wouldn't even consider doing outside, you know. It's not like you're gonna call the boys, "Oh, I'm having a barbecue", in the middle of summer, and have 'em all come over and have it the same. It's got to be the same environment. It's got to be the same circumstance. It's really strange that way.

As "situational friends", Joe recognizes that their interaction is limited to the game, whether hockey or softball, and defined by it.

The term that Joe uses is similar to the way in which the young men in the fraternity studied by Lyman (1998) express their own relationship to one another. In his case study examining an unsuccessful and offensive joke enacted by the men in a fraternity upon a nearby sorority, Lyman (1998) explores the nature of the relationship between the men and the women, and among the men themselves. In defending the aggressive and sexist joke, the men argue that humour creates a unique form of intimacy that is an essential aspect of the special male bond developed in the fraternity. This fraternal bond is idealized as a unique kind of intimacy that relies on shared activities and group joking (i.e., "having fun" together) rather than emotional intimacy and self-disclosure, and reinforces ideas about masculinity such as 'strength' and 'coolness'. The men refer to other fraternity members as "special friends" - with whom they can confide in, share things with, and cry in front of, if need be - and describe a very specific kind of friendship from which "genuine" friendships can and do develop (Lyman 1998: 176). While distinguished from other relationships in the men's lives, the fraternal bond is valued for the unique way that it binds them together as a group.

In a conversation with Adam, after being told that one of the main reasons he plays softball is for the camaraderie, I asked him if he thought it would be any different if he was just meeting these same guys on a weekly basis in a public place to have a beer, or if there was a social aspect that connects the camaraderie to the game of softball:

> I think the game itself gives us the basis for the social interaction. You couldn't have the social interaction without the game. There's not a game that we go and

> play where there's not some story talked about happening in the last twenty years, or whatever, that we're still playing together. But, you know, the context is always softball and, you know, you wouldn't have a poker night that would create that same environment. Like, that's what we all have in common. Trying to change that context, I don't think it would . . .

Any interaction that occurs "outside" the game is limited by a variety of factors, including the type of meeting and the extent to which their friendship extends outside of the team and is reflected in regular face-to-face interaction. Though the sports context in which the interaction takes place is significant because it is a shared activity, it is also significant in that the context also defines and delimits the sociality that takes place.

Additionally, Joe recognizes a distinct difference between his relationship with hockey and with softball, particularly because of the nature of the friendships that are included in the softball team:

> The little difference, though, with the ball team at least, there is a little bit more of a theme there, right. There's a little bit more of a, or not a theme, but, you know, a little stronger bond, and you stay a little closer, but it's always in the same group, right. Like, it would be beyond me to call up John Edmunds and invite him up to the house, right. But we get together as a team.

Though his relationship with most of the men on the team is confined to the weekly games of slow pitch, Joe describes this as very important to his life. Though it was 'situational', it also provides him with regular interaction in which he could play a sport he enjoys, drink a couple of beers and share jokes and stories alongside a group of men with whom he shares a common sport history and shared experiences. In essence, it provides him with a different form of friendship than he enjoys with the men he knows from his baseball days but which is equally important. After going through a divorce, Joe found that his weekly softball game, and the social interaction that goes along with it, helped him through it by providing emotional support:

> And, it goes beyond that, I mean, when you think about it, it goes beyond ball. I mean, all the boys were there to support me because I'm the only one that I'm aware of that's gone through a divorce, right. And ball was a bit of an outlet for me, right, at the time. Because I came home in , like I said, I played in '95, I came home in '95, just to basically get away from the situation, right, and ball was just one of the things that I had to do, right, because it was, you know, at that point in time, it was essential that I have some sort of social life that's something that's defined, that's regular, that I know is going to happen. I mean, the acceptance is there and you go out and do it. So, I don't know, it goes beyond the game.

Joe's relationship to the men on the team, as friends, was an important element that helped him to deal with the difficulties of his divorce. Adam and his wife would later introduce him to the woman with whom he is now in a long-term, committed relationship (though not married, he refers to her as his 'wife') and with whom he has two children.

Though the majority of the time that the men see each other is at the game, or at game-related functions such as the year-end league banquet, interacting regularly for only a few months of the year, and their personal circumstances and occupations vary widely, the men on the team value this interaction and define it, in various ways, as friendship - though distinguishing it from the friendship that they have with men with whom they socialize on a more personal level. The incorporation of difference contributes to the enjoyment because these are men that many of them would not interact with in their daily lives.

> Chuck: We have a wide range of personalities, but every team's going to have different personalities. But even the financial pendulum, I guess you'd call it, you've got people who are making fifty to a hundred thousand dollars a year, and then there's other people who are hardly working at all. Of course you got a lot of fellas in the middle, but there's a big gap there. It's not like everybody's executives, or a bunch of plumbers or welders . . . And you've got the four fellas on the team who smoke, and then you've got other fellas, there's another half-dozen fellas who are, they got families, and they got kids, and they got to sort of blend that in, and then you've got another three or four fellas who don't have kids and got no responsibilities . . . But, it's good to have different, depending on

> where you are on the bench you're gonna smell different things or the topic of conversation is a bit different, so . . . It's funny how we all came together.

The team incorporates individuals into a group of 'friends' that can share the game experience and the social interaction, each adding to the overall enjoyment of it for all.

This is an important element of the group friendships, "friends by the set," found in the 'third places'[13] discussed by Oldenburg (1997) that contribute to the positive aspect of such places:

> What this means is that the individual with a third place has a host of friends that are not limited by the narrowness of personal choice. Many who acquire a third place would not have believed, at the outset, that many of the others there would make good friends. They would never have chosen them individually and would not have them at all but for the fact that they "came with the set." Third place friendships thus have a breadth and variety typically greater than that found in other forms of friendship (Oldenburg 1997: 63).

What such friendships lack in depth of intimacy and affection, they seem to compensate for in terms of diversity and novelty - even if they are also limited to a particular place.

In my research, I found that team activities also occurred away from the softball field but the social context was largely the same even if they took place in a different physical setting. For example, the men from the Molson's team gather together for a limited number of team-related events throughout other times of the year, thereby extending the time frame in which they interact as a team.

> Chuck: I see Frank and Adam fairly regularly and I might see, I don't see Edmunds very often because John's hanging out in clubs a fair bit, right, and that's not a place I normally go . . . You might see each other once or twice for someone's birthday, or something like that. We don't see each other much over

[13] According to Oldenburg (1997: 16), 'third places' are informal, public gathering places outside of home and work, having the character of "home away from home" for its regulars, and which provide a number of positive social and personal benefits including social leveling, group friendships, pleasure and entertainment, and feelings of 'community.' Public drinking establishments such as neighbourhood taverns and sports bars (Campbell 1991; Wenner 1998) can be considered third places and I would argue that the slow pitch complex can also be described as such according to Oldenburg's description.

> the winter . . . Now, last year, we went out to Adam's cabin, and I think we're planning on doing that in the winter again, so we'll see each other then. But different people, you don't see them, or they don't go, or whatever.
> The 'cabin trip' - constantly referred to at the games, beginning with the very first

game and continuing over the course of the summer months both in reference to the events of the previous winter and in the planning and excitement of the next trip - was a highly valued team event outside of the temporal boundaries of the softball season. These trips, one taken in late summer or early autumn, and the other in February, are very meaningful to the men from the team. It allows them to 'get away' from the city and to meet with the other members of the team for a weekend of drinking and mirth at a time that they rarely see one another. Although the context is somewhat different, and the interactions that took place were altered accordingly (a subject to be taken up elsewhere), these trips are seen as extensions of what goes on during the slow pitch games themselves:

> Joe: Now, Adam and Vince [Frank Vincent], and Chuck Finlay, to some degree, we'll see each other. But if we get together, it's the team together, and we get together *as* a team, right. So going out to Adam's cabin is the boys, right. And, I say, what's the difference between being out at Adam's cabin or sitting in the dugout, right? The same sort of situation. The same things are gonna be happening, and the boys are gonna be sitting in the corner having their draws, and other guys are gonna be over there drinking the beer and shooting the shit, right. There won't be any game going on but there'll be all different kinds of games going on, right (looks sideways at me and chuckles). We just tend to drink a little bit more and get a little more rowdy, as you'll see.

So, Joe distinguishes between the interaction that results from his friendship with the other members of 'the core' - which takes the form of social outings such as visiting each other at home, dinners, and card games - from the 'team' interaction.

The opportunity to see each other, as a team, in the winter months is a continuation of the team relationship outside of the game, yet related to it. Although what

occurred at the cabin during the weekend in October that I went along was both very similar, and very different, to what went on during the game, the players interpreted it within the context of the team. That is, the cabin trip is understood as a team event, even though men who are not members of the team are there as well. The continuing existence of the team as an entity, and the relationships between the men on the team, outside of the period of time in which they played alongside one another as teammates was reaffirmed by these get-togethers outside of the game framework.

Such occasions included not only such the cabin trip or the hockey game they attended together but also other significant events in which the involvement of the members of the team was requested. This includes a 'surprise party' for the 39th birthday of one of the men and Frank's 40th birthday party to which he invited, and actively sought to persuade, every member of the team to attend. Turning forty is significant for these men for a number of reasons. In addition to the social significance of decade-based ages and the entry into each successive group (twenties, thirties, forties, etc.), the men are now eligible to play in the Master's slow pitch leagues. There is an added significance in sharing an event such as this - one attended by close friends and family - with the men from the softball team as it combines the personal aspect of other relationships with the 'public' friendship of the ball team.

The nature of the relationship between the men on the team is described by many of them, in a variety of ways, as 'friendship.' However, it is a situational friendship, as described by Joe, and also, I argue, a situated friendship, bound as it is not only to the goings-on at the games themselves, but also in a very specific setting defined as an

extension of the softball games. The relationships are bound to the context and the site in which the interaction takes place though this does not mean that they are insignificant.

2.5 The Value and Benefits of Team Friendships

Being a member of the team provides benefits to the men. During the cabin trip in October, Adam provided a free keg of beer for everyone to enjoy. He also sought and received help from the group: to finish insulating the ceiling of his cabin, to haul wood from the river up the hill to his cabin to be chain-sawed, and then to stack the wood neatly in an outlying shed. At the games themselves, the men draw upon the shared resources of the group by asking one another questions about home improvement, sharing business or even networking for work. In the latter instance, men from the same team, or even men from opposing teams who knew each other outside of the game, discuss various work-related issues including the quality of work, potential companies that might be hiring when looking for work, or just provide general advice about work.

The friendships forged on the team provide a unique bond that ties the men together, implying loyalty and mutual enjoyment, and influences whether or not a man will leave the team, for what reasons, and how he will do so. This seems to be involved with the view that the men have regarding their own place on the team and their relationship with the other men. Chuck, who turned forty-one this year, had planned to play a lot more golf, as well as playing in the over-forty league in addition to the Molson's team, but gave up these plans when his wife fell ill and required surgery at the beginning of the year. He had already warned 'the boys' on Molson's that he had planned to play in the other league, and that he intended to do so next year, but explains that he won't quit the team, expressing it in a way that suggests that it would be quitting

on the men themselves: "And next year, I'm hoping to be in another league [pauses]. I'll stay with the boys. I mean, I would never have quit the boys this year. Now, I would've told them I wasn't going to come down this year and they would've understood, but you don't want to lose that contact, the social part of it, right."

During a conversation with Joe about the place that softball has in our lives, he casually remarked to me that, "at this point, quitting ball would be like getting a divorce." In a later interview I asked Joe what he meant by this and he elucidated on the significance that these "situational friends" had in his life:

> Oh yeah, guaranteed. You know, you go through the same sort of emotional withdrawal. You're not gonna, you know, it keeps you coming back. You can't, you're not gonna see the boys anymore because, when you think about it, the context in which we socialize, you know, I wouldn't see, I never see Scott or Mike or John Edmunds. I might see, I'd probably see Adam and I'd probably see Frank, and I'd probably see Chuck and a few others, maybe, but not real often. I mean, we're talking, if it's not every Tuesday during the summer, it's going to be twice a year, right. And so, you know, not letting them down and [pauses], that's why we can't quit. I'm sure it's going to come a day when we finally decide to give it up, it's going to be almost as a group. "Okay, we're all done," right? Because we just can't, you know. It's just like getting a divorce. It'd be [pause], it'd be something missing in your life.

This statement is that much more significant because Joe was the only member of the team to have gone through the emotional states associated with his own earlier divorce. It would seem that, in describing the bond between himself and the other men on the team in terms of the relationships that exists in a marriage, between a man and a woman, re-emphasizes the emotional quality of the friendship that is created and reflected in his own life. Added to this is the fact that he has been playing some form of baseball - first fast pitch softball, then hardball and finally slow pitch softball - every year for most of his life. Removing the regularity of playing every year, and seeing the same group of

men every week, would result in an absence in his life that is unique, and could only be mitigated by the mutual agreement by everyone involved to stop playing; making the dissolution of the team a group decision that signals their intent to stop playing the game rather than simply abandoning the men on the team.

As the men on the team age, they are also experiencing a decline in the number of 'extended friendships' in their lives. This was a particular concern, expressed to me in an interview with Chuck:

> But I don't know what's going to happen next year, if Eli goes. We're to the age, I don't know anyone else to play ball. Do you know what I mean? There's nobody at my work. I'm the youngest one at my work. Everyone's older than me. Some play in the Mount Pearl league [another Master's league for players over the age of 35]. They're in their fifties. They're not going to help us down there. I don't know anybody thirty years old looking for a game of ball that's a good ballplayer, so . . . I'm not going to meet anybody in my work because I don't see a lot of turnover at work. Now Adam, Adam might see someone because he's around different companies and he might know someone, like Edgar used to work with him at Newtel, and you've got these huge companies, right, everyone comes from the company. But, I just don't have interaction with anybody to do that and, as you get older, it's not going to be that easy to get somebody to commit and usually, by that time, they probably can't. So the only, I think, the only thing that's going to happen for us if another team breaks up and we get four or five fellas from another team.

It would appear that there are two issues here: first, that the ongoing recruitment process that occurs over time as player leave the team is made much more difficult as the men grow older and the extent of their social networks - work, family, friends - diminishes due to changing life circumstances and the lack of new opportunities to meet people; and, secondly, as the other relationships change and/or diminish over time, the significance of the regular and ongoing team relationship becomes that much more meaningful in their lives.

The salience of friendship on the team appears to be obvious for these men, and the two forms presented here (pre-existing relationships and those that come into being by virtue of being on the same team) are increasingly blurred together. However, as the team is steadily aging, the dependence on friendship networks as a source for new players - and, thus, new "friends" - diminishes as new contacts are no longer being made while, at the same time, the regular social contact provided by the team is depended upon that much more.

2.6 Notions of Friendship

The preceding sections indicate the importance of friendship to the formation and maintenance of a slow pitch softball team, but also raise questions as to the meaning of friendship within this context. The Molson's team, for example, incorporates friendships and other relationships formed outside the sport into the team structure, but also exhibits characteristics of friendship in the bond that is constructed between the players. This is somewhat problematic as group membership has not always been associated in the literature with the development of friendship. In Paine's (1969: 518) original analysis, the relationship developed in collective institutions - such as Masonic lodges, voluntary associations, age-sets and religious denominations - is not friendship. He argues that his reference to 'group fellowship' constitutes a social relationship that may absorb and include friendship roles, yet is *not* friendship (Paine 1969: 517). Rather, it is "other than" or "less than" friendship. I argue instead that it constitutes just one form of friendship among many. This requires a further discussion about what characterizes friendship, about different forms of friendship, and where the slow pitch teams fit into this debate.

Paine (1969) notes many of the typical characteristics of friendship in his discussion of middle-class Western forms. 'Friendship' is an interpersonal relationship that assumes affective and sentiment laden content, implies intimacy and confidence, is voluntary, contributes to a sense of 'self,' has content and conduct defined within the context of the relationship rather than externally, is personal and private (as opposed to collective and public), spontaneous and reciprocal, and involves measures of bondedness (Paine 1969). He goes on to offer three characteristics of 'true' friendship in the Western middle-class culture: autonomy, unpredictability and terminality, as opposed to ascription, routinisation and open-endedness (Paine 1969: 514). That is, "the making and breaking of friendships in our society is largely a matter of personal choice that is beyond social control," "the content of a friendship cannot be at all accurately determined from a position outside it, while friends themselves are unlikely to be able to predict the course that their friendship will take," and it is "a relationship of emphatic confidence" between very specific individuals (Paine 1969: 514).

Significantly, Paine (1969: 506, 508) recognizes that this is an ideal form and that the 'true' friendship of Western middle-class culture may be a 'luxury' that is unattainable in other societies (cf., Bell & Coleman 1999: 3; Wellman 1992: 104). He also notes that there are many different versions and alternatives of friendship and questions the distinction often made between expressive and emotional friendship on the one hand, and instrumental friendship on the other (Paine 1969: 506). Instead, friendship has several attributes found in different combinations and degrees that make it misleading to distinguish an ideal form based solely on one attribute or another (Paine 1974: 13). It may be the notion of 'bondedness' that is most important here, though the nature of the

bond will vary between people and contexts (Paine 1974: 14). Various degrees of bondedness will characterize different forms of friendship in relation to other elements of the relationship.

Importantly, Paine (1999: 39-40) also links friendships to notions of the 'self,' suggesting that different understandings of self influence its form and content. This is an important distinction. Whether we acknowledge the notion of multiple 'selves' and social identities (cf., Abu-Lughod 1991; Narayan 1997), or simply the presentation and negotiation of self in multiple roles and identities through "impression management" (Goffman 1959), it is reasonable to assume that we will be involved in a variety of friendships in different contexts and for different reasons throughout our lives.

Gender differences in friendship have also been noted and addressed in the literature (Curry 1991; Messner 1992; Wellman 1992). Whereas high levels of emotional intimacy have characterized friendships among women, male friendships are typically associated with shared activities that do not rely on such intimacy. There are some problems with this distinction and Messner (1992: 125) suggests that a bond of "covert intimacy" may develop among men involved in common events. Questions about what exactly intimacy or self-disclosure entails (One's emotions? Self-identity? One's past or plans for the future? Information about other areas of one's life?) makes its role in friendship somewhat problematic and less than clear, though it undoubtedly remains a key element (see, Reid & Fine 1992). It is probable that 'familiarity' is also an important aspect of friendship, indicating knowledge and understanding of different aspects of one another's lives.

Different forms and attributes of friendship exist in different social and cultural contexts, but also vary within these contexts. Friendship varies with gender, class, and age and must be understood in relation to, and not separate from, other social institutions such as the family and work (Du Bois 1974; Leyton 1974; Reed-Danahay 1999; Schwartz 1974). It is also conceivable that the same individual will have different kinds of friends in different social contexts, and able to lay claim to multiple forms of friendships in her or his life. It appears, then, that a universal, 'ideal' notion of friendship is not useful here. Friendship describes a range of relationships with varied dimensions and categories such that distinctions between them will inevitably be imprecise (Du Bois 1974: 16-19). A range of relationships exhibiting characteristics of friendship is extremely important for my research as it means that different types of relations that do not necessarily conform to the 'ideal' notion, but which satisfy other aspects of friendship, may be considered as such.

It is likely that someone may have both close personal dyadic friendships characterized by intimacy and affection, and group friendships based on shared activity, 'covert intimacy', and familiarity, with each providing important benefits to a person's life. Oldenburg's (1997) "friends by the set," who meet as groups in public places, appear to be one example of a group form of friendship. The Cuban *peña* described by Carter (2000) may be another. Cubans define the *peña* in a variety of ways: "as a group of friends who regularly meet to pass time, as a large organization that supports a specific activity, such as playing softball in an open field, as a smaller group, such as musicians who meet at someone's house to play music, or as other kinds of organized associations, such as a fan club" (Carter 2000: 115). In general, it is "a loose association of people

who regularly meet for a specific reason," and which can be organized around work, a craft, an interest like watching baseball, or some other 'passion' (Carter 2000: 115). It involves a network built upon notions of egalitarianism, mutual aid and respect but is not solely or primarily an economic relationship. Those in the group may be friends but the relationship is not simply a personalized friendship (Carter 2000: 162). The *peña* incorporates other social relationships, but also creates unique bonds between group members that are themselves associated with friendship.

Schwartz (1974) argues that the "crowd" in Northern Harbour, a small community off the northern coast of Newfoundland, is an example of such a group or polyadic form of friendship in contradistinction to Paine's (1969) original typification. The sources for "the crowd" consist of organizing principles such as kinship, neighbourhoods, age groups, occupation and even other friends, "yet the applicability of any of these principles is optional and voluntary, emerging from within on-going social processes rather than being mandatory" (Schwartz 1974: 83). The 'crowd' involves relations of exchange and egalitarianism, embodies and transmits collective qualities, and is related to the life cycle of the participants. Schwartz (1974: 84, 91) reminds us that the bases for establishing friendship are multiple and variable, and are specific and relevant to the relationship itself; not a universal standard but as "a function of the requirements of interpersonal relations." So, "the multiplex character of the crowd as a group is sufficient to suggest that friendship . . . underlies the crowd as a whole and conditions the relevance of all of the contributing factors" (Schwartz 1974: 83).

Further, Schwartz (1974: 78-79) notes that friendship is often an important source in recruiting permanent members for the fishing crew, which itself acts as "a means for

broadening and solidifying existing ties through participation in the crew." Friendship becomes a source for recruitment in other activities, and participation in those activities serves to reinforce and reaffirm their friendship. This may also contribute to new friendships: "Men who fish together can be more than just work partners; they may become friends and engage in other activities such as other types of fishing (lobster, herring, salmon), hunting, and providing various services for each other during the year" (Schwartz 1974: 85). Membership in the group can lead to the development of new friendships while also relying upon and reinforcing existing relationships.

This is quite similar to the relationships on a slow pitch softball team and may be particularly pertinent within sports groups as sports and games have been identified as a context for peer groups and friendships (Dunk 1991; Fine 1985a). Rapport (1999: 100) discusses the manner in which playing dominoes in an English tavern constructs and reflects friendships among participants: "Dominoes, indeed, provides something of a foundation for sociality of a particular sort: for relations of amity and intimacy between those who are not affines or kin, neighbours or even local acquaintances. Playing dominoes may be seen to give on to relations of friendship which negate and transcend the latter certain categories." Sharing knowledge of oneself in the activity is itself a form of intimacy that creates familiarity and other bonds between participants: "Transferring intimacies between persons or intimate knowledge of oneself to the outward complexities of a football match, a car engine, a committee meeting, a fashionable outfit, a recipe, a piece of prose - so that intimacies become intricacies - provides a common language for friendly and intimate expression; as heads metaphorically touch bending over the car engine, so individual worlds intersect" (Rapport 1999: 114).

However, the sports framework has not been considered conducive to the formation of strong emotional bonds between participants. Michael Messner (1992) examines team sports as an environment in which men are able to forge meaningful friendships and relationships, but in such a way that lacks intimacy - a friendship based on common activity rather than on the sharing of emotional intimacy. He suggests that the athletic environment of team sports provides a context in which men commonly develop an intimacy with one another based on the shared experience of adversity in athletic competition. Despite the limitations of these friendships (lack of emotional intimacy, internal competition between teammates, relations of inequality within the team hierarchy), powerful bonds often develop between the men and they regularly describe the team relationship in terms of "family" (Messner 1992: 125). Borrowing a term from sociologist Scott Swain, Messner describes this as 'covert intimacy' in which men share their lives with one another through doing things together rather than engaging each other in open conversation about the intimate details of their lives (1992: 92).

The problem is that relationships are developed in sport that are defined by the men as meaningful, in which their teammates are described as being "family," but this occurs in a team structure that also involves a social hierarchy and competition between players for positions, playing time and recognition that appears to undermine any chance of achieving real intimacy or developing close relationships (Messner 1992: 106). Under this emphasis on teamwork and unity in which a sports team strives to achieve common goals lies internal competition that also pits players against one another so that athletic teams might be better characterized by sociologist David Riesman's term "antagonistic cooperation" rather than by an ideal sense of solidarity (Messner 1992: 87-88).

It appears that team formation and structure based on competition can interfere with the development of friendships and other social relationships (cf., Curry 1991; Glancy 1986: 61-63; Messner 1992; Theberge 2000: 39-56; Robidaux 2001: 43-44). For example, in a description of elite women's gymnastics, Weiss (2001: 194) notes that a strong bond, a "working friendship," develops amongst team members so that the team becomes a "fictive family." These bonds are very real but they are also fragile, subject to jealousy, envy and "sibling-style rivalry": "The reach of their sport is so persuasive that other dynamics remain subservient to the group and its single goal, competitive excellence" (Weiss 2001: 194). The friendship, expressed as a "fictive" sibling relationship, is secondary to competitive pursuits.

An important issue for my research is that the relations on the slow pitch team do not necessarily conform to more 'ideal' notions of friendship as originally described by Paine (1969), though they exhibit a number of its characteristics. But, since friendship varies according to gender, class, age, and in different social contexts, it is reasonable to assume a range of relationships that should be considered friendship rather than one particular type. Group friendship, as Schwartz (1974) argues in relation to "the crowd", is one such form within this range that I believe also includes the slow pitch softball team. While friendship is a key element in the formation and ongoing recruitment for these teams, reaffirming and maintaining such relationships, they also construct a form of friendship among its members that should be recognized. Certainly, the men on the Molson's team see the relationships that they have with other team members as a meaningful and significant element in their own continued participation, whether this is

described simply as being "with the boys", as "camaraderie", or even as "friends from the team."

Another issue concerns the potential conflict between the bonds of the "fictive family" on a sports team on the one hand, and the internal hierarchy, competition and lack of emotional intimacy on the other. This is an important distinction but one which may characterize sport in which competition is the primary element rather than in a recreational sport setting, such as slow pitch softball, in which men often come together as much for the social aspect as for the game itself. My assertion may be true particularly at the lower levels of competition, as the higher levels of slow pitch are defined by many as being more focused on winning and playing competitively than those at the lower end of the spectrum. While players may compete with one another for positions and playing time, there is greater flexibility in recreational slow pitch because everyone who shows up to a game is able to play; everyone is placed in the line-up to bat, and players take turns alternating or rotating defensive positions so that every player is able to get into the game. As such, friendship may be much more relevant for a voluntary, recreational sports team than it is for one that is professional or more competitive in nature.

Within the context of the team and the game, friendship acts as a form of social cohesion that adds to the intrinsic enjoyment of the slow pitch experience while binding the men together. Such social interaction, it is believed, has the potential to increase the possibility that the men will interact well together in the game. By comparing and discussing skills while playing together and talking about the game before, during and after play; by sharing knowledge about potential errors or improvements derived from past experience; by establishing positional play and interaction between the men on and

off the field, the relationships forged between the men can provide benefits both to the players as individuals and to the team as a whole.

The players explain and represent the bond between them using a discourse of friendship. Frank's quote at the start of this chapter is a good example of this, as are the descriptions by Joe and Chuck who both associate their relationships on the team with various attributes of friendship such as familiarity, dependability, loyalty, and regular interaction.

In a similar manner, Rezende (1999) discusses the way in which the discourse of friendship is used to construct an ideal relationship between maids and their employers in Brazil. Noting that friendship is closely associated with equality, broadly understood as affinity, she notes that distinct discourses on friendship can stress affinity in contexts where social distinctions may be an issue by using a number of themes, assertions and narratives about it (Rezende 1999: 81). The shared value placed on friendship for both maids and mistresses means affection, care and consideration for each: For maids this involves material aid and conversation in times of crisis, and for mistresses it invokes loyalty and trustworthiness as the maids work in their homes, look after their children and share their intimate lives (Rezende 1999: 85). While equality is not possible, as the social distinctions remain, they rely on affinity, based on their common humanity and gender, to unite them and to build trust in a potentially conflictive relationship (Rezende 1999: 86). As such, friendship relations and narratives can promote affinity in social groups marked by a hierarchical structure:

> This emphasis on affinity does not imply that there are no differences between friends but, rather, that stress falls on those aspects which make friends similar. Such value may characterize a whole set of relations with respect to others, clearly

> separating, for example, friends from workplace colleagues, or throw into relief certain aspects, and not others, of a relationship, for example the affectionate treatment between hierarchical positions. Thus, rather than equality, which is closely linked to a modern 'Western' conception of the person as having identical rights, friendship should be seen as an idiom of affinity and togetherness (Rezende 1999: 93).

In an important sense, the discourse of friendship is used to construct and symbolize an idealized set of relationships between people. On a slow pitch softball team, this discourse reflects a number of very important qualities that are important in binding the players to one another - such as informality, familiarity, equality, voluntariness, and affinity - as ballplayers and friends.

2.7 Summary

Friendship is an important element in the formation and ongoing existence of a recreational slow pitch team. Friendship is a part of the formation, recruitment and maintenance of the team. It is an essential part of the ongoing participation of team members who value the relationships developed through regular interaction at the games, and the discourse of friendship symbolizes the bond between the men in the face of inequities between the players. The bonding that takes place at the games is best characterized as a form of friendship among many.

The team incorporates and adds to the social relationships that the men share with other members of the team outside of the team framework such as friendships, kinship relations, and workmates. Being teammates reflects and reaffirms their relationships with one another outside the team. Additionally, a specialized form of friendship that comes into effect and is mediated by the team framework is emphasized for the feelings of 'camaraderie' that it engenders. This has implications for both the on-field performance

of the team as well as contributing to greater feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment that the men generate through participation. The importance of the friendships generated within the team through an ongoing, yearly relationship, including shared experiences on and off of the field, is valued by the men and explained by them as one of the main reasons they continue to play. The boundaries between 'team friendship' and other relationships are blurred as close friends, family and co-workers play on the team alongside one another. More personalized interaction can also result from being teammates that may draw individuals together outside of the game or redefine their previous relationship as one that is more personal.

References used by the players, such as 'the core' and 'situational friends', typify relationships of importance on the team that raise questions about what is meant by friendship. The 'core' represents a small group of men that have a twenty-year friendship who also play key roles in the organization and decision-making on the Molson's team. The term 'situational friends' indicates the unique nature of the bonds developed among team members. While it may not necessarily involve high levels of emotional intimacy, other measures of bondedness are involved in this relationship that are important for the development of friendship, including shared experiences over time, personal aid, and familiarity. This bond carries over into certain contexts that are extensions of the team interaction that occurs at the games, though the group friendship may not be evident in daily encounters. Friendship and 'camaraderie' are significant bonds for the men on the Molson's team, contributing to both personal enjoyment derived from participation and possible team victory on the softball diamond.

Chapter 3
Team Structure

"We've never kicked anyone off the team. We've talked about kicking people off the team, like Scott, but we've never actually done it."
(Frank, comment made after game, September 12, 2002)

3.1 Getting on the Team

As we stood around and enjoyed a beer after our final game of the year, some of the men began joking with Scott by pointing that he had been "on the bubble" years ago (i.e., on the verge of being kicked off of the team) but that he was now "off the bubble." After Frank claims that they have never actually kicked anyone off of the team, Adam makes a cryptic remark about Shawn, who had played with them briefly the previous summer. "No," Craig reasserts, "we never actually *kicked* him off the team." As they relate what had happened the summer before, it occurred to me that there was an interesting problem involved here. What struck me at first was that some of the men continued to say that they had never kicked anyone off of the team throughout my research, yet it seemed that just such a thing had happened only the year before. How could they continue to make such a claim, and what purpose does it serve?

Secondly, the presence of a systematic method of player appraisal by key team members - accompanied by either acceptance or exclusion within the team - appears to contradict the idea that being a part of the team implies a form of friendship. Despite defining their relationship with teammates as friendship, the potential for players to bond with others in the first place is influenced and potentially constrained by the process by which suitable players are selected and chosen while excluding those deemed unsuitable.

In this chapter I explore the processes involved in finding, selecting, keeping and removing players in order to explore this problem.

3.1.1 Playing Ball and "Fitting In"

As a recreational sports team Molson's finds new players through their own extended social networks rather than through a formal recruitment process. The informal process involved has already been hinted at, but further analysis would benefit from an examination of how players are selected and chosen to remain on the team, while also discussing the means by which those players who are unsuitable find themselves 'squeezed out' of the team. In the case of withdrawal, I am concerned here not with players who must leave the team due to injury, work or other personal obligations that make it no longer possible or desirable to continue to play. Instead, I am interested in the men who played at least one game with the team and subsequently were included in an informal selection process that very subtly excluded them from the team. This is significant because all teams must make a choice about who will become a member of the team, and who will not, which is as much an exclusionary process as it inclusionary. Additionally, the means by which a player leaves the team influences whether or not the player will be invited back.

The selection process bears many similarities to Richard Apostle's (1992: 21) description of team formation in a Maritime curling club which is based upon various technical, psychological and social criteria including competitive playing ability, informal social interaction at and around games, invitations to play in less serious competitions, the ability to carry oneself in an appropriately male-athletic manner, and the willingness to "party" with the team. Apostle (1992: 21) describes the manner in which members of

both competitive and less competitive curling teams are aware of the skills of players on other teams, looking upon them as potential teammates with whom they may wish to play sometime in the future.

> Much of the interaction which occurs in the club settings before and after bonspiel games is directed towards assessing the strength of current alliances and the prospects that certain desirable individuals may be persuaded to play on a different team. These realigning actions may also manifest themselves in the various "fun" competitions which mark the conclusion of the curling year. If individuals are interested enough in each other as potential new team-mates, they may agree to enter these less serious competitions together, frequently with lineups which reflect the particular combinations being considered for the next year (Apostle 1992: 21).

Merit and ability remain the most important factors in choosing potential players for teams that emphasize competition, which in the case of slow pitch softball increases as one moves up the ranking system with victory and success becoming an increasingly more important element at each skill level. This is particularly the case since moving up to the next ranking depends on success and winning at the level at which a team is at, maintaining a specific level requires a sustained ability to compete somewhat successfully against other teams similarly ranked, and moving down is often the result of an inability to beat opponents at the level at which a team is currently situated. For a recreational team, one that is focused on playing at the level of the local league, the criteria for inclusion on the team includes ability but also tends to emphasize other factors and the process through which this occurs is most often an informal one.

For recreational slow pitch teams, the jostling and maneuvering of personnel to increase the chance of success on the field is lessened by the desire for player continuity from year to year, and appears to be secondary to the social requirements. Still, tournaments and league games provide the chance to judge the social and physical

abilities of a potential player. Invitations to play in slow pitch tournaments, or even chance discoveries of player abilities at a single league game, can result in a player being asked to join the team on a permanent basis. In John's case, his friend Tom was invited to play with the Molson's team in a tournament. Tom then invited two of his own friends, John and Jerry. Particularly impressed with John's play, the men from Molson's asked him to join their team for the following season though they did not extend the invitation to either of his friends.

Alternatively, someone who plays only occasionally can also be extended an invitation to play full-time as a result of either an impressive performance within a single game or from longer interaction that creates a social bond that integrates him into the team. Invited to play with the team by his brother (who was, at the time, a member) when they needed an extra player, Todd's ability in the game quickly impressed the others and he was quickly asked to become a member. Interestingly, another man who also filled in when asked did not impress them and, as a result, was not asked to come back. In a pithy description, Chuck very clearly outlines the informal process whereby one player might be asked to become a member of the team, while another is thanked for playing and, rather than telling him that he does not fit their criteria, is simply never asked to play again: "Don came up, because we were looking for a couple of players, and said, 'I'll get my brother to come up,' and Todd came up and first at-bat it's over the fence. Because we were looking for somebody, right. So we said, 'Todd, do you want to come back next week?' Now we had another fella there, we didn't ask him back [laughs]."

It appears that other social relationships provide the basis for adding players: by inviting a friend, family member, co-worker, or teammate from another team or sport, to

play in a game or tournament. An assessment of the player's abilities is then undertaken from which it is decided whether to invite the player to become a permanent member or to thank him for helping them out and send him on his way. Thus, two criteria deemed important to both competitive and less-competitive teams are playing ability and "fitting-in", with different teams and different competitive levels stressing these two factors in a variety of ways. A judgment based on skill can be as simple as having the player hit a home-run in his first at-bat, as did Todd, or a wider assessment based on level of ability, knowledge of the strategies of the game and the athletic equipment used.

Drawing once again on Apostle's (1992: 21) description of the formation of curling teams, equally applicable here for slow pitch teams, the social elements integrate an array of skills and activities. Such factors include the importance of conducting oneself in a manner that conforms to "elements of male sport culture," including looking like a potentially successful player and making the plays within the game with a certain amount of skill and flair (Apostle 1992: 21). Further, "It is important to be able to 'party' on the road, to join in after-game festivities in a stereotypically male fashion, and, most significantly, to hold one's fair share of the liquor available" (Apostle 1992: 21).

The similarities to the behaviour in and around the slow pitch game are apparent when compared to the previous discussions of the way that drinking, joking and conversation are integrated into the game's activities. Certainly taking part in the post-game drinking session, even if one doesn't drink, serves various purposes beyond the creation of social solidarity related to the development of 'friendship' and the positive improvement of on-field play; not only does it serve as a site for the expression of more typically masculine behaviour, or for the transmission of team values, but, by taking part

in it, the other men are able to assess a potential player's capability of getting along with and fitting into the group.

My own experience with a team in another league, the Unknowns, bears this out further. Eli inquired after one of our games if anyone would like to play for his other team on the following Sunday as they were expecting to be short a couple of players. Chuck volunteered and, recognizing the opportunity to see Eli and John interact in a different team environment, so did I. When I arrived I learned that Chuck had already been there and left after learning that all the players had shown up and that they no longer required any additional personnel. As I was interested in the game for my research I was largely unconcerned about not playing and planned to watch the game from the bleacher seats, though I ended up playing for their opponents as they only had six players when the games began. I was invited to play with the Unknowns two weeks later and accepted an invitation to come watch them play in the following weeks. I arrived to watch them again when they were playing for the league championship, and found myself quickly pressed into service, despite not having any equipment, as they only had eight players at the game. Afterwards, I was offered a free beer and thanked. I was also asked to play the following week even though they were expecting to have their full team.

After commenting to one of the players at the final game that I had not contributed much to their win, he reassured me: "Don't worry about it. You've got a good reputation as a ballplayer or they wouldn't have asked you to play." I made a similar comment at the league banquet, when the prizes are awarded, and expressed to some of the players my discomfort in receiving a jacket as I had only played a few games with them. "Nonsense," I was told, "you came out and played when we needed a player and really

helped us out." In doing so, they added, I had still contributed to their win since they would not have been able to field a full team in the first game of the final series.

My acceptance on this team appears to be the result of the factors already mentioned. Playing alongside Eli and John on the Molson's team allowed them to assess my playing abilities and relate to the others that I had the requisite skills to play the game. By showing up for games and playing when they needed I was able to contribute to their team at key moments that were greatly appreciated. Finally, I took part in the post-game gatherings, enjoying a beer in their company and talking about sundry topics that arose, particularly those concerned with the game of slow pitch. As such, it would appear that I passed the informal entrance exam and agreed to play with them next year when asked.

3.1.2 'Commitment' and the Importance of Showing Up

Having the best possible number of players at each and every game, neither too few nor too many, is an important concern for team organizers such as Frank, Chuck and Adam on the Molson's team. This means, on the one hand, having at least enough players to be able to field a complete team so that they neither forfeit nor are they scrambling at the last minute to find a replacement. On the other hand, it means not having too many players which can cause problems with defensive positioning and making sure everyone plays, or with batting performances as a result of having only a few staggered at-bats throughout the course of the game. Asking fifteen to twenty men to play on the team in order to ensure that there are always enough players present to field a proper team is not the best possible scenario, and neither is having only ten players and no more. There is a certain amount of flexibility in the league rules that allows teams to play with fewer than ten players, as well as allowing them to bring in replacement players throughout the year

but, ideally, teams always try to have at least ten players at each game. At issue is the importance of receiving both commitment and loyalty from men who are playing slow pitch on a voluntary basis so that they are dependable and attend the games regularly.

Concern about the number of players was manifested on a nightly basis for the Molson's team in the regular counting of how many players we had at each game, who was coming and who was not coming. Through both jokes and outright statements, the players expressed a particular dislike for playing a game with less than ten players. Players discuss the ideal number of players for a team, as well as the effects that numbers have on performance, during conversations involving slow pitch, the team, and strategies. Chuck reiterated this concern with players in a discussion we had about the future of the team:

> You just can't go out there with ten players and start the year. But even in the game we had ten that we beat the other team in the first semi-final, and Scott had his groin pulled out, right, and we didn't have anyone to put in. And Frank hurt his leg, and I couldn't throw. So that's another thing about playing in tournaments, you can't go in there with ten players. I mean, one time we used to, a lot of games, up at CEI, we used to play with nine players. Other games we used to play with eight and we'd win because the thing is, if we've got the right eight thrown out there, that means that I was getting up [to bat] like eight times, eight or nine times a game. . . . And they'd put in a catcher for us and we'd play three in the outfield, three in the infield, and we'd still beat the other team . . . Now it's not the same caliber of ball but, seeing as you've got your good players out there, you're almost getting up every inning, right. And, when you know when you're getting up every inning, the ball, you can see the ball, you know, but when you've got twelve or thirteen players, and you're only getting up every three or four innings, it makes a big difference. There's more pressure on you. You're too anxious to get up there. It's a different mindset.

A thin line exists between having too many players at a game and having too few, with the ideal number being negotiated by those members of the team who make such decisions.

Some of the men also expressed discontent with past players who showed up irregularly to the games throughout the regular season, not contributing consistently to the team's effort to win games, but who would then come to all the playoff games when the outcome of the games "really matters." The team would find itself overloaded with players, which then contributed to poor performances in crucial playoff games. Conversely, players who show up for all the regular season games and then fail to come to playoff games were similarly objected to on the grounds that the team was then left with an insufficient number of players for these very important games. Adam explained to me the importance of having the right number of players on the team that depends on loyalty and commitment in order to field the team on any given night:

> Yeah, we're competitive when we're on the field. And it gets even more competitive when you get to the playoffs but, at the end, you want to go down and have a team that shows up so you can have a game of ball, right? What's the sense of having thirteen great ballplayers and every night you go down and there's only seven or eight showing up. You know, that's not what we're in it for . . . We, it's such a loyal group that we don't carry any more than thirteen or fourteen players, right, because we found when we were playing in the CEI league that teams that carry fifteen, sixteen players were always, you know, never had any trouble fielding a team in the regular season. They'd play with ten or eleven people and they'd do well but, when it came to the playoffs, they'd have fifteen or sixteen people and it really impacted their performance because guys weren't getting enough at-bats to really get into a groove. So, that's why we never wanted to do it. We'd play with as low a number of players as we could.

Not wanting to sacrifice their desire to be competitive for the sake of being able to field a team for every game, these men seek commitment from their players in order to have "as low a number of players" as they could without having too few. Those who organize the team value player loyalty from year to year. By having most, if not all, of the players return to the team each year, new players are only occasionally needed. Once

on the team, a level of commitment from players is required for the team to function effectively, which also shows the other men that one wants to be a part of the team.

Commitment is a characteristic that is both valued and sought after when looking for new players, as I was informed by Adam who explained that they had few criteria for choosing new players: "Other than commitment. That is one solid piece that we've always looked for is people being committed. We understand it's social. We understand that it's not do or die, and obviously if you've got a family commitment that, at least let us know. It's no big deal. We won't make anything out of it. But don't *not* show up and not let anybody know."

The emphasis placed on commitment appears to be particularly important for the continuing existence of a recreational team in which both regular attendance and effort at the games is voluntary. Thus, the maintenance of social relationships and the ability to deal with 'troublemakers' or other problems that arise, and the establishment of both obligations and 'commitment' are integral to the ongoing continuity of a recreational team from year to year while also recognizing the voluntary nature of participation and maintaining the appearance of equality.

Such commitment is balanced by responsibilities in other areas of the men's lives, most particularly familial and occupational, which are recognized as taking precedence over slow pitch. Nonetheless, the level of commitment that is given to the slow pitch team is still a key factor for deciding to accept a player as a regular member of the team and as an accepted part of the group. Players must come to terms with the level of commitment required for team membership and with the time they would like to spend with their family and their work obligations. Frank, who changed occupations five years

ago, found that his new real estate job required whole new levels of time and energy that altered his relationships with his family, as well as the emphasis of his leisure activities that now prevented him from playing as much slow pitch as he had in the past:

> I'm always out of the house on, my wife is fine with that. I mean, she, I chose this five years ago and she knew what I was doing and we agreed together that she was okay with it as well. But then, when I started we had an eight-month old at the time. So the biggest problem is not seeing your child and then to turn around when someone asks you to go play softball, if you've got the time to play - most of the times, too, I can't commit. If I'm going to play something, I commit to it.

As one of the men on the team who ostensibly ensured that the team ran as smooth as possible by contacting players to make sure that they would be making it to the game, Frank clearly understood the importance of 'commitment' for slow pitch teams:

> Because most of these years, all through this, I've been the guy calling everybody, telling them when the games are, doing all the organizing. And I know what it's like for someone to tell you that they're playing and then not show up, and this kind of stuff. And everything I've ever played, if I tell someone I'm playing, then I'm playing. I'm not saying, "Well, I can play Friday night, but I can't play Saturday morning. And I can play Saturday afternoon, but not Sunday morning." Like, if I'm playing I'm playing and if I'm not playing I'm not playing.

With his job, he often finds that his weekends and evenings must be made available for his clients. When asked to play in a weekend tournament, he is unable to make the commitment necessary to the team so as to leave his time available for any work-related responsibilities that may arise. As a result, Frank has not played in a slow pitch tournament in five years. However, he admits that he is willing to help out a friend for a single game through the week or on a weekend if they are in dire need of another player: "I'm not going to play, but if you're stuck on a particular night . . . you know, I can't commit to play but if you end up short on numbers for something like a Friday night

game or a Saturday morning game, if you're stuck, give me a call. And, if I can do it, I'll play *a* game to help you get through."

As for the other men on the team, Frank's commitment to the slow pitch team is balanced with his work and family responsibilities. Frank thought about how his wife and young daughter, as well as his job, influenced his willingness and ability to play:

> Once I got into real estate . . . as much as I may or may not have had appointments on the weekend . . . I don't know what I'm going to be doing the following weekend and I can't say "Yeah, I'll go play in a tournament" and stuff come up at work and just *not* do it. And then, if I'm not busy at work it'll also be away from my family again on the weekend when I've probably been working day and night all week. It wasn't fair to them either and plus I *want* to see my family, right. But the commitment was, well, if I never had, if I wasn't married, if I was single and was, my occupation was what it is, to commit to a tournament is still, you know, to say to somebody I'll play and then next thing you know I'll go play in the morning and tell him I can't play in the two o'clock game or something. I don't want that. That's not good. So, for me, when it got to that point, if I couldn't make a hundred percent commitment than I wouldn't play at all.

Commitment implies a social responsibility to the other members of the team that supersedes playing only when one wishes and solely for one's own personal enjoyment. While participation is voluntary, membership on the team also carries a measure of obligation by emphasizing loyalty and commitment.

Frank and Adam ask the men on the team to contact one of them if they are unable to make it to the game, thereby giving them adequate time to find a replacement if need be. Adam feels that, as they got older, they did not want to expend the time and energy needed to ensure that enough of the men were going to make it to the weekly game. I was told that he and Frank did not want to "baby-sit" guys anymore, so they no longer make phone calls before the game to see who will be playing. Though Frank still pulls out his cellular phone to find out where players are when the start time of our game is fast

approaching and we still do not have enough men to play, he no longer spends days beforehand calling everyone to make sure that they are coming to the game. Players are expected to call beforehand if they are unable to play. In this way, the need to balance the number of players required for the team with dependability and the right attitude is essential to fielding a team on any given night.

Some of the men on the team are quite proud of the fact that they had hardly missed any games all year. Despite his wife's illness early in the year, Chuck missed only the first game and, due to work, part of the final game - though in the latter instance he made plans to leave work early in order to make it to as many of the games as possible.

> You know, I've only missed, I missed the first game of the year because of Annette there. And I missed probably one other game because of work. I mean, if I'm working, I'm working. I can't - it's not like someone who, it's not like a day-job . . . In order for me to go early, someone's got to come in early for me and you don't really want to do that unless it's really important, right. So you shouldn't really be changing that for softball. Now, if it was the playoffs, I might, like I did get my buddy to come in early that night for me, but it's not something, you know, if I got softball Tuesday night in July, I'm not going to say to another fella, "Listen, I'll work for you Monday night and . . ." It's just not worth the hassle, right.

Similarly, John proudly informed me that the only games that he missed throughout the entire softball season were on a Monday night in July when he had to take his pregnant dog to the veterinarian. John worked as an animal-care technician out of his own home and had a great deal of flexibility in choosing his own hours of work in order to ensure that he would be able to make it to all of his slow pitch softball games. However, as he was planning on selling the Rottweiler pups and was counting on the additional income that it would provide, the problems that arose with his dog's pregnancy took precedence and he was unable to make it to his games that night. However, when

taking into account the fact that he played for four different slow pitch teams in league play, and also played in occasional tournaments on weekends, the fact that he missed games on only one night throughout the entire slow pitch season is quite remarkable. This is a sure sign of commitment to his slow pitch teams.

3.2 Staying on the Team

To further illustrate the ways in which playing ability, commitment and social interaction are valued and stressed among the Molson's team, it is beneficial to discuss the individual situations of some past and present players to further understand the manner in which players are chosen for the team and also how they may be excluded.

3.2.1 Will

Will played on the same the junior baseball team as the other 'core' members of the team. The issue with Will is his commitment to the slow pitch team, as he played only sporadically throughout the summer. Yet, this lack of commitment is generally overlooked by some of the men due to his long membership on the team, his place on the youth baseball team, his relationship with the "core" players, and the demands of his job in the medical profession that requires him to be available at any time of the day. In reference to his sporadic attendance of games, players often made jokes at his expense that highlighted this issue.[14]

There was growing concern as the regular season ended about whether or not he had played enough games to qualify for the playoffs, although he did manage to make it

[14] For example: Frank: "Will says he's coming to the game tonight," Chuck: "He always *says* he's coming"; or, as Will drove slowly into the complex one night, Eli: "Look, Will's driving in all tentative-like. He's not sure where he is because he's never here"; or, Frank: "Where's Will? He said he'd be here tonight," Joe: "He's probably lost and forgets how to get to the park."

to the minimum six games as required by the league rules. However, his irregular presence throughout the summer was considered somewhat of a problem by at least a few of the players, as voiced here in a conversation with Chuck after pointing out that he has only played in a few of our games: "But then he comes at the end of the year. I mean, you always have enough for the playoffs. You don't really want them coming then, you know what I mean? So, you know . . . can you really count Will on the team?"

Frank, too, acknowledged some of the difficulties of having Will as a member of the team as a result of "reliability" issues, but this was largely overlooked because he was a friend who had once played on the baseball team and also because he continued to show that he "loves the game" and wants to continue to play. While unreliable players in the past found themselves leaving or left off of the team, Will has remained:

> Frank: Most of the guys are reliable. The fellows over the years who aren't reliable ended up not playing the next year anyway, you know, if they're all screwed up for a year. Will's a little different. Will's not reliable and hasn't quit. He wants to play but Will is a doctor, as you know . . . His wife is also a doctor . . . and they've got three small kids. Their oldest is six, so getting out of the house is not always easy for Will. And, but, Will wants to play as much as you and I want to play. He just can't always get away. But he wants to play and that's why he won't quit (pauses) and we're not asking him to quit, but we wouldn't want two people like Will because a second Will would cause us trouble, you know, with numbers again. But he's paid his money . . .

In this instance, the commitment in terms of reliability and punctuality is not there yet Will remains a part of the team. To a certain extent, his 'commitment' is allowed some flexibility as his "love" for the game and his desire to play - when he has the available time - signals a certain amount of loyalty to the team, and to his friends on the team. So, the other men continue to allow him to play without asking him to quit the team.

3.2.2 Mike

As already noted, Mike was asked to become a full-time member of the team based on his willingness to "fill in" when needed and because he got along well with the other members of the team. Mike was not a very proficient player at the outset but his other attributes endeared him to the team:

> Adam: How did Mike get on the team? He was good friends with Scott at the time, and a lot of the other guys knew him. Like John knew him. But it came down to - Gee, that's a really good question . . . I think he played a couple of games, just filled in. He used to come down with the guys, and just filled in - a lot like Al did this year. The preface about Mike wasn't that he was a good ballplayer - the year he had this year was the best he's ever had - but his absolute dedication to it, right. You know, he would show up *every single night*, without question. You never had to worry about whether Mike was going to be there or not. And that's all we were looking for.

Mike already had friends on the team and he took part in the other team activities, such as the post-game beer drinking and chat sessions, before he became a member. Over time, Mike's ability has improved to the point where the other players on the team expect as much out of him as anyone else. However, neither Mike's invitation to join the team, nor his ongoing membership and participation, were based on his playing ability. Instead, it was his dependability and sociability that were deemed important.

3.2.3 Shawn

Despite indicating in an email before the season that he had played ball all his life, Shawn turned out to be a rather poor ballplayer. He was invited to join initially as some of the men from the previous year had indicated that they would not be returning. After the first couple of games it quickly became apparent that he was not very skilled and the other men on the team were duly unimpressed, as he couldn't catch, run or hit. As Shawn was not a very good player, some of the men decided to return his money and tell him that

they no longer needed him to play because some of the men who weren't going to play now planned to play for one more year. Adam agreed to return Shawn's $100 the following week and tell him that he was off of the team, but decided that he couldn't go through with it. Frank ended up telling him but also let him know that there was another team in the league who needs additional players. As Frank points out: "I wouldn't have just kicked him off the team if I couldn't have got him another game of ball somewhere else." So, they gave him his money back and Shawn walked over to the other team, who happened to be playing that night, gave them the money, and has been playing with them since. "He's the kind of player they need," Frank explains. "He may not be that good, but he's there every game and he pays his money."

A similar situation occurred on one of the teams in the 'A' division this year, but the player was simply given his money back and told that he was off the team because he wasn't good enough. While the relationship between playing ability and team membership is evident at the more competitive level, it is less clear - though not entirely insignificant - for a recreational team such as Molson's. Clearly, they were uncomfortable with asking a player to leave simply because they didn't feel that he was skilled enough, especially since they often stressed the importance of "fun" when playing slow pitch. Yet, they also wanted a player who would make the team better on the field.

Commitment was obviously not a factor here, as Frank pointed out that Shawn shows up for every game on his current team. In an interview with Joe I asked him to explain why he thought that Mike had stayed with the team while Shawn did not, since it appeared that neither one was a very good ballplayer at the outset:

> It is very much fitting in, right, when you think about it. First of all, you've got to be able to fit in and, second of all, you've got to play a bit, right. Mike was always, he fit in. He was one of the boys, if you will. So, he'd come in and joke around, personable, right. Shawn wasn't, Shawn was just not, he was kind of quiet and not really saying much, and not a real exceptional ballplayer. The thing with Mike was he wasn't great but he knew he wasn't great, and he tried real hard. And the other guy didn't really understand that he wasn't that great, right (chuckles). And there was no real, no real connection. Now Mike was one of the, I think he was a friend of Scott's and I think he was a friend of, well . . . Frank, I don't know if he knew him that well or not, but he sort of knew *of* him, right. So he had a connection anyways, right. So he was one of the boys, and he tried hard and at that point when Mike came in . . . the boys weren't worried about, you know, they were more worried about, "Do you fit in?" They weren't worried about talent at that point in time. You know, we were all in our late twenties then, probably in our prime in term of this sport, or close to it, right. So they weren't worried about getting another big bat or anything - didn't need it - but, are you going to show up everyday? Are you going to put in a good effort? You know, that kind of stuff, and that's all that mattered. With Shawn it was, we weren't really doing that well, you know. We were expecting something a little more than what he portrayed himself to be. And, he didn't fit in that well, right. There was no real connection so it was kind of like, why bother? It's being a little callous, but that was it.

Clearly, a combination of traits is preferable but some are deemed more valuable than others depending on the focus of any particular team (competitive, recreational) or even the same team at different times. As Joe points out, there is a difference between the needs of a dominant team with players at a peak athletic age and an aging team that is struggling in a new league. For the three players above, social relations - friendship, 'connections', 'fitting in' - are a key element for becoming and being a member of this particular slow pitch team, as is commitment. Membership is also loosely based on playing ability within the game, but this requirement fluctuates according to the needs of the team in question at any given time. In looking at combinations of these three criteria, teams are able to determine whom they would like to have as players.

3.3 Leaving the team and being 'squeezed out'

For a recreational sports team, on which membership and participation is voluntary and constrained by other responsibilities in each man's life, personnel changes and player movement are normal aspects of both team change and continuity from year to year. While there are legitimate reasons for not showing up for games - work, family, injuries, vacations, previous leisure plans - absence for no other reason except for not wanting to play, particularly if the team is not previously warned, is frowned upon. As noted above, commitment to the team, in the form of regular attendance of slow pitch games, is highly valued by the men.

As Eli explained to me in reference to two members of his other team (the Unknowns) who stopped coming to games without telling anyone their intentions, after heckling one of them in a game: "You don't just quit the team without calling anyone. They should've at least called and let someone know that they'd quit. After all, they're men, not children." While waiting for the rest of our team to arrive one night, he shouted out a greeting to the shortstop on the field, who also played on the Unknowns, before yelling to the man playing right field to "just keep right on going. I don't want anything to do with you." He follows this up with, "You're not a team player. You don't know the meaning of the word." The right fielder responds in kind. He passes the whole thing off as a joke to me, but makes sure to tell John (another Unknowns player) about the incident, adding afterwards that, "I had to raz him. He knows that I didn't mean anything by it, but I had to do it because of the way he quit the team."

Players may leave the team as a result of an ongoing conflict between the slow pitch games and their other responsibilities. As Frank described earlier, players with

ongoing problems attending games throughout the year often leave the team of their own accord, or choose not to return the following year. As such, it appears that 'problem' players who are undependable opt out of continuing participation when they realize they can no longer do so. When a player continually exhibits unreliable behaviour it plays havoc with attempts by other members of the team to field the best possible team with the lowest possible number of players. The Molson's team had a set of reactions to such behaviour to try to correct the problem and minimize the ongoing nature of such absences and this process can be hurried along if need be.

Scott had once been on the verge of being asked to leave the team. When he regularly failed to show up for games without warning anyone, he was making it extremely difficult for the other players who were depending on his presence. He was finally confronted by some of the men and told "you're going to be off the team if you don't show up anymore." From that day on he was one of the first men at the game almost every night. This, then, is one such method of dealing with the issue - by confronting the player and placing the onus on him to change his behaviour to conform to the wishes of the team, or find himself excluded from the team. While the player is directly confronted, he is not explicitly told to leave the team. Instead, he is given the choice of either changing his attitude or choosing to leave the team. In this way, the men are able to remove undesirable players who lack the proper commitment without openly 'kicking' them off the team by giving the appearance that it was the individual player's choice.

There is a sense of loyalty to players and those who are regulars are usually extended an invitation to play again the following year, or it is simply assumed that they

will do so. Additional players are sought only when some of these men decline. For those who leave, there is a 'right' and a 'wrong' way of doing so. The proper way is to openly let the team know that you are no longer able to play. The wrong way, much like irregular absences, involves simply not showing up for any more games without telling anyone about one's intentions to quit. Those members of Molson's who left the team in the course of my research fall into this second category, though each had legitimate reasons for quitting. The problem was, as expressed by the various members of the team, they had no idea whether or not they had actually quit the team or whether they were experiencing difficulties in making it to the games due to other reasons.

Max stopped coming to the games after the third week of the season after playing with the team for seven years. He had mentioned to some of the players that he was thinking of quitting due to lingering pain in his back and his neck from a car accident the previous year but did not openly express his intention to do so. For the rest of the year there was ongoing confusion among the rest of the men as to the reasons why he was no longer at the games. A number of possible explanations were offered, in addition to his injury, including: he was unable to pay the $100 league fee due to financial difficulties; he simply did not want to pay the league fee; he disliked being insulted about his playing ability; and he had gone on vacation or couldn't play because of work or family obligations. The questioning continued throughout the year without any real answer being discovered about why he had quit. By the end of the year, however, the men all agreed that he had quit without telling anyone.

Roger's situation was somewhat different but his manner of leaving was also a cause of some consternation amongst others on the team. Roger worked for the same

company as both Edgar and Frank. Unfortunately, the company experienced financial difficulties and was forced to restructure its finances and its workforce resulting in the lay-offs of some of the employees. Roger was one of those who lost his job. When he failed to show up for the game immediately following his lay-off, Adam explained that he had just lost his job and the men assumed that this was the reason for his absence. Edgar mentioned that he had heard that Roger had returned to his hometown on another part of the island immediately after losing his job, possibly to look for work. He failed to show up for our next game as well, but did show up three weeks later for our game in early August. This was the last time he came to any of our games and, since no one was able to contact him, the players could only make assumptions about what had happened. They waited for him to call to let them know what was going on, because they may not know how to reach him but "he knows how to get hold of us."

As with Max, Roger did not contact anyone to communicate his intention to leave the team, and so everyone was kept guessing for the rest of the summer as to what had really happened. For this reason, they represented a rather ambiguous situation for the others. A key issue was how they were to approach the situation the following year: Are they still members of the team so that they should be called next year and invited to play, giving them the option to decline, or are they no longer members and thus did not need to be contacted again?

Chuck and Frank discussed this situation at Frank's fortieth birthday party while sitting casually in the front room, drinking a beer, late in the evening. As two members of 'the core' of the team, and since Frank was very involved in the organization of the team,

this casual conversation appears to be a way of resolving the problem. Chuck asked Frank if he knew where Roger had gone.

"No one seems to know," Frank responds. "We don't have a contact number for him, but he's got my number. No one's heard anything from him as far as what he's doing, whether he quit or still means to come back."

Chuck nods and Frank points out, "But he paid his money anyway." He pauses to take a drink from his beer before adding, "He's probably not coming back."

Chuck then asks Frank about Max, and whether he has heard anything about what he might be doing.

"He had some problems at home early in the year," Frank explains, "but he didn't pay his money this year, either." At this point Frank points out that they've never kicked anyone off of the team.

"Don't call him for next year," Chuck says, "let him call us if he wants to play."

This appears to be an informal system that removes responsibility for excluding a player from the men who make such decisions. Although it appears that Max and Roger have already quit the team, by placing the responsibility on each of them to contact someone next year in order to continue playing on the team, the other men are ostensibly not actually kicking them off. Since there is no intent to contact either of the men to let them know the situation, it is much more unlikely that they will make such a telephone call. If they wait for the yearly telephone call from someone on the team, they will essentially find themselves replaced. However, if they take the initiative and ask to play, they will be allowed to return to the team. In this way, an undesirable player will most likely find himself "squeezed out" of the team by the time the next season begins.

Squeezing a player out of the team is an informal and indirect process. When a player is invited to play a game but does not measure up to the team requirements, he is simply thanked for his help but not asked to play again. If a player is already on the team but is causing additional problems due to conflicts with the team philosophy of play, an inability to 'fit in,' or a lack of commitment, he is confronted and asked to conform or leave the team, or not asked to return the following year. This allows the rest of the team to maintain the appearance of 'fun' and egalitarianism while excluding players, thereby allowing them to continue to claim that, "we've never kicked anyone off the team." This eliminates players without requiring anyone to explicitly say to another player, "You're off the team."

3.4 Summary

It seems obvious that despite repeated assertions by key players that they have "never kicked anyone off the team" this did take place the year before with Shawn. The question is: Why do the men on the team continue to say that they have never kicked anyone off the team despite the fact that this had indeed occurred? It seems that there are certain implications involved if this is openly accepted and such implications contrast with important values that are reiterated and reinforced through the playing experience. By maintaining this claim, significant ideas about slow pitch are preserved. The appearance of voluntary participation, both in terms of choosing to play on the team in the first place and choosing to continue to play after one becomes a member, is reinforced despite the selection procedure that takes place in terms of informal recruiting and in the appraisal of potential players. Also, if the team accepts that players are kicked off the team, ostensibly for not being skilled enough, the implication is that the competitive

nature of the sport is what is most important. By continuing the original claim, the men on the team are able to reinforce the overt emphasis placed on 'fun' and participation in slow pitch even when this may not always be the case.

The relationships developed on the team are partially constrained by the way in which players are recruited, selected and excluded. Inequalities on the team and internal competition or rivalry, as well as the obligations linked to commitment, also challenge notions of friendship. As such, neither the discourse nor the social relations of friendship construct a completely unified group, as conflict and inequity remain an element of each team. Nevertheless, friendships on the team are maintained and reaffirmed by being part of the group. Team relations that are constructed by drawing on key symbols of equality and bonding contribute to the establishment of group unity. Part of this process is the informal, yet systematic, manner in which potential members are selected and recruited according to their ability to match team requirements, and the way in which unsuitable members are subsequently excluded. The process is essential for the pursuit of success on the field by ensuring that potential players are able to contribute to the team in terms of playing ability. Additionally, the subtlety and informality involved allow the players to assert more a positive and egalitarian significance that contributes to the form of friendship that comes into play once someone is accepted as a team member.

Additionally, team membership is itself constrained by the specific traits and various criteria that are deemed essential to group acceptance. As such, there is a very efficient, though largely informal, process of inclusion and exclusion involved in choosing potential teammates, and thus friends. Since this relationship exists within, and is dependent upon, common membership on the team, the immediacy of the social

interaction disappears when a player leaves. Messner (1992: 126) further adds that when a professional athlete retires or is cut from the team, it is common for him to be treated as a non-person by his former teammates and that such seemingly cold-hearted treatment is less a reflection of the superficiality of such friendship on the team than it is a manifestation of the career insecurities that such players must constantly deal with. Similarly, Curry (1991: 127) stresses that the social bonding that takes place on a team requires constant maintenance through competition, and injured athletes may find that this bond suffers if they cannot participate fully in the sport or other activities around which the interaction is centered.

A similar situation exists for a recreational sports team such as Molson's but, because of its emphasis on the social aspects of slow pitch, it is not the same. Since the unique friendship developed as a member of the team is defined by playing alongside one another as teammates, the nature of the relationship changes when this ends as the immediacy of the situation is no longer the same. Nonetheless, while the team friendship is in place players are able to receive both material and emotionally salient benefits from the relationship, whether or not that continues after a player leaves the team.

Chapter 4
Competition

"I know we're down here for fun, but it's a lot more fun when we win"
(Chuck, comment made after game, July 2, 2002)

4.1 Playing Slow Pitch

Many of the rules and strategies, the positioning and roles of the players, and the flow of slow pitch are similar to baseball, from which the game is ultimately derived. In the early years of slow pitch softball the ball was thrown underhand to the batter and was allowed to reach a height of anywhere between three and ten feet off the ground.[15] Currently the ball must be pitched so that it reaches an arc of at least six feet and no higher than twelve feet. As it is much easier to hit the ball when it is pitched in this manner, there is a tenth defensive player on the field instead of the nine used in baseball and fast pitch. This additional player is often situated in a position on the field, such as shallow outfield, designed to minimize the chances that a batter can deliberately and safely hit the ball to that area. The rules also allow all players who are on the roster to bat in a game.

For the most part, official SPN rules are followed for the Caribou leagues - with far greater flexibility in the Newtel and Country Ribbon leagues, which did not use official umpires. The umpires in both the A and B leagues are players who had taken a training course provided by Slo-Pitch National. Officially, the umpires in the B league, in which I played, were to follow the rules spelled out by SPN. In effect, while umpires are supposed to enforce the official rules, they are sometimes selective in doing so. The strike

[15] For example, see: "High school girls' teams are enjoying "slow pitch" softball," *The Evening Telegram*, September 28, 1979, p.15.

zone for the batter was ostensibly the area over home plate from the batter's knees to his shoulders, though there was some flexibility according to the umpire's discretion that was occasionally cause for comments by players. Players sometimes challenge the height of the pitch as well, complaining that pitches are either too high or too low. Bunting and stealing bases are prohibited, and a batter who hits a foul ball with two strikes is called out.

The games are seven innings in length, allowing them to be played within the hour and fifteen minutes allowed by the schedule. There is also a rule that limits each team to scoring a maximum of five runs per inning for the first six innings of the game. In the seventh inning, this limit is abandoned and both teams are allowed to score as many runs as they can before three outs are made. This is referred to as the "open inning." The explanation given for this rule is that it keeps the game closer for a longer period of time, particularly if one team is of significantly higher ability than the other, by keeping a team from running away with the game in the early innings. This rule changes the complexion of the game as specific strategies come into play throughout the game to prevent the fifth run from scoring in an inning. It also preserves the time constraints of the game, as less time is required to complete an inning.

A mercy rule is invoked after a specific inning if one team is ahead of the other by a predetermined number of runs, deemed too large a deficit to be overcome by the losing team in the time remaining. At the Caribou Complex, the run difference required for a 'mercy' was twelve runs after five complete innings (or four and a half if the home team is winning). This rule, too, helps to limit the time required to complete a game and also limits the extent to which one team can beat another.

One of the greatest areas of flexibility is related to the number of players required in order for a team to play. While ten players are required to field a complete team, teams are often allowed to play with only nine, thereby eliminating the extra outfielder position. In the Caribou Complex leagues, teams are allowed to play if they have at least eight players. This reflects the difficulty that many teams have in ensuring that their players are able to attend the games when they must compete for time with work commitments, family responsibilities, and other leisure activities. It also reduces the number of games that a team might have to forfeit due to a lack of players.

When this occurs, the team often plays with only three outfielders, and their opponent provides someone to play the catcher position for them. This is an interesting situation as an opposing player is playing a defensive position against his own teammates. When this situation arose, a discussion takes place about the responsibilities of the 'catcher' in this situation. Most often, his primary role is to retrieve the ball after it is pitched and throw it back to the pitcher. He is not expected to catch any fly-balls hit by the batter (his teammate) within his vicinity and I observed a number of occasions in which the player stood perfectly still while the ball dropped only a few feet away or stepped out of the way when it was coming towards him. Similarly, if the ball is hit to the outfield, the catcher is absolved of any responsibility to catch the ball at home plate and one of the other team's infielders must run in to catch any throws.

The largest dilemma in this situation came with infield hits, when a runner was trying to score from third base. In some instances, the catcher was expected to stand on the plate and catch the throw, giving him the responsibility of preventing his own team from scoring a run. Often, the catcher is not required to move while catching the ball -

neither if it is a bad throw nor to pick up the ball if it goes by him - putting the pressure on the infielders to make a perfect throw in order to get the runner out. This rule was also applied once for balls hit to the outfield though the catcher was surprised when someone threw him the ball and he missed it, allowing his team to score another two runs. In still other instances, the catcher is not required to make any play at all, other than returning the ball to the pitcher, and would simply remove himself from the immediate area if the ball were hit. If the men on the team that was lacking players forgot to run in to cover this position, their opponents took advantage of it to score runs at will.

There is also some flexibility when players either arrive at the game late or have to leave early. When a player arrives late, his name is added to the bottom of the line-up and he immediately enters the game, is able to take up a position on the field, and bats when his spot in the order comes around. When a player has to leave the game early, his name is simply crossed off of the list with no penalty to the team and his spot is skipped in the batting order. As one player described it to me: "It's only a game of ball. You can't make buddy stay if he's got somewhere else to go."

In essence, slow pitch is primarily a hitting and fielding sport in which the importance of pitching is significantly decreased, though not entirely absent. 'Place-hitting' (the ability of the batter to intentionally hit the ball to a specific spot in the field) and fielding skills are considerably important since the ball is much easier to hit and is put in play by almost every batter. The fact that the ball is moving slower when it is pitched means that it also does not move as quickly when hit, making it nominally easier to complete defensive plays. Since the pitcher can do little to limit the abilities of the batter, the emphasis remains on hitting the ball and high scores often characterize slow pitch

games. It is often the power hitters, especially those who hit home runs, who are celebrated the most within the game as it takes added strength and skill to hit the softer, slower-moving ball great distances.[16] The structure of slow pitch also allows a wider variety of people to play. Players of diverse ages, experience and backgrounds, as well as both genders, play slow pitch at both the competitive and recreational levels in St. John's and across Canada.

4.2 Fun and Competition in Recreational Slow Pitch Softball

When I asked players why they play slow pitch, and what they get out of playing, I received an array of answers, such as: getting some exercise, enjoying a game of ball, getting out of the house, because it's fun, for the competition, for the camaraderie, having a couple of beers, and having a few laughs. Discourses of fun and competition permeate the experience of slow pitch softball, as expressed by the men in my research, in terms of their reasons for participation, the benefits derived from playing, the construction of meaning within the sport, and the place that the sport occupies in their lives. While players utilize, negotiate and discuss what it means to be competitive in slow pitch, they are at the same time - sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly - commenting on the meaning and importance of fun, and vice versa. I suggest that this relationship can be applied not only to slow pitch, but also to recreational forms of sport in general.

In a recreational context, offered by some of these men as an alternative to more competitive leagues, winning has very little direct outcome for the players beyond the sporting environment in which it takes place. There is very little material benefit in the

[16] For an interesting discussion of the skills and strategies involved in hitting the ball in slow pitch softball see Joe Carriero's (1984) instructional booklet. He discusses some of the physical and mental aspects of the game that are unique to slow pitch, and includes a small section on making the transition from fast pitch.

form of prizes or money, there is little or no recognition in the wider society in which the league is situated, and there is little coverage in the local media such that the status and significance of the event remains within the 'community' constituted by the league, the teams and the players themselves. Players contrast the "recreational" aspect of their league with professional athletes, making comments such as "We're not getting paid to play," or "I'm not getting paid millions of dollars to play slow pitch." Instead, these men are actually paying league fees in order to play. In this manner they stress their participation in slow pitch as a voluntary leisure activity, undertaken for enjoyment rather than material or financial benefits, in conjunction with other aspects of their lives. Nevertheless, when the game is underway, the players still want to win.[17]

Players often compare slow pitch softball to the fast pitch form of the sport. The attraction to each have sometimes been described in terms of what differentiates the two, with fast pitch being associated with a more competitive ethos and slow pitch focusing primarily on participation and enjoyment. It appears that a bias continues to exist in some softball circles suggesting a preference for fast pitch over slow pitch, often accompanied by a portrayal of the latter as a 'lesser' form of the sport. When the St. John's Masters Slo-Pitch League began, for example, "other athletes, especially fastpitch players, laughed at slo-pitch softball" (Don Power, "Silver lining in the sand: Masters slo-pitch leagues celebrate 25th anniversaries this summer, *The Express*, July 10-16, 2002, p. 25). As at is in Cornwall, Ontario (Murray 1991: 106), fast pitch is generally regarded by both

[17] Thomas Dunk (1991) makes a similar observation regarding lob-ball in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He notes that, while the game is made easier to play, the games are still competitive, the players still hope to win, and decisions made by umpires that may affect their team's chances for victory are still hotly contested (Dunk 1991: 71). Gradations in skill levels are recognized amongst teams and individuals in terms of the differences in competitiveness and seriousness with which players approach the game.

media and spectators in St. John's as being a more challenging form of softball. Players gain public status as a result of their participation and success in the local fast pitch leagues, reinforced through local media coverage. In this sense, Murray (1991: 106) argues that, "the media has the potential to create an image of the preferred form of the game of softball," as well as to celebrate its skilled players as 'heroes.' This holds true for St. John's. While slow pitch is occasionally discussed in one of the local newspapers, browsing through the various sports sections on a daily basis quickly reveals that the fast pitch leagues receive far more extensive coverage in terms of articles, photos, scores, and recognition of the athletes. Connected early in its Newfoundland development to aging fast pitch and baseball players unable to continue to compete at the levels required by their original sport, but who wanted to continue to play, it appears that the notion continues that slow pitch is a lower-status game linked to age, inability and alcohol.

The leisurely aspect of the regular league game is also compared with the heightened levels of emotion and competitiveness in both league playoffs ("We're not serious now, but that'll change in the playoffs") and in tournaments ("There's no need to play like that, it's not a national tournament"), where the outcome has a much more immediate impact on the players. An additional aspect of the recreational league is that it is believed to hold little significance for anyone other then the players themselves, largely because of the level of play, which was one of the explanations given to me for the reason why few people came to watch their games.

Emphases on fun, enjoyment, participation and social interaction are held to be as important as skill development, physical activity, competition and the outcome of the contest for the men in my research. The approach taken by a team in recreational sport

will vary between sports, between leagues, between teams in the same league, and even between players on the same team. While some players and teams may be focused on winning league championships, on increasing overall skill and moving up to higher levels of play, or on competing in local, provincial or national tournaments, other teams and players spend as much time stressing social activities involving team members, enjoying oneself while playing, and the development of meaningful relationships within the team.

Sharon Kemp (1999: 93) suggests an argument could be made that "a spirit of co-operation coexists with one of competition in all sports," though this does not necessarily involve setting one's personal aspirations aside in order to help one's opponent.[18] Recreational sport, such as slow pitch, appears to involve varying levels of social interaction amongst both teammates and opponents throughout. Despite its social component, however, winning is still held to be an important goal, particularly for those teams who have a well-established history of successful achievements, and the way that fun and competition are constructed within the game is integral to this process. The issue for those who manage and oversee such teams is to develop levels of commitment and support that will enable a team to be successful in the game while also maximizing the potential for enjoyment.

Maureen Glancy (1986: 62) notes that in organized sport success is usually identified with winning, and that winning is often the primary force that binds the members of a team together in a common purpose. As a result, the team structure and

[18] See also Allison (1981: 92), who makes the same argument in a discussion of Navajo athletes on a high school basketball team: "Competition and cooperation are fundamental processes of the sporting context . . . If there is a basic theme which should emerge, it is that competition and cooperation take on many forms; the particular form of each which is expressed is both situationally and culturally determined and specific."

strategies required for an emphasis on team performance may supersede the social and personal needs of the players, thereby reducing the possibility of developing meaningful interpersonal relationships (Glancy 1986: 62; see also, Messner 1992). However, in a study of participation on a local recreation-league softball team in the U.S., Glancy notes that "having a good time" is not directly dependent upon competitive success for the players in her research. Instead, in playing softball "for the fun of it," they are able to establish important relationships and friendships in a manner that emphasizes social values important to the group, including both a desire to win and establishing "meaningful memories" (Glancy 1986: 63, 74-75).

An important aspect of this process is the way in which the members of the team establish group goals and values in the game:

> The primary goal was not only that of playing the league schedule of games, but also having fun playing them to the best of member's abilities. Associated with the goal of playing and playing well was a goal of demonstrating ties with spouses and friends. Members also sought socializing opportunities, time they could spend with each other informally as a group, enjoying each other and sharing interests, especially softball (Glancy 1986: 71).

In this manner, players sought the opportunity to fulfill both social and competitive goals through participation on the team that enhanced their enjoyment of the activity.

The social and competitive aspects of slow pitch softball have also been discussed both in terms of internal variations and in relation to other forms of softball. Sandra Murray (1991: 134) notes, in her research on softball in Cornwall, Ontario, that fast pitch softball teams are more oriented towards competition such that team formation is a consequence of the requisite skill of the players and what they are able to contribute to the level of the team's performance in the game. Comparatively, slow pitch softball teams

are more likely to be formed in a social atmosphere. This means that team affiliation is not dependent directly upon a measure of playing ability but rather on a "measure of identity" - one joins a team with whom one has something in common and, often, with whom one has pre-existing social ties (Murray 1991: 134). While ability remains an important factor for success in slow pitch, the necessary skills are made easier by virtue of the structure of the game such that exceptional ability and technique are much less important (Murray 1991: 109). Further, Murray (1991: 109) argues that: "The basic needs being fulfilled by this form of softball are social in nature. It provides the milieu for affiliation in which people can interact socially."

Similarly, sociologists Eldon E. Snyder and Ronald Ammons (1993), writing of coed softball in the U.S., indicate that while some teams play only for recreational-leisure purposes, others pursue more competitive goals such as playing in state and national tournaments. The levels of involvement vary according to the collective philosophy of the team and the values of the team members. In their research, Snyder & Ammons (1993: 6) note that there are unwritten rules that define coed softball as less serious and more social than, in particular, all-male softball. These 'rules' govern appropriate behaviour and players are expected to "tone down" the aggressive play that they might otherwise exhibit (Snyder and Ammons 1993: 6). The social dimension was more obvious at the lower skill levels ('B', 'C') than in the higher, more serious and more competitive divisions ('A'). Thus, the emphasis on good sportsmanship and fun are characterized more by the lower divisions of the sport, whereas the higher divisions, through their greater involvement in tournament play, "incorporate the high level of seriousness that is present in formal sport" throughout North America (Snyder &

Ammons 1993: 9). Notions of fun and competition vary between different sports, between different forms of the same sport, and at different levels within the sport itself.

The negotiation and balance of fun and competition involved in slow pitch softball is important in my research in terms of the experience of the players and the ongoing development of the sport in St. John's. Both of the key organizations involved in the development of slow pitch softball in Newfoundland and Labrador - Slo-Pitch National (SPN) and Softball Newfoundland and Labrador (SNL) - make distinctions between more and less serious approaches to the game by categorizing players and teams according to their skill levels. SNL makes the distinction between 'competitive' and 'recreational' divisions, while SPN segments players and teams into a hierarchy of five general categories according to a system which rates playing ability and levels of skill.[19] At the top of this hierarchy is the A division, which represents the top level of slow pitch softball played in Canada, after which comes B, C, D, and E, respectively. The last division in this list, E, is often referred to simply as 'Rec' or 'Recreational.' As a result of these rating systems, players from higher divisions are not supposed to move down the ladder as a group in order to challenge teams of lesser ability and increase their chances of victory, though this does occasionally occur. Participation at all levels is voluntary despite the obvious structuring of slow pitch.

While local leagues may not operate under these same rating systems, players often make a distinction between the higher skilled and more competitive teams, and those that are not. The leagues run by the Caribou Complex are separated into two levels,

[19] Team ratings are based on a number of different criteria that include the ability to hit homeruns and the use of offensive and defensive 'fundamentals' of the game. Examples of such fundamentals include: utilizing the proper 'cut-off' procedures, base-running skills, situational hitting, and game strategies.

the A league and the B league, of which the former represents a higher calibre of play than the latter. While there is a general perception among some players that many of the 'A' players exhibit inflated egos as a result of the status associated with playing in a 'higher' league, in watching the games I observed games that were characterized by more homeruns, harder hit balls, and skilful defensive plays, all of which occurred on a more consistent basis that increased the overall level of play. There is also the perception that these players take the game more seriously than do others, though this may be more true of playoffs or tournaments as the atmosphere in the regular-season games were similar in terms of playfulness and levity as those I observed in other leagues. Nonetheless, as one moves up the divisions, higher levels of competitiveness and ability are required for success, and are deemed to be desirable qualities for players and teams alike.

Despite the emphasis on competitiveness at different levels of the game, many players that I spoke with cited "fun" as a primary reason for their participation. In essence, this emphasis on fun acts as both a competing and co-acting (and interacting) philosophy of slow pitch softball that challenges the notion of unfettered competition often ascribed to team sports. While the players openly state the importance of having fun while playing, and not taking the game too seriously, it is also important for them to play well and be competitive such that they desire not only to have 'a game of ball,' but also to have 'a *good* game of ball.'

Dunk (1991: 72) describes this in a similar manner, noting the necessity for players to balance notions associated with competitiveness with those of enjoyment and fun in order to conform to the general values of others who play the game:

> Generally, though, fun is the point of the whole exercise. Anyone who takes the competitive element of these games too seriously is frowned upon. There is an unwritten, but nonetheless understood, set of rules governing appropriate behaviour. Efforts are made to avoid body contact in, for example, close plays at home plate or first base; one does not express disappointment too strongly over an error or when striking out; and one does not publicly criticize other people's play. These rules are frequently transgressed. The only means of enforcing them is through ostracism, gossip, and name-calling. . . . The fine line between not trying hard enough and thereby ruining the competitiveness of the game, and playing more intensely then is considered appropriate and thereby lessening the fun, must be continually negotiated by the participants.

Further, Dunk (1991: 72) adds that those players who are more serious about athletics and playing competitive sport join either baseball or fast pitch leagues, or play other sports considered more demanding. Serious athletes participating in the slow pitch leagues must be openly aware of their behaviour so that they are not viewed as "prima donnas" or "showing off", "for these games are not intended to be taken too seriously, at least not if it ruins the fun for others" (Dunk 1991: 72).

In the course of my research I learned that the distinction between slow pitch and other more competitive sports is no longer as valid as it once was. Many older players believe that slow pitch is now becoming increasingly competitive as players at all levels seek continued improvement and higher levels of success at the league and tournament levels. One player told me that he thinks "fun ball is going out of it all together," particularly as younger players are now joining slow pitch leagues to play competitive sport. Nevertheless, many slow pitch teams continue to emphasize fun even as they focus on winning games. Rather than viewed as dichotomy of fun *or* competition, or a continuum with fun at one end and competition at the other, I suggest that these two notions can be viewed as interconnected and occurring simultaneously within slow pitch. I note here the distinctions made by Margaret Mead (1937/1961) in a volume exploring

elements of cooperative and competitive behaviours in societies around the world. She emphasizes that cooperation and competition are not opposites, and makes the distinction between rivalry and competition and between helpfulness and cooperation, adding that competition does not necessarily lead to conflict or cooperation to solidarity (Mead 1937/1961: 16-17, 460). Thus, no society is either exclusively competitive or cooperative.

The construction of meanings associated with fun and competition are dynamic and vary according to the context of different games, different opponents, and even different situations within the same game. They can conflict with one another, causing internal dissension on a team that contributes to the withdrawal or removal of players or to the dissolution of the team as a whole, but can also interact in such a way that the game becomes even more enjoyable to the participants as both a contest and a leisurely pursuit. Fun and competition are integral to the manner in which players interpret the game as they attempt to negotiate a relationship between these notions in many different ways according to the needs, goals, and values developed and expressed in the collective identity of the team. As the "fine line" alluded to by Dunk (1991: 72), the players must continually strike a balance between playing too intensely than is considered appropriate and thereby spoiling the fun for others, and not trying hard enough which ruins the game as a competitive contest. This occurs through the way that the men play the game, in the way that activities are enacted in and around the game, and through the language and rhetoric used to discuss and describe the game.

4.3 The Dynamics of Competition in Slow Pitch

Inevitably, the ways that meanings, values and symbols are expressed within sport are influenced by the structure of the game itself. Unlike other team sports - football, ball, rugby, soccer, and hockey, for example - baseball and softball do not involve two teams, or groups from within those teams, competing directly against one another in the space for territorial dominance while moving an object forward in order to score points.[20] Nevertheless, manifestations of competition in slow pitch do occur in terms of physical contact, language, and the structure of the game itself.

Contact occurs when players run the bases, particularly in fast pitch and baseball, as defending players use their bodies to block runners from the bag so that they can be tagged out. Additionally, runners use their bodies against defensive players in both direct and indirect means, by making light physical contact or by placing one's self in the way of a player about to throw the ball, in order to increase the chances of misplays and errors that would benefit their team.

Despite the slow movement of the ball in slow pitch, the confrontation between pitcher and batter is often conceived of and discussed in terms of a symbolic battle to control home plate similar to fast pitch and baseball. Typically, in baseball or fast pitch, pitchers assert ownership of the plate by throwing the ball at high velocity near to the batter, as a 'brush back pitch', that makes the batter more wary, while batters 'crowd' the plate, standing close to it, to make similar claims of ownership. The speed of the pitch in slow pitch makes this action rather ineffective, as batters can get easily out of the way or let the ball hit them without fear of injury, yet the pitcher-batter showdown is still

[20] For discussions of this distinction, see Shore (1996: 82-83) and Carter (2000: 84-86).

discussed in this manner as each player views the plate as an extension of their own space.

While physical contact may occur, aggression and/or physical dominance over one's opponent are not regular or integral factors in slow pitch softball. In fact, overt aggression and physical violence are considered unwanted elements in recreational slow pitch, though the discourse of dominance and competition permeates the game in other ways. While ideas about competition in slow pitch incorporate wider cultural notions about sport prevalent in the wider society, they are also manifested in ways that are related to specific beliefs about the form that such competition should take within the sport.

In addressing the metaphor of 'work' in Little League baseball, Fine (1985a) discusses behavioural and rhetorical components that are contrasted with pure play and fun. These include, seriousness (the belief that the game "matters"), continual focus and non-distraction, emotional intensity, and the presence and handling of injuries. I suggest that the metaphor of work as described by Fine (1985a) is linked to ideas about competition in slow pitch as constructed and expressed by the Molson's players in various ways. Sometimes these ideas are openly talked about and discussed by the participants in order to achieve a general consensus in team play, other times they are enacted and embodied in the play of the game itself, and still other times they emerged indirectly as the players interact at the games. 'Competition' in this context carries with it an array of meanings that is often played out in the game, but in its simplest form is defined by these men as playing in a certain way because one desires to win the game. Here I explore some of the ways that competition is manifested, negotiated, and displayed

by discussing the rules, umpires, notions of 'dominance' and 'mercy', and physical aggression.

4.3.1 Rules

Some rules are designed to minimize the amount of physical contact in the game of slow pitch. In this particular league, rather than touching home plate to score a run, the runner must cross a scoring line drawn in the dirt at a right angle to the third-base line, from home plate to the backstop fence. Since the catcher must stand on the home plate to receive the throw and put the runner out, physical contact in the form of collisions or being hit by the catcher's glove are limited. In other leagues, a second home plate, located in foul territory approximately halfway between home plate and the fence along the third-base side of the field, is used for the same reason. While contact continues to occur, most often at other bases, the chances are lessened at home plate. This is significant as it is often here where the most violent physical contact can occur as scoring a run, or preventing a run from scoring, may directly impact the outcome of the game and can be accompanied by heightened emotions for the players involved.

A 'safety-bag' or 'double-base' is used at first base. This is a base that is twice as long as a normal base, with one half being white and the other a bright orange. The orange section rests in foul territory and must be touched by any batter who is running to first base after hitting the ball, unless the ball is hit to the outfield. The runner is supposed to be called out immediately by the umpire if he lands on the white half when a throw to first is expected, though this did not always occur. The orange section serves the purpose of separating the runner and the first baseman, as the fielder must touch the white half of the base when catching the ball. If the fielder touches the orange half, the runner

is called safe. After reaching first base successfully, the orange section is no longer used and the runner must then stand on the white half or risk being called out for being off the base. By separating the two players as they converge on the base, this serves to minimize physical contact, though collisions do occur and runners may still be tagged out by the first-baseman, with ball in glove, if need be.

In addition to league rules, both SNL and SPN include guidelines in their official rulebooks designed to define appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and physical contact within the game.[21] While imperfect, as such contact and interference does occur, these rules contribute to what Bruce Kidd (1990: 42) refers to, in a description of changes made in a community softball league in his own neighbourhood, as "redefining the rules and values of sports to make them more inviting to everybody." Amending rules to make games safer, more accessible, and educative may involve tradeoffs in terms of other aspects of the sport, and Kidd (1990: 42) notes with some regret that this same softball league also discourages runners from sliding into the bases in order to further reduce physical contact.

While sliding was neither openly discouraged nor banned outright, as it is in other leagues in the city, there appears to be an informal understanding in the Caribou Complex leagues against sliding, as it was much more the exception than the rule in base running. This is not due to a lack of necessary skills as no Molson's player (other than myself) slid more than a couple of times throughout the entire season, and many did not slide at all,

[21] Such rules include calling a player out for physically or verbally interfering with a fielder who is attempting to make a defensive play; for loud and excessive profanity directed at opposing players or the umpire; and, for deliberately running into an opposing player. See: *Official Slo-Pitch Rules, 2002*, Slo-Pitch National Softball Inc.; *SNL Handbook 2002*, Softball Newfoundland and Labrador).

despite having both the knowledge and ability to do so. This was common throughout the league as the majority of players chose to go into each base standing up, which often results in runners dancing about in an attempt to avoid being tagged out, or stopping altogether and allowing oneself to be tagged easily. This was justified by the players in terms of not wanting to injure themselves, which appears to make some sense as I observed a few such injuries, though these looked to be the result of improper technique rather than from any inherent risk of sliding.

An additional explanation by players suggested that some viewed sliding as either "showing off" or taking the game too seriously. Nonetheless, these formal and informal rules serve to "reduce the premium on physical dominance" within slow pitch softball while maintaining a competitive element and, in doing so, add to the ongoing discussion concerning the nature of sport that may challenge the predominantly confrontational and/or violent view of male team sports (Kidd 1990: 42-43).

At the same time, players still attempt to circumvent the rules. Line-drives or pop-ups that would normally have been caught were intentionally dropped in an attempt to confuse the runners and get two outs instead of one; infielders standing near a base would pretend to catch the ball and apply a tag to a runner in order to have him stop, slow down, or slide unnecessarily.[22] In another instance, Eli, from Molson's, was bumped by the third-baseman while he was running to third base after a hit by another player. Eli was quite upset about the incident and showed his disapproval by jogging home, all the

[22] The 'fake tag' is considered a form of obstruction and violates the official SPN rules which allow an umpire to eject a player from the game for such an act. Though I observed this action being taken, and opposing players complaining about it to the umpire, no player was ever ejected from the game for applying a fake tag during the course of this research.

while making comments to both the offending player and to the umpire (who Eli thought should have made an 'obstruction' call and automatically allowed Eli to score), so that he was put out by the other team who by this time had retrieved the ball and thrown it to the catcher at home plate. Eli's disapprobation continued in the dugout afterwards as he angrily discussed the incident with some of his teammates.

In this case, the contact was minor and there is no way of knowing whether the opposing player had done so intentionally. Yet, from other instances and the ensuing protestations, it appears that inadvertently placing oneself into the path of a base runner, whether or not physical contact occurs, is occasionally used as a strategy to attempt to slow the runner down as he advances to the next base. This can be viewed less as an overt violation of the rules, but rather as constituting an unofficial, though known, means of circumventing these rules that violates them only when done incorrectly (i.e., when contact is actually made).

4.3.2 Umpires

The role of umpires in slow pitch also affects the dynamic manner in which competitiveness is manifested. One aspect of this emerges when players challenge an umpire's calls, or lack thereof. Such a confrontation is considered acceptable only so far as it remains a discussion, albeit one that may be emotionally charged, and does not become verbally or physically abusive. Angry confrontations occur only infrequently as they are actively discouraged by players, umpires and league organizers alike. More often, players take the opportunity to discuss calls made by the umpire in a very low-key manner, simply inquiring about the rationale behind the decision, making jokes, or making quick, brusque comments that are not continued for very long afterwards.

The use of humour is a common technique for questioning the umpire's decision, as when players make comments in a light hearted and joking manner that the wrong call was made (For example: "Are you sure you're watching the same game as the rest of us?"; "If that's a strike, than I'm a mainlander"; "Have another beer, b'y"). At other times, the umpire's judgement is questioned and players request additional explanation on the part of the umpire, or an argument ensues in a more direct and emotional manner from the belief that the umpire erred in his call, failed to make a call when one was required, misinterpreted a rule or was unaware of the rule governing the incident in question.

The umpires in the Caribou Complex leagues have all undergone training in a course provided by SPN. While they occasionally wear a hat, t-shirt, or other clothing that identifies them with SPN, they are usually clothed in a manner similar to the players, in loose fitting athletic wear of various types rather than uniforms of any kind. Moreover, most of the umpires also play in one of the local leagues as players and are known personally by the players in both roles. The social relationship that exists extends beyond umpire-player to common participation in the 'community' of the league's ballplayers. Comments were made by players that accepted mistakes by umpires, noting that they are doing the best they can and allowed for a margin of error in their decisions.

At the same time, the rules must still be interpreted and enforced properly and arguing with the umpire may remind him of this for future reference. Thus, arguments are not always for the purpose of having a call altered, or even out of anger and outrage, but may be a means of letting the umpire know that a mistake was made or to inform him of an applicable rule for the next time such a situation occurs. Frank, who admitted to arguing with both softball umpires and referees in his recreational hockey league,

explained to me that he did so in a rather specific manner, and for a particular reason: "I'm not bawling and screaming at him, but I'm talking to him, and maybe it's not going to get you anywhere anyway, but I'm just letting him know, I guess, that next time maybe, he'll make the right call." He adds that this is particularly important as the umpires, or referees, who officiate 'recreational' leagues may not know all the rules. While he admits that he may occasionally "go off his head" and lose control, he asserts that it is a temporary reaction related to competitiveness. Due to its temporary nature, Frank downplays its significance: "It doesn't really matter and you don't care afterwards. It's all part of being competitive, I suppose."

Other players who emphasized the fleeting nature of such a reaction expressed similar sentiments to me. They believe that comments are made within the immediate context of the game and should not lead to lingering anger or resentment by either players or umpires when the game ends. Players also voice their displeasure in a more indirect manner, by talking amongst themselves but doing so loudly enough that the umpire is able to overhear them. When confronted, they are able to protest the innocence of their act by pointing out that they were speaking to one another, and not to the umpire at all. Larson (1988: 117) notes the same sort of indirect verbal strategy in her own research.

Umpires allow a certain amount of disagreement with their decisions, but move quickly to put an end to confrontations that become abusive in the interests of maintaining their authority and control over the game. "We have to stop it before it starts," one umpire explained to me after being involved in an incident in which both teams were vocally challenging his calls of balls and strikes. "We can't let it go or there will be trouble." This appears to be a direct consequence of the umpire's role in the game, and

the authority connected to and dependant upon that position, such that umpires must maintain control even when a mistake is made.

This can be compared to the Newtel league in which official umpires, formally trained in the rules, are not used. Instead, a player from the team currently batting fills the umpire position. This means that the 'umpire' is making decisions that directly affect his team's chances of success. While certain players show a tendency to assume the umpire role when given the chance, a number of different men from both teams will end up umpiring at one time or another throughout the course of the game. In this league the umpire's decision is more flexible, and often takes into consideration what the players on the field (including the other team) might have seen. Care also seems to be taken to minimize bias towards one's own team by making decisions in some instances that favour opponents. Mistaken calls were more often the source of additional joking at the umpire's expense, directed at him from both teams, and were overturned more often which appeared to eliminate direct emotional confrontations between umpires and players.

Joking and using indirect means of challenging the umpires contributes to a competitive atmosphere that incorporates both an emphasis on winning signalled by the players' concerns about umpires' decisions as it may affect the outcome of the game, and a relaxation of competitive norms that allows a greater flexibility in the manner that this ethos is expressed and defined. It appears as though, as the role of the umpire becomes increasingly removed from the players in social terms, and as their position becomes increasingly institutionalized and professionalized, that the challenges to their authority subsequently increase. This appears to result from less social relations outside of the

immediate game and a more rigid idea of the role of the umpire within the game defined by the rules, their interpretation and application of those rules, and the expectations of the players regarding this responsibility.

While the institutionalization of umpires in the game as a professional group may contribute to a formalization of slow pitch, ensuring a common experience for players based on uniform application of the requisite rules, it also creates a form of the game that is less flexible and more dependent on the authority of the umpires themselves. Thus, a belief that this authority is being abused, or that blatant errors are being made, results in players challenging the umpires to live up to their responsibility.

4.3.3 Dominance and Mercy

In slow pitch, dominance over one's opponent is primarily shown by defeating the other team by a large number of runs and through the display of hitting homeruns, which are associated with idealized notions of masculinity such as power and strength.[23] This can be accomplished by either a nonchalant attitude that signals a lack of concern for the abilities of other teams or an aggressive, overly competitive attitude that demands victory at all costs. Interestingly, there also exists the belief that a game characterized by too many homeruns can be interpreted as uncompetitive, as detracting from the other elements of the game enjoyed by the players.

The 'mercy rule', whereby the game is automatically ended if one team is winning by a predetermined number of runs after the fifth inning, deemed to be an insurmountable

[23] Klein (2000: 75) notes the relationship between hitting homeruns and masculinity, and describes some of the associated behaviours for both Mexican and American baseball players on a team that plays on both sides of the Mexico-U.S. border. Shore (1996: 88) argues that an important meaning of the homerun in baseball is a representation of "the possibility of heroic action momentarily overcoming the game itself." Carter (2000: 86) claims that the homerun "is the ultimate triumph of the individual."

lead, provides an apt example of the ambiguity that surrounds such discourse. On one hand, it appears to represent a benevolent attitude: the game is ended because the losing team has little or no possibility of winning, thus sparing them the additional embarrassment and shame of losing by an even greater run differential; they are shown 'mercy' and compassion for their situation. There is also a functional aspect in that it preserves the time constraints placed on the games, important for leisure activities that must be played in a specified time frame.

On the other hand, this rule also implies a more dominating notion in which the losing team is forced to beg for mercy and explicitly recognize the superiority of the other team. By expressing a desire to defeat a team badly enough to invoke the mercy rule, players are able to indicate the desire to humiliate and dominate their opponent. Upon learning that one's opponents are at the bottom of the league's standings, players may encourage their teammates to mercy the team (suggesting that there is very little that their opponents can do to prevent it) and get the games over with quickly.

What is recognized in a game in which one team is clearly overpowering the other is that the competitive component must be redefined in relation to a clear inequality in ability. After his team had mercied their opponents in both games of the night, one player commented to me that "Sometimes you don't want to play seven innings. Sometimes five innings is enough." He explained further that games in which one team dominates another are not enjoyable for either team, as the competitive aspect is nearly absent, and players find other ways to have fun while seeking to end the game as quickly as possible.

An overt display of dominance over one's opponents is considered to be unsportsmanlike, and may raise the ire of the losing team. This occurred in our final

game of the season, in which the team that would win the championship soundly beat us. As it became apparent that we were going to be eliminated from the playoffs, one of my team-mates attempted to throw the ball at one of our opponents as he ran to second base. He missed, and the runner ended up advancing to third base as a result. While comments and jokes were made about the incident afterwards, with little real disapproval, some of the other players expressed some measure of disapproval in private conversation. At the same time, the other players, including myself, understood his reaction as similar feelings of resentment were expressed towards our opponents as they continued to run up the score, take extra bases, accept walks on four straight pitches[24], and play very aggressively despite having the game well in hand and most certainly assured a victory at that point.

What was deemed to be "poor sportsmanship" on the part of our opponents, for openly asserting their dominance over our team, prompted an attempt to "teach them a lesson" through an unsportsmanlike act of our own. It seems that their aggressive mode of play, at a point in the game when victory was at hand, is an example of "playing more intensely than is considered appropriate and thereby lessening the fun" for the other participants (Dunk 199: 72) who were, in this instance, my own team-mates. This led to the characterization of our opponents as "arseholes," resulting from both their style of play in this particular instance and past examples that the players made reference to in the weeks that followed.

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[24] As there is a general disinclination towards walking, some players who have a three ball/no strike count will swing the bat weakly when the fourth pitch is also going to be a ball. Known as a 'courtesy swing', this allows the pitcher another chance to throw a strike, while also signalling a reluctance to accept a bases-on-balls. Walking on four straight pitches, without so much as a courtesy swing, is often interpreted as being overly competitive.

4.3.4 Aggression and Physicality

A serious incident occurred in the deciding game of the league championship series for the 'B' league that was the only such occurrence that I observed during my research. A player was ejected from the game for intentionally making contact with an opposing player (by running into him) in what appeared to be a particularly aggressive and violent act, deemed as such by the umpires officiating the game.

After an initial throwing error, the player found himself jostling and bumping the first-baseman, shoulder to shoulder, as he attempted to turn to the left to advance to second base, and as the fielder attempted to turn to the right so as to retrieve the ball lying beside the chain-link fence surrounding the playing field. After reaching second base safely, the player then proceeds to jump and move about, both taunting the first-baseman (who had by now picked up the ball) and waiting to see where the ball was going to be thrown next. Finally, he takes off in a mad dash to third base. The ball is thrown across the infield to the third-baseman, who must step off the base in order to make the catch. As he is doing so, the runner lunges forward and collides with him just a few feet from the bag, sending the third-baseman reeling head over heels backwards. After scrambling to the base on his hands and knees, thinking that he was safe since the ball had been dropped in the collision, the runner is quickly called out by one of the umpires. After a brief discussion with the other umpire, the player is ejected from the game for "intent to injure" and must leave the playing field immediately before the game is allowed to proceed. Luckily, no injury resulted from the collision and the third-baseman regains his composure enough to resume his position.

The runner reacts angrily and one of his teammates joins him to argue with the umpires and find out why he had been kicked out of the game. The rest of the team is yelling from the dugout, which elicits a similar response from the defending team on the field. As the runner and his teammate continue discussions with the umpires, eliciting an explanation for the decision, the first-baseman is clearly upset and yells across the diamond at them: "There's no need for that shit! He tried to run me over! There's guys down here with families and jobs!" After a few more minutes of talk, the runner, also clearly upset, grabs his equipment from the dugout and exits the playing field, watching the remainder of the game standing on the benches immediately behind home plate.

The emotional level remains high for both teams for the next two innings, as they taunt and jeer at one another after each successful hit by the team at bat or successful catch made by the team in the field, and cheering when an error is made by their opponents. Attempts were also made to influence play using language as a medium (cf., Larson 1988) by yelling "He's going to throw it away" or "He's going to drop it" when an opponent was fielding a ball. This intensified level of competitive behaviour eventually diminishes and the final few innings proceed as any other - jokes and laughter re-emerge on both teams, and the interaction between the teams no longer bears any explicit resentment. The game, in the end, has an exciting finish, as the league champion is decided in extra innings by a single run.

More serious than any other incident that I observed, it was summarily dealt with by the umpires as a violation of the rules that prohibit intentional physical contact between players. More often than not, physical contact occurred unintentionally and those involved would apologize to one another, help each other up, shake hands, slap

each other on the back or shoulder, make sure that each was uninjured, and otherwise reassert to one another that there was no intent to cause injury. Further, players from both teams would express concern when a player from either side appeared to be injured.

The dynamic that exists in slow pitch between the desire to win games on the one hand, and an emphasis on 'playing' or having fun on the other hand, involves more than an adversarial relationship with one's opponents and cooperation amongst team-mates. It also involves a level of cooperation and social relations between the two teams themselves. When this cooperative play is transgressed, as in overly competitive behaviour that manifests itself in physical aggressiveness, it is dealt with, if not by the umpires, by the players themselves who must reassert the non-serious aspect of the game - as "just a game."

It is notable that the anger and emotional response generated by the aggressive (and violent) play discussed above is expressed in terms of the 'everyday' lives of the players. Notably, the first-baseman involved in the incident offers this as an antithesis to the game underway. A rejection of this form of play is characterized not only by its place within the game, as unsportsmanlike or against the rules, but also by its negative effects outside the game: One's participation in slow pitch should not jeopardize the more meaningful spaces in the players' lives, i.e., their jobs and their relationships with their families. Despite being very much embedded in the lives of the players, it is also separated by them from other aspects of their lives as a bounded and distinct domain with context-specific meaning that, ideally, should not interfere with their daily lives.

4.4 Summary

Players negotiate the meaning of competitive behaviour in slow pitch softball in numerous ways: They talk about past examples of inappropriate physical or verbal behaviour deemed to be "more than just being competitive"; they draw comparisons to other sports and activities in which they are or have been involved, such as recreational hockey or fast pitch; and, they discuss the traits of specific players who exhibit ideal or inappropriate behaviour in the game. At one point, while discussing someone well known to some of the Molson's players ("Off the ice he's a nice guy, but as soon as he steps onto the ice he turns into an arsehole"), Chuck turns to me and asks why it is that this happens. "Because," he tells me, "as soon as you keep score, it's no longer recreational. Fun hockey comes out of it altogether."

Competitiveness is an essential component of the way that the players play slow pitch such that it is not, in and of itself, valued negatively. It becomes a negative attribute when it overrides all notions of fun and enjoyment for the other players on the team and even for one's opponents: Not when a game is taken seriously, but when it is taken *too* seriously. It is important to play the game competitively, but not to openly express this in any manner that may be misconstrued as taking this seriousness too far - playing to win, but doing so in a way that continues to emphasize fun as the primary element of the game. Some players use terms such as "psycho" and "over the edge" to refer to those men who took the game far too seriously for their liking. This was most often accompanied by a short example in which a player had become excessively angry, yelled at others, made decisions that excluded members of the team (such as benching poor players) or otherwise allowed winning the game to override its enjoyment by others. By engaging in

conversations about these kinds of players, the men are able to transmit those values and ideas associated with playing slow pitch in an appropriate manner.

The notion of 'competition' as expressed and embodied by the men in my research was neither a single definition shared by all, nor was it static. Instead, ideas about competitiveness are flexible and dynamic - constructed, manipulated, shaped and reshaped within the context and circumstances of the game's activities by the men individually as players, and collectively as a team. The men are very much concerned with developing a collective understanding of the boundaries of acceptable competitive behaviour in relation to the context of the game and the needs of the individual players.

Further, fun and competition are intertwined in this process such that the notion of 'fun', as another key element in slow pitch, can be viewed as part of its competitive element and vice versa. At times fun is invoked in order to challenge and defuse an aggressively competitive approach; at times competition is invoked to keep the minds of the players on the task at hand, the game, when it appears that secondary interests may be interfering. And, while they are sometimes offered as competing discourses, they also interact and combine together in such a way that competition as fun - and fun as competition - are also expressed.

Chapter 5
Fun

"I know that you want to win, but let's have fun."
(Eli, Interview, October 18, 2002)

5.1 Having Fun and Enjoying Yourself

The players emphasize a more playful and less competitive aspect of the game that values participation and social interaction for all team members. I refer to this as a discourse of 'fun'. The symbolic significance of fun and enjoyment in relation to notions of competitiveness is manifested through the use of specific discourse and its embodiment in non-serious play within the game. It is suggested in the comment made to me after I had returned from playing in a national tournament in Quebec, where my team lost all five games played: "Did you have fun? As long as you have fun, that's all that matters." Similarly, Eli confided to me that he had encountered some difficulties with his mixed team at the 2002 provincial tournament due to their overly competitive approach to the game: They were "too serious and didn't have any fun." He was finally forced to come right out and tell them, "I know that you like to win, but let's have fun." Despite winning the tournament, Eli asserted that he did not have fun and planned to forego playing with them in the 2003 tourney for a weekend of golf and drinking with one of his league teams.

The discourse of fun is not always limited to one's teammates but is also extended to include one's opponents, as both teams must agree to play the game in a manner that is understood to be enjoyable. As part of this process, the league is conceived of as a 'community' of sorts, with social interaction and familiarity resulting from both the

games and the activities that surround the games. In so doing, this challenges the confrontational, adversarial, aggressive competitiveness often associated with male team sports. Although competition remains important, so too is cooperation as far as it is required to ensure mutual satisfaction and enjoyment for both teams, and players take care to emphasize fun as the primary reason to play slow pitch.

Throughout the course of my research, players often expressed an aversion to getting on base from a 'walk' in terms of gender.[25] Walking was associated with weakness, inability, and effeminacy. However, part of the discontent with bases-on-balls was also linked to notions of overly competitive behaviour; that a player who openly displayed a preference for walking was taking the game much more seriously than was warranted for a recreational league, in which non-seriousness is emphasized by players. This also violated ideas about playing slow pitch in Newfoundland that contrasted with the more competitive play associated with teams from mainland Canada. That is, such a player violates a mutual agreement among the participants to "play" and signals the importance of winning over and above that of fun and enjoyment.[26]

Players also decry acts of violence that threaten the health of other players (e.g., a baserunner intentionally sliding into the second baseman) as a manifestation of competitiveness that is undesired in slow pitch. Playing the game in this fashion suggests an implicit agreement among teams to compete with one another but in a mutually acceptable fashion that minimizes the intentionally aggressive infliction of injury that

[25] When a player shows an open willingness to accept a walk he is often openly taunted and teased in a joking manner by his teammates. This includes such comments as, "Where's your purse?", "A walk? I've got a skirt in here. Do you want it?", and "You pussy! I would've taken one swing at least." All of these associate walking with stereotypically feminine qualities and, as a form of symbolic inversion, suggest that men who accept walks and do not hit the ball are actually women.

[26] My thanks to Dr. Louis Chiaramonte for this observation.

might have repercussions in the daily lives of the players. Respect for one's opponent is one element of this, as is recognizing and appreciating the skills and abilities displayed by players on the other team. This is sometimes more of an ideal than a reality, yet the discourse of fun, cooperation and enjoyment reflects this ideal.

In this vein, a team competing in their initial game of the 2002 SPN provincial tournament took the opportunity to congratulate players on the opposing team each and every time they hit a homerun over the fence. While their opponents lined up along the third-base line to greet and congratulate their teammate, the infielders from this team did the same as the batter trotted around the bases: Beginning with the first baseman, to each successive infielder including the pitcher who went over to stand beside the shortstop, they high-fived the batter, slapping his hand with their own as he jogged by, while adding comments such as "Nice hit" and "Way to go." This team ritual appears to openly celebrate homeruns, even when the feat was accomplished by a player from the other team, thereby acknowledging the skills of their opponents and their mutual participation in the game.

The post-game ritual of shaking hands also seems to recognize this element as players from both teams line up in opposite directions and subsequently shake hands with each of their opponents, accompanied by a nod of the head and remarks of "Good game" to everyone on the other team. Included in this act are compliments to individual players from the other team that recognize their play in the game such as "Good pitching" and "Nice hitting." This ritual is often repeated amongst players on the same team as time is also taken - sometimes before shaking hands with opponents, sometimes after - to congratulate team-mates for their play in the game. The symbolic significance of the

handshake after a game encapsulates an important relationship between opponents. Not only does this act signal the end of the aggression and competitiveness of the game, and a return to everyday life without holding a grudge, but it may also symbolize a recognition that what took place in the game could not have been achieved without the participation of the other team: "Thanks friend, I could never have achieved what I did without you" (Hyland 1984: 68).

In the sections that follow I first discuss specific ways in which ideas about 'fun' are expressed and enacted by these men while playing slow pitch. Next, I present some of the ways that the Molson's team combines both competition and fun into their playing experience. Finally, I argue that the relation between fun and competition are important for the construction and expression of team identity, for attracting and keeping players, and for stressing equality despite inequities within the team.

5.2 The Dynamics of Fun in Slow Pitch

In addition to Fine's (1985a) notion of 'work' that forms part of the Little League baseball, he also suggests that there are certain behavioural elements of the sport that reflect 'play' for the participants. These include, excitement and involvement in the game, not taking the game "seriously," and the presence of side involvements not directly related to baseball (Fine 1985a: 53-57). I suggest that there are similar rhetorical and behavioural aspects of slow pitch, discussed in the rest of this chapter, that reflect the ways that these men embody and express notions of fun, including the celebration of errors, the use of language and cheering, relaxed forms of competition, the drinking of alcohol and the use of humour.

5.2.1 Celebration of Errors

An element of slow pitch that may separate it from other, more serious forms of sport is the celebration of not only impressive plays on the field (good hits, impressive defensive plays), but also the cherished memory of humorous errors and misplays by one's team-mates (and sometimes by one's opponents). Snyder and Ammons (1993: 9) note that softball teams in the lower divisions of play in the U.S. show a willingness to accept the game as "not-very-serious" and will laugh off fielding errors and mistakes in a generally good-natured way. Emotional intensity and emphasis on success and winning are more evident among the 'A' players, but even for these players such display occurs more so in tournament or playoffs (games defined, in part, as competitive) than in regular league play (Ammons & Snyder 1993: 9). My own observations reflect this, as league games in the Caribou Complex A league were as rife with jokes, laughter, and good-natured teasing as were other games.

Players make jokes about themselves and about their own failures, as noted in the earlier example in which Frank laughs at himself for hitting a pop-up caught by the catcher after telling another player he was going to hit a homerun. Similarly, jokes are made about the errors of one's teammates as when John asked to look at my glove after I had missed a ground ball. After turning it around in his hands examining it, he returned it to me with a laconic smile: "I was looking for a hole in your glove, but I didn't see one."

Some of these errors carry over from year to year as the men recall the misplays immediately after a game while sharing a beer, adding them to the lore of the team, or recount to one another humorous events involving past and present players. A recollection of one such story can lead to another of a similar nature involving the same

or a different player. Many of these stories take the form of misplays that have the potential for injury but result instead in laughter when the player emerges unhurt. Players who trip on a base or slip on a loose bit of gravel and fall down while running around the bases, or who stumble and scrape their knees while attempting to score a run; an outfielder who slips and falls on the wet grass while trying to catch the ball, having it miss his head by mere inches, or an infielder who fails to catch a thrown ball and has it hit him square in the forehead - as long as the player emerges relatively unscathed, the error is often laughed at and referred to at the expense of the individual involved.

What was termed "the play of the year" for the Molson's team involved just such a humorous play by Mike, who was playing the position of catcher at the time. When a ball was hit straight up in the air behind home plate, Mike spun around in a full circle - face up, looking for the ball - before falling to the ground. The ball fell and bounced off the ground, only narrowly missing his head. At a birthday party for one of the players in mid-September, the story of this event was once again retold and the play is given a name - "the spin-a-roni." Mike happily re-enacts the play, once in the kitchen and again in the dining room, spinning about with his arm extended in the air before falling to the floor accompanied by the boisterous laughter of everyone present. Frank declares it to be the highlight of the year. Later, when one of the men mistakenly refers to this same play as the "spin-o-rama," the others quickly correct him and 'spin-a-roni' seems to have become its official name.

Players are able to recall these misplays quite readily and the retelling of the events continue long after the game, or even the season, is over. A player interviewed for my research referred to them as "little snapshots" of the games: "You did this and that

was really funny, and, boy, jeez, did you screw that up and it was kinda funny." Rather than being recounted as full-fledged stories, such errors and events most closely resemble what Dunk (1991: 83) refers to as "verbal representations," in the form of "anecdotal vignettes." Told and retold for the sake of laughter, these "little snapshots" add to the hilarity during and after the games long after they actually occurred. As such, these vignettes and stories become part of the collective memory of the team by which the players define themselves as a group (Dunk 1991: 86). Additionally, by focusing on the errors and misplays as some of the most enjoyable and memorable events of the slow pitch experience, the players are defining the game as one that incorporates laugher, mistakes and non-seriousness in addition to competitive forms of play.

5.2.2 Language and Cheering

Larson (1988) discusses the form that 'chatter' and other forms of ritual communication take in slow pitch softball in relation its use by players.[27] The play context of the softball game is defined, in part, by the chatter which "serves to reify and reinforce the definition of the context as play," by both creating and reflecting elements of play and non-play in terms of context and content (Larson 1988: 106). Such communicative forms not only mark the game context as play, it also affirms solidarity, conveys information, and tests the boundaries of competition and aggression amongst players through the expression of playful content (Larson 1988: 107). The ambiguous

[27] According to Larson (1988: 109): 'Chatter', "also known as pep talk, jabbering, and talking up, is done primarily by players, although it overlaps to an extent with coaching when coaches (player or nonplayer) use the linguistic formulas of chatter. It has a distinctive form, and its functions range from inspiring and informing teammates to adversely affecting the performance of the opposing team." Other forms of speaking that occur within the game include: calling, cheering, coaching, commentary and conversation.

nature of chatter is both a part of the softball game and a 'metagame', "the object of which is the definition of the relationship between play and nonplay" (Larson 1988: 107).

Chatter is utilized by the men in my research in ways that correspond to Larson's (1988) discussion, including its usage as both offense and defense for teams depending on whether the speech is directed at one's team-mates or one's opponents. In its defensive form, players use chatter as inspiration for teammates ("Attaway! Attabee! Way to pull that down!"; "Pitch 'em in, Bill! Pitch 'em in there, buddy!"), to convey information ("Knock it down now, boys! Keep it in front of you and nothing over your heads!"), and to maintain a playful boundary by defusing a tense situation or registering disapproval in an indirect manner ("That's alright, that's alright! Make him come to you now, make sure it's good!" when a player swings and misses; "Nice try, nice try, but you gotta lay off those high pitches" after a player hits the ball weakly to end the inning; cf., Larson 1988: 113-114). An element of this is "chatter as reality inducer" (Larson 1988: 109), using language creatively, enthusiastically and with great conviction in an attempt to make what they say come true for the benefit of the team ("Get out of here! Get gone!", after a player hits a deep fly ball that could go over the fence). Players also use such verbal methods to interact with, and register disapproval for, the umpire as noted earlier.

As offense, chatter is directed at the opposition, often indirectly, in such a manner that is overheard by them. Larson (1988: 115) also suggests that two teams competing with one another through increased volumes of chatter (both in quantity and loudness), are compelled by the belief that 'audio command' of the playing field can be equated with physical control that contributes to success in the game. I observed on a number of occasions instances in which a team responded to the chatter of their opponents in this

way, growing louder by yelling out as a group, which in turn led to a similar response by the other team such that the field was awash with calls from both sides cheering on their respective team-mates. Vocally disregarding the other team's actions and abilities through intra-team communication is another way of accomplishing this, as an indirect means of undermining the confidence of one's opponents while simultaneously bolstering one's own, as well as heckling the other team directly (Larson 1988: 114-117). Examples include: "Easy out! That's an easy out!"; "He can't hit the strike zone! Wait for one!"; and, "It's just another long out! They can do that all night long!"

Part of the ambiguity noted by Larson (1988) is that this form of speech can serve as both offensive and defensive tactic at the same time, and is very much caught up with the competitive aspects of the game. Yet, it is also very much implicated in defining the game as 'play', as 'fun'. Chatter is dynamic and generative, a form of public performance that requires verbal skill and creativity: "Chatter as verbal art is play within play," derived from innovation and creative combination of a variety of elements (Larson 1988: 119). Individual players and teams develop reputations for speech styles that become very much a part of their identity - some loud, some intense, some confrontational, some informal and cavalier (Larson 1988: 112-113). Thus, in my research, while the Burin Red Dogs, a team consisting of young men in their late teens and early twenties, were extremely vocal and animated throughout all aspects of their games, the Molson's players were much more laid back, making casual comments to one another at opportune moments in the game rather than regaling in any sort of loud, sustained chatter from the beginning of the game to its end.

The context of the game is negotiated by the players using their speech, as Larson (1988: 106-107) points out, so that one of the functions of such chatter is to help to remind players not to take the game too seriously, that it is "just a game," while at the same time helping to produce the victories which give status beyond the immediate boundaries of the game. It then becomes incorporated into both competitive and fun play with each team negotiating a collective approach in its own manner.

5.2.3 Relaxed Competition

When it appears that the outcome of the game has been decided, most often late in the game when one of the teams has established a large lead, players from both team alter their approach to the game in a way that signals a less serious, and often more playful attitude. In effect, the competitive form of play that may have existed up to that point is relaxed. Players will change defensive positions to ones that they do not normally play. A player who does not pitch, or does so only rarely, will do so for an inning, sometimes performing rather well, other times walking batter after batter as he is unable to hit the strike zone; a rotund man who has pitched the entire game so far switches positions with the right fielder; the catcher takes the opportunity to get out from behind home plate, pitches an inning, and then begins to rotate through the various outfield positions. For some players this provides the chance to play a position that he might prefer to play on a regular basis, for others the change occurs regardless of whether or not the player has any skill at the new position, with little concern over performance, and for still other times it provides the opportunity for players to pick up new skills.

In a more competitive game, the relationship between players and specific positions is much more direct and inflexible, usually the men play fixed positions or a

specific range of positions, such that there is not a great deal of repositioning during the game beyond ensuring that every member of the team gets regular playing time. However, when the outcome of the game is almost certain, win or lose, when the impact of success or failure at a given position on this outcome is negligible, players avail themselves of the opportunity to play another position, which also increases the potential for errors while adding to the levity of the post-game interaction as players laugh about the ensuing mishaps.

Players manifest the relaxed competition at different points in the game. A player may prolong the game, intentionally making an out while batting or running the bases rather than score the runs necessary to end the game by the mercy rule, or mishandling a ball in the field to allow the other team to score a few more runs thereby allowing one's own team to do the same without invoking a mercy. In the past, John was one such player, preventing runs from scoring by stopping at third base, intentionally hitting fly-balls that are easily caught, putting his glove on the other hand to make catches, attempting to catch the ball behind his back, or even in his hat.[28] John has also been known to allow friends of his on other teams to get on base by not catching or fielding a ball that is hit in his direction. During one of our conversations, he explained to me that he occasionally allowed a ball to roll past him when playing in a local mixed league with his wife in order to allow lesser skilled players, most often women, to get a base hit. He pointed out, with a big smile, that many of these players were often very happy and

[28] Catching the ball in a hat, or any other article of clothing, is deemed an "illegal catch" and does not count even if successful.

excited to get on base and he took pleasure in helping them out: "Because, that's what the game's all about."

At other times, players bat from the opposite side of home plate than usual (i.e., batting from the left side when one bats normally from the right), in a manner to which he is unaccustomed and therefore less skilled. This makes it more difficult for a player to get a hit but, if successful, he adds to the levity and joking by his teammates. Such forms of play seem to signal that high levels of effort are no longer required, and may also reflect a manner of respect in which one team does not want to overtly stress their dominance over the other. Michael Messner (1992: 162-163) argues that actions such as a highly skilled male player who restrains his ability on a mixed-sex basketball team, or a husband who plays racquetball with his wife while wearing an eye-patch and using only his left hand, may be interpreted by some as patronizing and condescending gestures that allow them to feel superior even in defeat, but can also be understood as examples of "changing the rules to make them more 'equal'" that breaks with the "dominant masculine athletic value system" which elevates competition and winning above the development and maintenance of personal relationships: "First, they are redefining "fairness," not as "equal opportunity" within a rigid rule structure, but rather, as "equality" within a negotiated and fluid rule structure. Most important, the foundation for their game is a value-system that elevates the quality of their relationship to a position of prominence over winning."

I suggest that a similar interpretation can be applied to relaxed forms of competitive play in slow pitch, though there are often competing interpretations of such play by the different teams and players involved that are not necessarily reconciled. It

appears that relaxing the competitive mode of play can have different implications for the winning and losing teams. For the winning team, it appears to provide an added assertion of their dominant position within the game, even if this is unintended. That is, even if the relaxation of a more aggressive form of competitiveness emphasizes a new context of 'playing' as expressed by the players, the losing team can interpret this as an additional way of claiming superiority. In our second game of the evening against one of the teams near the bottom of the league standings, after mercying them in the first game, Scott decided to stop running midway between second and third bases and walked slowly the rest of the way, much to the amusement of our players in the dugout. Later in the game, Frank chooses to stay at third base on a fly-ball caught by the left fielder, rather than 'tagging up' and running home to score. The third-baseman says something to him, and when Frank scores on the next hit, he tells us that the this player was not impressed by his choice to stay at third and had asked, "Why are you toying with us?" Frank explained that he wasn't 'toying' with them, but was 'broke up' (i.e., injured) and didn't want to run any more than he had to. Nonetheless, the opposing fielder apparently interpreted the actions of our team as an overt indication that we didn't need to expend effort to win the game, which caused some embarrassment and resentment for our opponents who felt that we were deliberately trifling with them. In this manner, playfulness and lackadaisical attitudes become an additional form of dominance.

When the losing team behaves in a similar manner there are additional, negative implications that conflict with notions of competition in slow pitch - that is, that they are "giving up." The issue here appears to be that the losing team is indicating that they are no longer going to attempt to win the game, thereby conceding defeat and undermining

notions of competition in which a victory should be earned by the victor. This may be viewed negatively by one's opponents (as in the comment, "They just gave up in the second game," spoken in a disapproving manner with a shake of the head) as well as by one's own team-mates (as in Chuck's comments after we were eliminated from the playoffs, "The game was already over by the time that I showed up. We just gave up.").

As such, it appears that switching positions, lackadaisical play and 'fooling around' can, in some circumstances, indicate a playful attitude that is somewhat in variance with notions of competition. However, they can also be interpreted in certain contexts as undesirable by players for undermining the competitive ideals valued in the game, or for reinforcing those same notions under a veneer of playfulness.

5.2.4 Drinking

One effect of the emphasis placed on the drinking of alcohol in slow pitch is that it signals a less serious approach to the game in addition to being a significant element in the experience of the sport by the players. It serves to define the game as separate from the everyday lives of the players. Alcohol is commonly used as a marker of festivity that signifies a transition to a time set aside for play (de Garine 2001: 5; Gusfield 1987, 1991; Heath 2000: 14). It signifies non-seriousness for the players, in contrast to the 'seriousness' of daily life. Along with the use of humour, alcohol in slow pitch symbolizes a less serious sport for participants, particularly in contrast to the more competitive forms of softball.

Alcohol is linked to ideas about the 'seriousness' of particular sports or contests. One aspect of this in slow pitch is the idea that players shouldn't drink before important games. If they do so they are indicating that they do not take the games very seriously,

are already certain of the outcome of the game, or are unconcerned about whether they win or lose. For teams who wish to focus on winning, consumption of alcohol is often viewed as having a negative effect on their playing ability and may be accompanied by team rules governing drinking before games. In the past Chuck had acted as a conscience for his team, pointing to errors in order to improve the level of play and warning them not to overindulge before a big game. As he explained: "I'd say, 'Boys, we've had enough beer. It's an important game now. We need to win this game."

A question posed by another player, in reference to his own team, suggests that a distinction can be made between a serious approach to the game for players and teams that forego drinking during games, and a less serious manner that incorporates it. When I asked him if his team was largely a "social thing," he responded: "It is and it isn't. I know there's lots of fellas there still that really like to win but, you know, a lot of fellas on the team, they're drinking and all that stuff too, so it's got to be more social. If you're really trying to win bad, would you really do that?"

Similarly, Chuck explains the impact of drinking on the play of Molson's in the decade they played in the CEI league:

> When we were up at the CEI league, every time, we used to play one game and every second week we'd have a break in between games, and I'd say in the ten years we were up there, if we played a hundred games with a break in between, I'd say our record in the first game was 85 [wins] and 15 [losses], and our record in the second game was probably 20 and 80. You know what I mean? Everybody had a few beers, you know, a hot summer day. That's what half the reason why you're up there for, to enjoy yourself. But then you get to a certain point that, like, you're almost endangering yourself as far as I'm concerned.

Chuck expressed a great deal of acceptance that other players on the team might approach the game in a different manner, and noted that his own opinion has changed over the

years. He no longer worries whether players drink before the game, though he still wants to win: "At the end of the day, you're only causing trouble for yourself, and who gives a shit what they does. Everybody's down there to have a bit of fun, but you've still got that competitive drive . . . To each his own."

The discourse of alcohol also permeates the way that players talk about the 'fun' of the game that has its own meaning independent of winning or losing. As one player explained to me before the game, while drinking a beer: "We're a fun team. We drink beer and have a good time." In this manner, playing the game for fun and drinking alcohol are linked. The words uttered by members of Frank's recreational hockey team, which he applies equally to slow pitch, also reflect this notion: "Perfect game, guys. No one got hurt and the beer's cold." Drinking, it appears, has its own meaning that contributes to the enjoyment of the experience for the men, and signifies a 'fun-ness'.

Alcohol is also invoked after a loss, or to a losing team, to remind the players that the outcome of the game is not the most important element in slow pitch. After a close playoff game, in which the game was decided in extra innings by a single run, John consoles the losing team, who are now finished for the year, by pointing out the vagaries of the game and the importance of enjoyment regardless of the score: "It was a good game, boys, but it's only a game of ball. Somebody has to win and somebody has to lose. The beer goes down the same either way." A player in the St. John's Masters Slo-Pitch League echoes this sentiment: "You can win with a smile, and you can lose with a smile, because the beer tastes the same no matter if you win or lose" (Don Power, "Silver lining in the sand: Masters slo-pitch leagues celebrate 25th anniversaries this summer, *The Express*, July 10-16, 2002, p. 25). These men associate drinking with a less serious mode

of playing sport, in part a result of the effect that it has on ability, but is also used by players to associate slow pitch itself with this ethos by suggesting that what is most important in the game is the drinking and the other related activities associated with enjoying oneself.

5.3 Fun and Competition on Molson's

> "I think we've got a pretty good combination of competitiveness and fun. Like, we have a lot of fun in the dugout and razzing each other and giving everyone a hard time and laughing and stuff. But deep down, everybody wants to win." (Frank, Interview, September 7, 2002)

One way in which the Molson's players negotiate the interrelationship between fun and competition is through the 'batting order'. Typically, the batting order gives preference to the higher skilled players by placing them at the top of the order in a position that complements their hitting ability. By placing the better hitters at the beginning, and the lesser-skilled ones at the end, teams attempt to maximize the potential to score runs. This is particularly the case as over the course of the season players who bat at the top of the order on a regular basis will receive more overall chances to bat than those at the bottom.

The Molson's players mitigate this possibility by not returning to the top of the batting order in the second game of our nightly doubleheaders. Instead, the batting order is resumed at the point where it left off at the end of the first game. In this manner, while the order remains the same, it is possible for any one of the men to become the lead-off batter or to bat in the much-vaunted clean-up position according to the vagaries of chance that determines who makes the final out of the first game. Further, while the initial batting order is normally chosen with some regard to matching the best hitters with the

appropriate spot in the order, choices are often made collectively with a number of the players giving their input. On a night that John decided the order he disregarded strategy entirely, choosing instead to place the player who had batted at or near the bottom for most of the year in the first position, and then placing everyone else according to the similarity of their first names. In another game he placed the batters in order of their 'seniority' on the team, putting the longest serving players first and the newest ones at the end, based on the number of years each had been a member of the team.

This appears to signal a less competitive approach to the game, particularly since few other teams that we played against did this. Notably, this routine was abandoned by Frank and Chuck in the playoffs, much to the chagrin of John, when the games were defined in more competitive terms such that the significance of the outcome was deemed to be much greater. This corresponds with the general perception amongst players that playoff games and tournaments are more meaningful than games played in the regular season. Not only are some games understood to be more competitive than others, but meanings derived from situations within each game are also negotiated in these terms signalling more or less competitive/fun moments.

The approach taken by the team as a whole impacts the interrelationships between the men thereby contributing to the team identity that emerges through their interaction and negotiation of the two concepts of fun and competition. Although a team might emphasize one over the other, both are incorporated into their play, their experience of the game, their association with other teams and their expression of team identity. For Molson's, care is taken to identify the reason for playing as 'fun', while also pursuing a victory at each and every game. Players reassure one another when mistakes are made,

through conversation or a well-timed joke, to remind the group of the real reason for playing slow pitch.

However, as Fine (1986a: 182-3) reminds us, while hilarity and humorous side distractions matter little to the structure of informal games, constraints are often relied upon in formal game situations to ensure that these side engagements are temporary and do not threaten the game structure. Thus, Little League baseball coaches recognize that such side involvements contribute to the enjoyment of the game, while also taking care "to ensure that this 'fun' does not spread too widely, undermining the game" (Fine 1986a: 184). In slow pitch, timely reminders by teammates suggesting that attention should be paid to the game underway serve this same purpose when humour and hilarity appear to be interfering with the possibility of victory. It appears that the discourse of competition can be used to ensure that the game does not 'degenerate' into "mere, anarchic fun" (cf., Fine 1985a: 48), and the fun discourse can be used to defuse the seriousness of the contest and remind players of its relative insignificance to their everyday lives of family and work. The desire to win is not supposed to overrun the value of participation and enjoyment derived from the playing experience, but neither is the emphasis on having fun supposed to override involvement in the game and the need to play well. When one element becomes dominant, in contradistinction to the other, a renegotiation takes place in order to redefine or reaffirm the collective values of the team in relation to the game.

For example, John is well known for running the bases in a manner that appears lackadaisical, despite the ability to run rather quickly when he so desires. He rarely runs at top speed to any base, choosing instead to jog or walk, often timing it so that he reaches the base safely at the last possible moment before the ball is caught by the fielder standing

nearby; yet he is almost always successful. He stops at bases rather than advancing easily to the next one, and regularly calls for a courtesy runner to come run for him after getting a hit. The other players on the team made jokes about his running style throughout the year, complimenting him on his ability to conserve energy, yelling at him to run or stop at a base when he didn't need to, or expressing surprise and laughter when he ran faster than usual.

While John's running style was a source of laughter and joking for the players throughout the season, it became an issue of contention for some of the men during a game when the outcome hung in the balance. In the final two innings, at a point in the game largely defined by competition and intense emotion as we were losing by only a few runs, a running error by John acquired a different meaning and significance than the playfulness exhibited in other games. The emphasis on fun was quickly reasserted immediately following the game, and players were quick to recognize both the quality of the game played and the collective effort of the team despite losing. However, for those final minutes, John's running style was no longer a source of joking.

5.4 Team Identity, Mobilization and Equality

An important aspect of the collective identity of recreational slow pitch teams concerns the integration of both elements of fun and of competition into the manner in which the team develops group goals, norms, values and modes of play within the game. Each team measures the relationships of the members to one another, and to the group as a whole, at least in part through the interrelationship of fun and competition expressed collectively through discourse and styles of play. When players join the team they must not only judge one's own approach to the game, but also determine the team approach

whether they conform to it or not. In turn, the players on the team evaluate new members in these same terms.

Women's studies scholar, Yvonne Zipter (1988: 115), addresses this notion of team identity aptly from her own experiences with softball, noting that "a team's philosophy is instrumental in shaping the experience":

> Sometimes the philosophy is spoken, sometimes not. Sometimes a philosophy is controlled by the coach, sometimes by the team as a whole (and the dynamics of who does the controlling can themselves be telling). Team philosophies determine who plays and/or who doesn't; who coaches and how; the frequency of and the way that practices are conducted; the tone of the game; the interaction among a team's players as well as their interactions with other teams; the quality of ball being played; and, no doubt, a number of other things we aren't even aware of. Some team philosophies are patterned after male models of competition, while others call the traditional ethics of competition into question. Philosophies range from "winning is everything," to "playing one's best is what counts," to "having fun is all that matters" - and a myriad of combinations.

In short, a team's "philosophy" consists of "how you play the game," as an individual and as part of a team. This relationship is negotiated through a variety of means including the use of discourse, embodied action in the game, and through the social interaction that takes place in and around each game.

This is similar to Larson's (1988: 119-120) discussion of the negotiation between 'hard' (playing in tournaments, playing to win) and 'soft' (playing for fun) forms of play through speech and communication in softball:

> Softball players negotiate the placement of their game on a continuum of soft and hard play, however, with their speech. Overt concern about winning is culturally unacceptable as too serious . . . and players continually negotiate the placement of the boundary between appropriate and inappropriate levels of concern with winning . . . Those who are extremely serious about their softball may attempt to mask that fact within the normally accepted strategic leeway of the rules for speaking. For the serious or hard player, for whom winning takes precedence over rules of context maintenance, there is a metalevel rule in operation that one is to

> win if at all possible, but also to enhance the victory by ostensibly conforming to the context definition as soft play, "just a game," and retaining an appearance of being unconcerned about winning.

The result is that serious players, and teams, draw upon the discourse of fun in contexts that de-emphasize the seriousness of their own approach to the game; they identify the game as "play," separate from their everyday lives, while also pursuing victory in an accepted fashion by negotiating the boundaries of fun and competition.

This negotiation is a significant element of the norms, goals and values that become the 'idioculture' (Fine 1985a) of the team. It is integral to the way that the players interact, and compete, in the game. This relationship is not static, as a team's approach to the game may change over time, or when new players join or long-time teammates leave. New players introduce elements from other teams or from their own personal experience, while the loss of former teammates may eliminate a facet of the game that is not maintained. Additionally, as is the case of at least some of the players on the Molson's team, as players age their outlook on the game, and its place in their lives, might also shift as they change jobs, marry or have children.

As Dunk (1991: 92) notes in his own research: "The Boys do like to win, as do the other teams in the league, but competitiveness is tempered by the overriding principle of fun. It must not destroy the group and anyone who takes the game too seriously is sneered at." To this I add that the competitive nature remains an important part of the way that the sport is played in St. John's so that fun, too, must not undermine the game as a contest between two teams. Care must be taken that a mode of competition that does not jeopardize enjoyment for players is negotiated with a mode of fun that does not remove the significance of playing well and being successful in the game such that each

team develops its own balance and identity as a result. Those players who regularly act in ways that conflict with the team philosophy quickly identify themselves as potential problems for team unity.

'Fun' is also an important way for slow pitch teams to recruit and retain players. Gary Allan Fine (1989) suggests that those voluntary groups able to best provide the necessary resources for participation may be the most successful in attracting and maintaining committed members and ensuring their continuing existence. These resources need not be limited solely to material factors such as finances and equipment, but also include such things as knowledge, identity symbols and sociability. For voluntary sports organizations, he notes that different levels of sport provide and mobilize a variety of resources that contribute to the continuation and fulfillment of the groups and their members (Fine 1989: 330-331): National organizations such as Little League Baseball or Slo-Pitch National provide rules and procedures, guidance for general policy, connection to a national network of resources, and use of their names for community support while having little direct impact on daily operational decisions; local leagues provide personnel such as umpires and coaches, playing fields and equipment, and the scheduling of games for competition; and, individual teams provide specific knowledge of the sport, symbols of identity related to the team, the allocation of playing time for each player, and the assignment of players to defensive positions and slots in the batting order. He further suggests that one of the most significant resources provided at the team level is sociability, and the accompanying facilitation of enjoyment for the players (Fine 1989: 331).

In this manner, Fine (1989: 321) points out a key issue for voluntary leisure organizations, such as recreational sports teams: How do they achieve their goals while cementing their members to the collectivity, given that participation can be withdrawn at any time? This is a problem that is less significant for mandatory institutions such as work and school, and also for organizations with a formal structure that binds members to the group through direct obligations. Fine (1989) suggests that it is through the provision and mobilization of such resources - including sociability, enjoyment and fun - that leisure groups are able to ensure levels of commitment from its members vital to the group's continuation. This is in addition to the content and meanings of the activity itself, and the benefits that each individual derives from participation, as Fine (1989: 321) argues that these too provide rhetorical resources that can be managed by the organization in pursuit of its goals.

I suggest that one way in which slow pitch teams develop the levels of commitment essential to being able to field a team on a regular basis is through the discursive and behavioural aspects of 'fun'. By using fun as a resource, and providing it to members in terms of sociability and a particular mode of play, teams provide a reason for players to continue to come to the games. Such an emphasis also obscures another very important goal for the teams: competitiveness. However, before those people who manage teams can worry about the level of play on the field, they must first ensure that the players show up for the games in a dependable fashion. Providing a space in which players can come together and pursue competitive play while associating with others who share similar interests, swapping stories, jokes and personal experiences, and relishing in a form of "focused sociability" (Fine 1989: 326-327), teams are able to attract and retain

members in a collective bond. Such an emphasis on sociability is also considered a key element in the camaraderie that teams associate with "team chemistry" or cohesion in relation to the competitive aspect of the sport.

Competition within sport stresses hierarchy and structure, based as it is on a measurement of the contribution that each player is able to make to the team's success in terms of skill and ability. Fun, on the other hand, is much more egalitarian in nature as it is based on participation while skill is downplayed in order to include everyone in the game. Ideally, anyone can participate in the social interaction, the playful behaviour and the verbal antics of slow pitch.

While commonsense notions of 'fun' tend to view it as a privatized, subjective and ephemeral phenomenon that has little consequence other than making individuals "feel better," Walter Podilchak (1985, 1991), a sociologist, suggests that fun is primarily a social experience that depends on others for its fulfillment through organization and social construction (1991: 132). One source for this social experience of fun is in leisure groups where there is a relaxed sociability, a comfortable group climate, group planning and shared leadership, and participation by all involved (Podilchak 1991: 126). These aspects of leisure groups are not automatic, nor are they reducible to the relationships between individuals:

> These groups are not taken for granted as preconceived recreational activities that will intrinsically produce reciprocity, nor are they restricted to dyadic love and friendship relationships. Leisure groups are negotiated subcultural groups that establish values of reciprocity and interdependence, collectivism, and loyalty - a sense of identity or belonging (Podilchak 1991: 127).

The "omnibus" of fun, as Podilchak (1991: 126-127) calls it, incorporates and emphasizes an array of values, social relationships and group processes, including:

"togetherness, companionships, shared leadership, belongingness, reciprocity, interdependence, collectivism, trust, and acceptance of others." Alongside the concept of "we-ness," the notion of equality is an important ethic that both contributes to and develops out of the social qualities of fun (Podilchak 1991: 124). Indeed, Podilchak (1985: 688) suggests that participants may create a "sense of equality" where there are in fact distinct inequalities in terms of skill levels:

> Having "fun" in a game develops in the display of skill. Even with unequal skill levels, participants may establish some common basis in creating a sense of equality. In a church picnic softball game, skill levels are varied but downplayed in order for all players to feel a part of the game. "Fun" is established once an equilibrium emerges among participants. It is not much "fun" if someone displays inappropriate skill display.

Competition in slow pitch supports the development of structure and hierarchy as teams must recognize players with greater skill, who can most contribute to the success of the team, and place them in the most effective positions in the batting order and on the field. While bonding may occur as players strive for a common cause - winning - inequalities are inherent in terms of skill and contribution. The emphasis on fun in the game - through the use of discourse, embodied action and expressive interaction - serves as both counterbalance and obfuscation of this inequality. Fun, as social interaction and participation, is egalitarian by virtue of emphasizing values in which all players are able to be involved, but also by de-emphasizing the informal structure that develops in the pursuit of success.

Fun is invoked when competition is overtly dominant, when the emphases on enjoyment, participation and notions of equality suffer, and the importance placed on victory acts to the detriment of social interaction. It also serves as a reminder when teams

fail, that it is enjoyment and satisfaction that is important in the game and not wins or losses. Competition, on the other hand, is invoked when unfettered fun results in lackadaisical play, a lack of effort, or inattention that undermines the game as an athletic contest in which two sides strive to win, albeit in a mutually acceptable manner.

Players express an appreciation and understanding of the game in which fun and competition are conjoined and intertwined in the experience. The 'good game' combines both enjoyment and the competitive element by emphasizing them both - the game is fun because it is competitive, and competitive while also being fun (cf., Goffman 1961: 67; Hyland 1984). In emphasizing fun, the structure of the team also seeks to subordinate and harness it in the pursuit of competitive play, by creating a team that comes to the games ready to play and is able to work well together on the field, and thereby contributes to success in the game. Fun is a key element in the manner in which slow pitch teams construct and develop the process of cohesion that, it is hoped, will make the team better on the field.

5.5 Summary

For Huizinga (1949: 2-3), it is precisely the "fun-element" - the intensity, the absorption, and the "power of maddening" - which characterizes the essence and primary quality of play. Erving Goffman (1961) addresses the significance of 'fun' in relation to playing games, noting that its euphoric characteristics constitute a key element in understanding such activities and the choice to participate in them:

> Games can be fun to play, and fun alone is the approved reason for playing them. The individual, in contrast to his treatment of "serious" activity, claims a right to complain about a game that does not pay its way in immediate pleasure and, whether the game is pleasurable or not, to plead a slight excuse, such as an indisposition of mood, for not participating (Goffman 1961: 17).

Goffman highlights a key element of many games, their voluntary nature, in which participants are free to leave at any time should they no longer be enjoyable. He further argues that by attempting to understand how games can be fun, by exploring the dimensions of fun, and by "treating fun seriously," we are able to learn about not only interaction in games and sports, but also about social interaction in other contexts (Goffman 1961: 17, 43). Additionally, the experience of a game as fun is bound to its competitive element as "[t]here is a common-sense view that games are fun to play when the outcome or pay-off has a good chance of remaining unsettled until the end of play" (Goffman 1961: 67). Games are modified by means of 'balancing' and handicapping teams, by introducing skill levels to develop equality between opponents, and even by introducing "pure luck," in order to provide an experience that keeps players engrossed in the flow of the game and its capacity for enjoyment (Goffman 1961: 67). This is accomplished not only by ensuring that pleasure is an element of the game, but also through the strategies and "alternating, interlocking moves of the players" within the game that constitute ideas of competitive play (Goffman 1961: 67).

Fun and competition, then, are linked rather than opposed concepts involving a variety of experiences and ideas about games and sports. As such, the "*fun* of playing" (Huizinga 1949: 2) is a key element in the recreational slow pitch experience worth exploring further, noting that we must not assume a simple, common-sense meaning derived from its seemingly self-explanatory elements, and that is must be understood, in part, in relation to notions of 'competition'.

The presence of competition as a key element in organized sports has been examined in relation to injuries (White and Young 1999), as well as masculinity, gender identity, and gender relations (Curry 1991; Hughes and Coakley 1991; Messner 1990, 1992; Theberge 2000). Researchers have also noted the relationship that exists between the notions of fun and competition in sports and games, doing so in a number of different ways: in the coexistence of cooperation and competition in the sport of bicycle racing (Albert 1991) and sled dog racing (Kemp 1999); the metaphors of 'work' and 'play' in Little League baseball (Fine 1985a), and the negotiation between "playing for fun" and "playing to win" in slow pitch softball using forms of speech (Larson 1988). David Turner's (1992) discussion of his Sunday Morning League also centres on this relationship, noting as he does that their game is neither cooperative nor competitive but is instead "accommodating" in such a way that it mutes opposition between players.

Noel Dyck (2000: 23) indicates that fun is an integral aspect of an informal game such as 'street hockey,' in which competitive disparities are balanced in order to preserve the enjoyment for all participants. Yet, "[t]he rhetoric and pursuit of 'fun' is not, however, limited to children's hockey games," it also occurs at other levels and in other forms of sport, including professional sports teams (Dyck 2000: 23). While fun is largely subordinated to competitive elements of winning at the professional sporting level, due to the importance of success for both occupational identity and longevity of professional athletes (cf., Robidaux 2001), at the amateur and recreational levels they are very much intertwined, one with the other, as they are compared, contrasted, conjoined, and enjoyed within the various contexts of the game by participants and spectators alike. Chuck, a Molson's team member, summed up this notion rather nicely one night in June, after we

managed to win our second game in the final innings of play: "I know we're down here for fun, but it's a lot more fun when we win."

Care is taken by the players to emphasize, express and embody a mode of playing that is conducive to 'fun' that is both in contradistinction and in relation to ideas about appropriate forms of competitive play in slow pitch. An additional manner in which this occurs is the humour and laughter that permeates the experience of these men while they play, that also helps to define the slow pitch game in terms of 'play' in the manner outlined by Larson (1988) for other speech forms. This involves not only cooperation within a team, but also between teams, to develop and express acceptable forms of both competitive and fun play that, ideally, makes the game enjoyable for all.

As part of this process informal games emerge around the game, as well as in the intervals within the game itself, and in any given game players can be seen attempting to make a play in an unorthodox manner. As often as not, such attempts lead to dropped balls, bad throws or missed chances that allow runners to advance, batters to get on base and runs to score resulting in scowls and remonstrations from teammates. But, when they are successful, they are cause for exclamations, cheers and laughter from players on both teams. Fun, too, is negotiated and inserted into the game structure but is continually played out alongside notions of competition.

'Fun' and 'competition' coexist in the playing experience of slow pitch for the men in my research in such a way that the discourse is employed through a variety of means in order to define the meaning of the games. These are not the only two concepts used in this context, but they are significant ones worthy of analysis. They are not static and unchanging, but are instead flexible, dynamic and interrelated, emerging through the

context of each game, and from one game to the next. I argue that an emphasis on fun and the play element in relation to notions of competitiveness in slow pitch constitutes a significant element in the formation of team identity, and acceptance of that identity by the players, by emphasizing unity within a competitive environment, and is also employed as a way to construct levels of commitment from voluntary participation. The balance of fun and competition, then, is key to understanding communitas in slow pitch.

Chapter 6
Alcohol

> "I just enjoy getting out with the guys, having a beer, and, as you know, half the time the beer is broke out right away, and sometimes after the first game, you know. Having a beer with a bunch of the guys and just being out. The camaraderie is what I enjoy." (Frank, Interview, September 7, 2002)

> It's those memories -- of laughs shared over a few beer -- these players remember. Nobody remembers the hits, defensive plays or errors. It's the post-game activities which mean the most.
>
> "The camaraderie," [Ray] Benson reiterates, as he provides a tour of the park to a visitor amidst barbs thrown from other players. "The beer, the crapping on one another after the game. It's just that I generally enjoy a night out with the fellas. It's nice to sit down and have a beer after the game and make fun of your team-mates. It's a good atmosphere to play in." (Don Power, "Silver lining in the sand: Masters slo-pitch leagues celebrate 25th anniversaries this summer, *The Express*, July 10-16, 2002, p. 25).

6.1 Alcohol and Slow Pitch

Alcohol and alcoholic consumption are very closely involved in the experience of slow pitch softball for the men in my research, and appears to have been so for some time.[29] The most popular alcoholic beverage consumed at the games is beer. It is almost ubiquitous in and around slow pitch as players drink before, during and after the games. It is represented in team names, as well as team and league sponsorships by businesses that sell alcohol. It can be seen on the prizes awarded to teams, on clothing worn and equipment carried by players. And, it is expressed in the way that the men talk about the game of slow pitch.

[29] In a newspaper article, Wince Worthman, a sales manager for a company that manufactures a popular brand of rum in Newfoundland, recounts how important "sampling" was to establishing an early foothold in the local market. In addition to dispensing free shots of the rum to fishermen as they unloaded their daily catch, he would also "take a bottle to an adult softball game, so that players could sip a drink behind the diamond after the match," though he acknowledges that he would no longer do so given the current sensitivity regarding public drinking (Pitts 2003).

For the men in Dunk's (1991) research, alcohol is also a key aspect of their slow pitch games as they drink beer before games, while 'warming up,' in between innings and while waiting their turn to bat. They meet in the parking lot after the game to talk and drink beer from a case brought by one of the players, and they go to a bar afterwards to share more drinking and conversation. It is part of the weekly league games, and a part of weekend tournaments, signified by the "team beer-drinking trophy" that they won. Teams tell stories about drinking, and players discuss the attributes of others in terms of what they drank, and how they handled their consumption of alcohol. Yet, while a large part of the slow pitch experience, such drinking behaviour is sometimes a detriment to their playing ability. Understanding the place of alcohol involves not only examining its symbolic significance in the game, its consumption and its existence as a key artifact in slow pitch, but also the social context in which the men drink in order to understand its relationship to conversation, humour and joking.

6.1.1 Commercial Interests, Sponsorships and Beer

It is already evident that numerous companies are involved in local slow pitch softball leagues in St. John's. At the Caribou Complex, both telecommunications company Newtel, and Country Ribbon, a food processing plant located across the road from the playing fields, organize leagues for their employees. This suggests that the support of sports and social events for employees contributes to improved morale and loyalty, as well as greater reliability, cooperation and health that leads to happier and more productive workers for employers (Carter 2000: 83). Local businesses in St. John's sponsor individual teams. Larger corporations, such as Molson's and Labatt's, sponsor

teams, contribute funds and prizes for leagues, and are also involved in partnerships with slow pitch organizations at the national level.

Seven of the thirteen teams that began the year in the Caribou Complex B league were sponsored by companies that sold alcohol, including breweries, bars, restaurants, and a bowling alley (See Appendix A). These sponsorships take different forms. It may involve giving money to the team to contribute to the league fees that must be paid, donating shirts to be worn as a uniform with the team's name and sponsor written on them, or providing less tangible benefits such as discounts at the business involved. Generally, sponsorships help to defray some of the financial costs of participation for teams and players. In return, it is believed that the sponsor receives publicity and advertisement for their support of a local team. In the case of certain sponsors, such as Molson's, Labatt's, or a local drinking establishment, such support may also strengthen the connection between their products or services on the one hand, and sports and leisure on the other. Advertisement and recognition in the local press has been an important reason for corporate involvement in amateur and recreational sports since the nineteenth century as part of this process.[30] For example, Dunk (1991: 73) explains that sponsors of the softball league in Thunder Bay receive such publicity by having the company name worn on team uniforms, having it published in the newspaper with the league standings, or mentioned during the sports news on television.

Such publicity is rare in the Caribou Complex leagues. Local media coverage of slow pitch in St. John's is quite rare and tends to favour the more established and higher

[30] For discussions of corporate involvement in local amateur/recreational baseball in Canada and the United States see Carter (2000: 83), Howell (1995) and Humber (1995).

status fast pitch and baseball leagues. The large number of slow pitch leagues in the city, in comparison to the other two sports, is probably one reason why league standings are not placed in local newspapers. The results of the Caribou Complex leagues are posted on a website (www.playtimesports.nf.net) for the benefit of players, but it is doubtful that this is accessed by the wider community. Further, only a few of the teams wear uniforms of any sort, and most teams do not have their sponsor's name printed on the clothing worn at the games.

Sponsorship can also be understood as a public representation of corporate involvement in the "community."[31] The actual cost of sponsorship by these companies is believed to be little as the general perception among players is that businesses receive tax benefits for donating money to local sports teams. For those businesses involved in the sale of alcohol there is often an additional benefit. In return for the sponsorship, players from the team are often expected to frequent the place of business after games, or at other times, to have a few drinks as patrons. In this manner, the money originally given to the team is 'paid back' to the business in the form of increased patronage by the players and their families.

On the surface, it appears that both parties benefit from the sponsorship: the team receives financial or other support that makes it cheaper for players to participate, and the local companies receive publicity, recognition for community involvement, and additional business from players. This relationship is not without issues for the players

[31] Molson general manager, Rick Doyle, expained the reason why they chose to get involved with slow pitch in 1989: "'To start with, it's not our intention to ruin the program over there,' Doyle says. "We aren't out here trying to break down Softball Newfoundland. Our intention is just to put something back into the community that we're taking out. We're doing business in the community and we'd like to put something back in, and slo-pitch is a pretty good opportunity to do that" (Power 1989: 17).

and is not always accepted without question. A conversation that occurred between Eli, John and various other members of the Unknowns concerned the possible benefits and drawbacks of having a local restaurant/bar, West Side Charlies, as a sponsor. In addition to a financial donation that would lower the cost of playing in the league for each man on the team, the business offers a dollar off the cost of every beer that a member of the team purchases. This discount applies not only to drinks bought after games, but also to other nights when a member of the team might eat dinner in the establishment with his family. Some of the men still did not think that this was a good idea and Eli points out that the team would be obligated to go back to West Side Charlies to drink after their games rather than drinking their own "team beer" at the ballpark.

Team beer consists of beer that someone, usually previously designated for the purpose, brings to the game in a cooler packed with ice which all members of the team are allowed to drink. Teams usually charge a small amount for the beer, which recoups the cost of purchase as well as ensuring a small profit for the team. The price is often a good deal cheaper than going out to a bar or restaurant. In the case of the Unknowns, the cost of each beer is two dollars. The money is paid into a "kitty" and is used for the benefit of the team. The Unknowns were saving money to buy a new bat, but other uses for the kitty include paying for league fees, contributing towards expenses incurred in travelling to another town for a tournament, and paying for a year-end party for players and their families. In effect, the beer kitty is a means for the team to raise additional funds through the consumption of beer by the players - the more beer they drink, the more money the team makes.

As a result, some of the Unknowns' players were uncomfortable about going to a local business to drink after the games and abandoning a team tradition that provides an additional source of money for expenses. Not only would the team no longer benefit from the post-game consumption of beer, but players who wanted to be a part of the much-valued social interaction that follows most games would then be required to spend more money as the business involved charges much higher prices.

For Molson's, this relationship is somewhat different. The team received a navy-blue baseball cap and a white t-shirt from Molson's, with the slogan "I am Canadian" printed boldly on each, which are the same as those placed in cases of Molson's beer products as part of a popular national marketing campaign.[32] Presumably donated for the purposes of wearing it as a uniform, this clothing was rarely worn together by the players as a group as they continued to arrive at games clothed in a variety of shirts, sweatshirts and jackets from past years. The team did not receive any money from Molson's to reduce the cost of playing, and each member of the team was required to pay $100 in order to cover the $1000 league fee.

The most significant donation to the team from Molson's came in the form of free beer. This was the most important aspect of the sponsorship for the players. They had been sponsored for years by the Labatt's brewing company, but approached Molson's when Labatt's cut back on the amount of beer given to the team after having already reduced the amount of free clothing. In 2002, the team received the equivalent of three 'cases' of beer - thirty-six cans - for each night that we played. Although this was approximately only three or four cans of beer for each player per night, consumed over a

[32] 'Canadian' is Molson's most popular and largest selling beer product in Canada.

period of three or four hours, the benefits of free beer appears to outweigh the lack of financial sponsorship for these men. There may also be an additional business connection involved in this decision, as two of the players on the team are involved in managing the Caribou Complex through their company, PlayTime Sports. It is important to recognize that the canteen situated at the complex sold only Molson's beer products in addition to snacks and non-alcoholic beverages.

It also appears that the sponsorship, though welcomed by the players, has little effect on the identity of the team itself. The manner in which the men expressed their collective identity and perceived of themselves as a team was more often framed in terms of their past accomplishments and experiences than in relation to any sort of meaningful reference to themselves as "Molson's." This was reflected in the stories told about the team and the general manner in which players referred to the team as a whole without drawing upon the name Molson's as a meaningful marker. Terms such as "we," "the guys," and "the team" were used most frequently, without reference to a team name, and may be partially attributed to the fact that they had been sponsored for many years by Labatt's. The ways that players construct the meaning of beer within the game, which does not necessarily reflect the commercial interests of corporate sponsors, can also be understood as an expression of agency.

6.1.2 Beer as Artifact and Symbol

At every slow pitch game that I attended, clothing and equipment embossed with the names of beer products were commonplace. Players arrive carrying 'ball-bags' (large bags carried over the shoulder in which gloves, shoes, bats and various other sports equipment can be transported), wearing jackets, t-shirts, sweatshirts, mock turtlenecks

and baseball caps, along with various other items, all of which have the names of Molson's and Labatt's products printed, stitched or otherwise emblazoned prominently on them. These products include: Molson Canadian, Canadian Light, Black Horse, Coor's Light, Labatt's Blue, and Newfoundland "Screech."

The possibility of winning these items as prizes in tournaments contributes to their allure. For example, in the SNL Men's Slo-Pitch Provincial tournament, prizes were awarded to the batter in the tournament with the highest batting average, the individual with the most homeruns, the tournament MVP ("most valuable player"), and to the winning team. Similarly, prizes awarded at the CEI league banquet at the end of the year were awarded to the top four teams, the MVP of the playoffs (from the winning team), and to both the MVP and the most energetic and spirited player on each team.

The clothing and other prizes are important to indicate their identity as slow pitch players, but also as symbols of their success within the game. Jackets, shirts and sweatshirts naming them as members of a team that had won their league or a major tournament are worn with pride by the players, and casual inquiries lead easily to stories and explanations on the part of the men about how and where they were won. However, the clothing has the names and logos of alcoholic products displayed somewhere on them, making them unsuitable to be worn outside of informal settings. Eli told me that he enjoyed winning the clothing, but that he often gave them away because he couldn't wear them at work. It seems that for many of the players, the main use of the items and clothing won at tournaments or awarded for league championships, is at the slow pitch games themselves, as players arrive carrying their equipment in the bat-bags, and wear

the sundry jackets, sweatshirts and t-shirts while playing. Spectators, too, can often be seen wearing such clothing to the games.

The men are untroubled by this relationship, and see little problem with the close association between beer companies and recreational sports such as slow pitch. Indeed, some see it as a "good fit." On at least three separate occasions Eli informed me that darts used to be "the drinking sport of Newfoundland," but this title now belongs to slow pitch. This is reinforced by the quantity of alcohol available at tournaments, as well as the tendency for players to drink together after their weekly games. I was told that in most tournaments, beer can be purchased for two dollars each, and a deal is often offered in which three beers can be bought for five dollars to encourage consumption. Further, it is not unusual for tournament convenors to simply give beer away for free at the tournament's end if there is an abundance of beer remaining, and if players stay to drink afterwards. Tickets that can be redeemed for free beer are also sometimes given to teams simply for entering tournaments as was the case with both the SPN and SNL provincial D tournaments.

Teams may meet at a local drinking establishment to continue socializing after a game. The CEI club serves as a post-game meeting place for many of the teams in the CEI league. Players gather around small wooden tables in the bar, stand outside on the deck or form pairs and play horseshoes. As part of their part-membership in the club, the softball players purchase beer at a discounted price (two beers for $4.50) and are able to buy a 'bucket of beer,' a special deal that consists of six bottles of beer placed in a small plastic bucket with ice for a price of twelve dollars. In addition to other prizes, the team that wins the league championship receives thirty-six free beers after their final game.

This association between beer and slow pitch is expressed and enacted through the discourse and behaviour of the players at the games, and through the direct connection that exists between companies that sell alcohol and the sport at the local, provincial and national levels. The underlying idea appears to be to instil the notion that beer and slow pitch go hand-in-hand such that players of all ages and both genders will consume alcohol as part of the playing experience - ideally, purchasing and consuming the products of the company most closely linked with the game. It appears to be quite successful in that players equate slow pitch with beer in many different ways. For many, to play slow pitch is to drink. However, players also exhibit a great deal of agency in the process, and are not 'controlled' by either the beer companies or sponsors that sell alcoholic beverages. They construct and establish their own meanings associated with alcohol in the game, as symbol and artifact, often seeking to maximize their own benefits as individuals and teams regardless of the purposes of corporations that sponsor the sport.

It is probably important that it is beer, and not another alcoholic beverage, that has come to be so closely associated with the sport of slow pitch. This is most likely influenced by the commercial sponsorship of the sport by major breweries at many different levels of slow pitch, as well as more informal associations between male sports and alcohol in which socio-economic position influences the choice of drink. I would argue that beer is also functionally useful for the purposes of reciprocity and sharing that are a part of the way that these men drink at the game. It is conveniently packaged together, but can be distributed individually and enjoyed simultaneously without need for the passing of a bottle amongst members of the group. In this way, a case of beer may be symbolic of the slow pitch team in a way that a bottle of liquor can not: It can be

understood as both a collective, a 'case' or team, and also a group of individuals (bottles or players) easily separated into its single components for the benefit or impediment of the group depending on the manner in which it is used. Thus, the choice of alcoholic beverage consumed within games needs to be studied further for its symbolic and functional uses by the groups in question.

6.2 Drinking at the Game

It is useful at this point to explore the role alcohol plays in slow pitch by examining its place at the weekly game. This includes the way teams drink and what occurs while they drink. In this manner, beer and beer drinking can be discussed within the social context of the game and the behaviour of the team.

6.2.1 Before the Game

Most players make an effort to be at the playing field around thirty minutes before the game so as to meet with other members of the team and have sufficient time to "warm up" (stretch muscles, throw the ball) and prepare for the game. Due to difficulties in getting to the game from their jobs, players often arrive only minutes before the first games of the night, scheduled to begin at 6:00 p.m., and the start of these games are often delayed to wait for players from one or both teams. League regulations also allow men who are unable to get to the complex on time to join in immediately upon arrival, even if the game is already in progress.

Players who arrive early for games scheduled to start later in the evening explain that they do so in order to relax, have a beer, or to "watch some ball" before their game, to socialize with team-mates and friends on other teams, or to 'scout' the playing abilities of future opponents. Teams congregate together, sitting and standing around the

spectators' bleachers that line both fields, or in other areas of the complex, occasionally wandering off to speak and joke with players on other teams.

The men on the Molson's team meet at the same spot before every game, approximately thirty metres behind the dugout on the western side of Legion Field, where most of them park their vehicles. As subsequent members of the team arrive, players leave their cars to gather together in small groups, or in a rough circle as a larger group, to socialize. The two largest categories of conversation in this pre-game period are: (1) the game of slow pitch and the performance of the team, and (2) the men's activities and events of the past week since our previous game, when most of these men would have seen and spoke to one another last. Talk about slow pitch covers such issues as: the quality of play and outcome of our last game, including any memorable jokes or comical events that took place; a discussion of our upcoming opponents, league rules, team standings and personal statistics; assessments of players' skills and abilities, often with references to previous years or other players, and general discussions of the level of team play; and, talk of various kinds of equipment including gloves and bats.

An important topic that arises at almost every game concerns the number of players that will be playing that night. A running count is kept as players arrive until ten are present, which is just enough to field a complete team. The issue is not simply whether or not we will have enough to field a team, as league rules allow teams to play with as few as eight men without forfeiting the game, but whether we will have to play with only three outfielders. This was a problem the previous year, and is extremely undesirable for the outfielders as it means that each man must do much more running to cover a wider area in the field. The men discuss amongst themselves to determine those

men that are coming and those that are not, as well as the reasons a player might be absent, to determine the number of players and the quality of the team each night.

The other topic of conversation that is common amongst players before the game involves activities and events in the men's lives since the previous game. In this way players are able to talk about and familiarize themselves with their teammates' lives, including family trips, other leisure activities, and local issues in St. John's. Sporting events, both local amateur sports and professional sports entertainment, are also commonly discussed. Being able to talk about sports in its various forms appears to be a valuable asset, not only for the purpose of talking about slow pitch, but also in reference to local amateur or professional sports, that Walker (1998: 232) suggests is part of the cultural ideology about the manner in which men relate to one another.

Players also talk about their jobs, usually in a general sense of inquiring about how things were going at work or to tell others about something that had occurred. The men rarely go into specific details unless warranted by the topic of conversation and all express general satisfaction with their jobs. Networking is something that occurs informally at games, as some of the players are able to provide services to one another in relation to their jobs.[33] In addition to doing business and trading favours with one another, players also provide information about the availability and suitability of employment. In this way, players are able to offer and draw upon resources and information within the team.

Drinking before the game is largely an individual activity as some players sip casually on beer brought from home or purchased from the canteen, while others do not.

[33] In my own instance, Frank was instrumental in helping me find our current home.

Some choose not to drink at all since they are aware that consuming too much alcohol before they play may reduce their playing ability. For this reason, some teams discourage anything other than casual drinking before the game.

6.2.2 During the Game

Players often arrive with beer to consume during the game: Some have two or three bottles, brought from home and stowed away in their equipment bag to be retrieved at any time; other men arrive with a "case" (a box with twelve bottles of beer) or two for the men on the team to share during their games. There is usually a brief interval of five or ten minutes in between the two games of the doubleheader that allows players to relax briefly before resuming play. During this break some players saunter up to the canteen where food and drinks are sold. In addition to snacks such as chocolate bars and potato chips, beverages such as water, sports drinks and beer are also available. Cans of beer, all of which are Molson's products, are available for $2.50 each. I also observed players running quickly to their cars during this interval and driving off, only to return minutes later with cases of beer presumably purchased at a nearby variety store.

For the Molson's team, the cooler of beer is carried into the dugout at this time, if it was not brought in at the outset of the first game. Since the beer is free for Molson's, drinking is not dependent on having money. This assures that all players have access to the beer, though equal distribution is not ensured as cans are taken on a 'first come, first serve' basis. As such, sharing is an important element of the beer-drinking process for the team. When a player opens the cooler to remove a beer, he asks if anyone else in the dugout would like one as well and subsequently distributes cans of beer to the players who request one. Should a player transgress this unspoken rule, one of the other men

makes sure to loudly point out that he had done so: "Look at this guy, he goes and gets himself a beer without asking if I want one." Players also do not take more than one beer at a time, and do not help themselves to another until they are finished, or almost finished, the one they have. When a player notices that the number of cans is dwindling, he lets everyone know that there are not many left - often stating the exact number for all to hear. In this way, everyone is made aware that the cooler is nearly empty, giving all the opportunity to have one more before they are gone.

Other than the politeness of asking if anyone would like a beer while the cooler is open, players are expected to get their own drinks. Frank described this to me at the very first game: "Help yourself to the beer, because no one's going to offer to get it for you." Men who play on a temporary basis (i.e., for just one night) are encouraged to avail themselves of the free beer, and beer is also offered to friends or family who come to watch the team play. Beer is offered to the umpires during the rest period in between games as they converse with the players, though I rarely observed them accept such offers

Beer and slow pitch are also related in the manner that 'strike outs' are treated by players. Strikeouts are extremely rare in slow pitch as the ball is moving so slowly and is much easier to hit. The strike out, then, is the source of a great deal of joking and teasing among players, particularly one's own team-mates, since it is considered the comical epitome of ineptitude in slow pitch. A strikeout causes cheers from both teammates and opponents alike, each laughing and yelling that the batter now owes his teammates a case of beer, or a "round" of beers. While players are told that they owe beer to the other players on the team for striking out, more often this penalty is a source of joking that is only occasionally paid by the 'offending' player. Thus, some players willingly pay the

penalty, to the pleasant surprise of their teammates, and others do not. It is not strictly enforced and there are no sanctions, beyond additional joking and taunting, if a player is unable or chooses not to pay.

A prime consideration is undoubtedly the additional financial cost placed on players who strike out. In a conversation with a team from Paradise, a cheaper variation of this was described to me, in which the player who struck out must buy beer for only the three men who follow him in the batting order rather than purchasing drinks for the entire team. In this way it is made "easier on the wallet" for the player involved and encourages him to "pay up"; it increases the possibility that he will pay for these three beers rather than the dozen or more required for an entire team. It would seem that were such a penalty to be enforced strictly, the financial burden placed on such players might make the game less enjoyable, particularly for those men who can little afford the additional cost.

6.2.3 After the Game

After the game, the Molson's players congregate in the same area where they meet before the game. A lamppost stands nearby so there is illumination when the lights on the playing field are shut off at the end of the night. Forming a rough circle, sometimes with the cooler placed strategically in the centre, the men finish what is left of the beer while discussing the night's game and sundry other conversational topics. The beer seems to serve as the primary purpose for staying afterwards, as few players stay and socialize when the beer has been consumed in its entirety. On those nights when the beer was finished before our games were completed, the members of the team left the complex almost immediately afterwards - often within ten or fifteen minutes. However, having

beer remaining is still no assurance that players will stay as they are just as quick to leave when the weather is cold or rainy, when our games are completed at a much later time than usual, or when the men have commitments early the next morning.

Unlike the period preceding the game, in which players tend to form small conversational groups as part of a larger aggregate, the team gathers as a whole afterwards, standing together in a roughly circular formation that facilitates group conversation. The post-game talk also has much more of a team-oriented flavour, revolving as it does around shared memories or group activities. Any number of smaller, individual discussions continue to occur between small groups along the periphery of the circle concerning issues such as politics, family issues and work, but this is in addition to the louder, and much more lively, conversation underway within the larger group. In this forum, the players contribute from all sides, seemingly tossing jokes and stories into the middle of the group for another to pick up, reply or add to, and throw back for someone else to take up. In addition to the team content of the stories, they are also told in a group context with a number of players adding to the story-telling process in a collective effort.

An important aspect of these gatherings involves discussing the game that the team has just finished playing. Topics such as an analysis of the level of team play and the play of our opponents, contributing factors to the victory or loss, the abilities of individual players, the success or failure of various strategies employed, and suggestions and advice handed out to team-mates for future games are all taken up at this time. These post-game chats also include hearty laughter and joking about comical errors and funny events that took place as they are explained and re-enacted by the men involved. This, in

turn, leads to the retelling of other stories about humorous plays and misplays from past games.

The players laugh with one another about not only the exploits in the game but also stories involving drinking and drunkenness, especially if they occurred within the context of a team-related event. The 'cabin trip' was a source of many of these recollections for Molson's with tales being recounted about players who broke the kitchen table during horseplay, another who was involved in a public display of vomiting, and a third who was 'comatose,' barely moving from the couch for the entire weekend. These same players were also teased for their behaviour, much to the amusement of all.

The tradition by many teams to celebrate the end of their season, immediately following their final game of the year, with the consumption of more beer than usual reinforces the role of drinking. Having beer for the last game, preferably more than usual, is viewed as very important by the men as a form of celebration of the end of another season, and also of any successes that the team had. It is also the last time that many of these men will be drinking together as a team until the following year.

After winning the CEI league championship on an early, late-September Sunday afternoon, the players from the Unknowns drank not only their own team beer, but also the free beer awarded to them for winning, before returning to the park to continue to drink. Much to their pleasure and surprise, Adam arrived unannounced with a keg of beer left over from an event the night before. One of the men joked that Adam should receive the team MVP award for bringing the keg, even though he wasn't a member of the team. With an abundance of beer at their disposal they settled in for an afternoon of drinking in which they discussed the events of the summer, and began to plan for next year's team.

Shortly after, players from the opposing team, only recently defeated, wandered down from the CEI club where they had been drinking and were told to help themselves to the keg. When I left an hour later to return home, members of both teams were sitting and standing on the hill overlooking the diamond, watching the 'B' finals being played out, moving alternately between the warm sun and the cool shade, talking and laughing away.

The process of identity construction by these players as a team draws heavily upon these memories of 'team history' and the continuity that is reflected in the present summer from all those that have come before. In the period after the game, whether this is only fifteen minutes or an hour, the beer is used by the players as an 'excuse' to stay afterwards and socialize as a group, to share jokes and to tell stories about the team and its players. More so than before the game, it is this collective event that contributes to the 'bonding' process and is analogous to the 'locker room talk' that other researchers have identified as a key element in the development of group identities in sport (cf., Curry 1991; Robidaux 2001; Theberge 2000).

It appears that in some ways it is the beer that is what the players really want out of playing, as players bemoan its absence at games and emphasize its importance in the playing experience. In a manner this is true, but not simply because they seek inebriation or the consumption of alcohol for its own sake. Instead, the drinking of beer should be understood as both a symbol of the primary meaning of the game, as 'fun', and in relation to the social interaction that is as much valued by the men as the play on the field. By linking their social time to the time it takes to consume an often-predetermined amount of alcohol, the men are able to emphasize sociability while also limiting their drinking time.

6.3 Team Beer, Rounds, and Camaraderie

The sharing of beer amongst team members is recognized as a contributing factor towards team unity. As one man announced to his team-mates during the post-game drinking period: "I like the rounds, boys. It's good for the camaraderie." The process of cohesion in slow pitch relies on the sharing of selves through talk, through the commensality of drinking together, and through relationships expressed in the exchange of goods and services. Commensality reinforces a sense of communion among the individuals who take part in the collective consumption of food and drink and produces social bonds of reciprocity and collective identity (Adler 1991: 383; Chatwin 2001: 82; de Garine 2001: 7). Driessen (1992: 73) notes that the act of drinking together establishes, reaffirms and expresses bonds between people: "Drinking not only creates a bond, but also serves to reinforce existing bonds and express the cultural substance of social relationships." As such, the collective context of, and the relationships that develop from, the sharing of beer are integral to the team interaction on and off the field of play.

The Molson's team has a unique but very significant way of developing a shared group identity through drinking. Since the sponsor donates the beer, no money is charged for its consumption and all members of the team have equal access to the beer. Access is ensured for all by removing the cost and making the beer free. By sharing in the beer, each player is expressing a relation to the group; by urging all members to drink, those in the group are constructing an inclusionary relationship with the others. By eliminating the need for the buying of 'rounds' or any other reciprocal relationship between individuals on the team using beer as a medium, having free, equal access to the beer establishes a unique relationship to the team as a conceptual entity. As such, new players

are urged to partake of the beer as part of their membership, and their readiness to do so signals an acceptance of their own inclusion. Those who drink it are not beholden to anyone but the group since a member of the team does not provide the beer. Having said that, there is a clear recognition of the importance of the team member who brings the beer to each game, but accompanying this prestige is added responsibility for failing to do so brings this player a reprimand by the other men.

For teams who do not receive free beer, drinking during the games involves buying beer from the canteen, bringing a case of beer along to share with teammates, or drinking beer supplied by the team. In the latter instance, the price of team beer is cheaper than the canteen but more than its original purchase price, with the money going into the 'beer kitty'. While ostensibly acting as a method of pooling resources (money, beer), purchasing team beer also has its problems. Since the 'team beer' is for the use of all the players on the team, attempts are made not to exclude anyone who does not have money at the game, or is experiencing some financial difficulty. As a result, a form of credit system is often established. A player on the team volunteers, or is volunteered by others, to bring the beer to each game and to keep track of those players who are drinking on credit. The players themselves are expected to keep an accurate count of the money they owe. Names are entered into a small notebook if drinking on credit and each beer that the player drinks is subsequently recorded, ideally with the player paying in full the following week. This debt can carry over from week to week and teams usually place a limit on the amount of beer that can be consumed in this manner.

The credit system can lead to tension when a player is running up a large debt without paying, fails to keep accurate account of the number of beers being taken, or is

continually unable to pay what he owes. Just such a thing occurred after a Sunday game with the Unknowns as Earl - who ostensibly took care of the operation of the team including bringing the beer, preparing the batting order, and acting as the primary contact with the league - openly questioned Jim about whether or not he had paid the money he owed, as well as the number of beers that he had drank on that day. A rather argumentative conversation resulted before Earl was satisfied that Jim had marked down the proper number of beers. He then reminded others on the team to pay what they owed at their next game.

On this same day, I was offered a free beer as I had played with them when they needed an extra player. Beer is sometimes used as payment for other game related, and non-game related, favours. When I approached Paul at the CEI club after a game to thank him and his team for allowing me to play with them a month ago, he responded with: "If you want to thank me, you can buy me a beer." So, I bought him a beer to express my gratitude and we sat down and talked for nearly 45 minutes. I also observed a player who bought beer for a teammate after a game to thank the man for giving him a ride to the ballpark, and another who bought his teammate beer for helping him do some work in his home on the weekend. In this manner, the repayment of obligations through reciprocal acts is expressed through the symbolic medium of beer.

Adler (1991: 396) notes that alcohol has often been used as a symbolic medium by which men and women were joined in relations of exchange and sociality. Though this has changed significantly, alcohol remains a medium of exchange so that "drinking still has the ability to recall, and even reproduce momentarily, the relations of symbolic exchange that informed its preindustrial history" (Adler 1991: 379). As such, the axiom

"with beer one thanks, but with money one pays" (Adler 1991: 384) holds true, as the slow pitch players repay obligations and express gratitude for personal favours through buying one another beer after the game, thereby stressing the social relationship and mutual aid between them.

Similarly, Mars (1987: 99), in his research on Newfoundland longshoremen, notes that reciprocities and obligations from the work environment are carried over to the post-work drinking period such that "unbalanced obligations derived from one sphere may be balanced by action in another." In this way, both regular gang members, who buy one another drinks - predominantly beer - on a regular basis in the tavern after work, and 'outside men,' who pass around a bottle of wine or cheap rum ("Screech") among a constantly shifting group in parking lots, are able to negotiate issues of prestige and security at work through the sharing of alcohol. At the same time, the drinking period affords conversation and talks that provide the men with important information about the work situation. I suggest that similar behaviour can be seen in the actions of the men in my research, for whom beer provides a medium through which reciprocities and obligations are balanced between different spheres of the their lives, and the drinking period itself is relied upon to cement social relations between the players while providing them with key information essential to negotiating their membership on the team.

The social interaction and behaviours associated with drinking beer at the game is also found at times when the team gathers together for social events away from the game. In these contexts, forms of reciprocity and social credit are often a key element of drinking behaviour. On the weekend cabin trip for members of Molson's, a similar pattern of drinking behaviour emerged in drinking from a free keg of beer provided by

one of the players as from the cooler at the games: players were expected to ask others in the cabin whether they wanted a beer before going off to fill their cup.

The men take turns buying 'rounds' for their teammates, with one player buying a beer for others in a small group and each player reciprocating when it his turn, in certain situations. I observed a player buying a round of beer for every member of the team on only two occasions. This seemed to be an expression of the player's relation toward the group and did not appear to engender similar round buying by the other men. The player was thanked heartily, and some of the other men returned the favour by buying him a beer in return, but the subsequent buying of rounds for the entire team did not occur. Most often, the buying of rounds was limited to a small group within the team. Such behaviour was observed by Molson's players at the Caribou Complex league banquet and awards ceremony; by players from the Unknowns at their year-end banquet; by various league teams and players at tournaments who took turns buying beer for each other from the canteen at the ball field; and between players as they drank from the 'team beer', with players taking turns paying for one another. Such behaviour becomes a means of constructing and expressing individual and group relationships.

The form the reciprocity takes appears to be dependent on the relationship of the men involved, so that men who were close friends were seen exhibiting a seemingly 'generalized' reciprocity, while others would repay a beer with a beer almost immediately afterward in a more 'balanced' manner similar to Sahlins' (1972: 191-192) schema of reciprocity and social proximity. In this instance, the form of reciprocity is linked to the 'closeness' of the friendship. Thus, Jim and John, who have been friends since childhood, often bought beer for one another after their Sunday afternoon games with

little direct reciprocation; Jim bought John's beer for two weeks straight with the knowledge that, as expressed to me, "it all comes back around," and John would respond in kind sometime in the future. On the other hand, when I was included in the round-buying by members of another team with whom I was talking, the men made sure to point out to me that it was my turn to purchase the beer when they thought that I was getting ready to leave.

The relationships between individual players and between players and the team are expressed and maintained through the symbolic exchange of drinking beer at the game. The practice of 'team beer' is similar to, but not exactly the same as, 'pooling' as discussed by Sahlins (1972: 188). The effect is somewhat different for Molson's and for those teams who do not get free beer. For Molson's, it is not so much pooling and redistribution as it is sharing of the resources (beer) donated to the team by their sponsor. The drinking behaviour established by the team ensures equal access for all players to the beer, and attempts to balance the quantity each player might receive. The team beer and 'kitty' system is much closer to pooling, with players combining their financial resources through the consumption of beer in order to purchase more beer or, ideally, benefit the team as a whole. While a single player is usually chosen to oversee the collection of funds and the purchases of beer and other goods from the kitty, the 'redistribution' that occurs is not attributed directly to him, as this authority is exercised on behalf of the team, and he receives little prestige as a result.

Forms of reciprocity both reflect and develop relationships between individuals or small groups of people within the group. When Jim and John, from the example above, buy one another beer they are involved in the ongoing expression of their relationship

with one another, while also constructing a relation to the team through the drinking of team beer. While generalized and balanced reciprocities reflect different social relationships, they are nonetheless key elements in the ongoing construction of relationships between slow pitch players. The combined effect of pooling, the collective combining and redistribution of a group's resources (Sahlins 1974: 188), and a system of reciprocities, as a set of rights and obligations involving the giving and receiving of goods or services between two parties (Kennedy 1970: 56), links players both to the group and to one another, as does the commensality and the patterned behaviour associated with sharing of beer and conversation. As Sahlins (1972: 94) notes: "Pooling abolishes the differentiation of the parts in favor of the coherence of the whole; it is the constituting activity of the group . . . reciprocity is always a "between" relation: however solidary. . ."

This system of reciprocities and pooling also carries with it certain mutual obligations, particularly the obligation to participate in drink rituals and to return a gift in the appropriate manner. It is through the drink rituals that the social world of the group is, in part, constructed and reproduced and it is through the giving and exchange of drinks that social ties of reciprocity and obligation are established (Adler 1991: 382). As noted by Heath (2000: 128), the buying of rounds may appear to be an egalitarian custom in which all members of the group are equally involved, but it can also be quite burdensome. This occurs when one has limited finances or would prefer to purchase only a couple of drinks for oneself; or when he would like to leave the group but "feels that he cannot afford to lose the return on his earlier investment, or to incur the scorn of some from whom he had accepted drinks without reciprocating" (Heath 2000: 128). The buying of rounds can also mean that a person drinks greater quantities of alcohol, for a longer

period of time, to comply with group norms of behaviour and to avoid any sanctions associated with opting out. Round buying inevitably involves an element of financial cost for those who participate.

In Dunk's (1991: 92) research, he notes that generalized reciprocity is the primary mode within the slow pitch team, but carries with it certain obligations for behaviour:

> No one asks who has or has not contributed to the team's beer fund. It is assumed that everyone contributes his share. In the bar after the game, everyone takes turns buying rounds. If someone is short of money one evening someone else or several other people stand him drinks. This "just happens"; one does not need to ask. Of course, the gift does contain an obligation. Everyone is expected to behave in the same manner. Anyone who is perceived to be too concerned with money, about who has paid for what, is the object of scorn.

Such reciprocal behaviour is believed to be an expression of "true friends" that extends beyond the bar or the game and into the daily lives of the men involved.

Players often made loud statements about their teammates, usually in a jovial manner, but which appear to emphasize team norms in beer-drinking behaviour by embarrassing anyone who fails to comply to the obligations of round buying or other group drinking practices. While it is generally assumed that all contribute equally, I did observe players who were unhappy about the level of participation in the post-game drinking. When it was announced that the team did not yet have enough in the 'kitty' to pay for the year-end party, with encouragement to "drink up," a small group of players grumbled that they had already contributed more than their fair share of money by staying to drink after every game. They pointed out that it was the same five or six men who were drinking the beer, and this group was essentially paying for the team party for everyone else. What is needed, they suggested, is to get some of the men who don't

normally stay afterwards to stick around and drink a beer or two themselves. A short argument ensued, and this group of men threatened to begin bringing their own beer to the games to drink. In a conversation afterwards, one of the men explained that he enjoyed having a beer 'with the boys' after the game, but did not like that the rest of the team were counting on the money made from drinking team beer when they were not drinking themselves.

For the middle-class drinkers in the English tavern studied by Hunt and Satterlee (1986: 530), it is necessary for members to have a high enough income that allowed them to take part in the "life-style" of the group which included spending money through round buying to maintain their membership and identity as a "sociable person." An individual's failure to adhere to group rules of equal participation - by not participating in round buying or deliberately waiting for only a small group to be present - jeopardised his/her group position and relationships with other members leading to an exclusion from future rounds, though not necessarily from other aspects of the group's social life (Hunt & Satterlee 1986: 530-531). Individuals can also lose status by attempting to dominate the round buying, which may be seen by others as an attempt to assert superiority over them in terms of wealth or generosity.

Ostensibly, egalitarianism is the ideal mode of interaction in the group drinking process, enforced by group norms, yet the appearance of equality obscures the inequalities that may emerge and be emphasized as a result. It is important for the men who play slow pitch to be aware of the relationships that they have with the other men on the team, individually and as a group, in order to fulfill one's obligations in the appropriate manner when included in the reciprocal exchange of beer. Although I did not

observe the development of any overt conflict or hostility as a result of not reciprocating in the proper way, there were numerous times when players reminded others of their responsibility. Players also castigated absent members who violate the norms established by the group for drinking behaviour.

6.4 Risks of Drinking

Drinking alcohol in a public area contravenes both legal and local community standards in St. John's. Players who choose to drink in public parks after their softball games must deal with the complaints of local residents and the occasional appearance of the police so that some care is taken to drink in a relatively quiet, unobtrusive manner. Driving while intoxicated also violates legal and societal values and players make attempts to act responsibly as a result, by limiting the amount of alcohol they consume or ensuring that they have an alternate way to get to and from games. This is not to say that intoxication does not occur, but there is no way to accurately measure this phenomenon in my research. Further, players were not averse to driving home with an open can of beer despite legal prohibitions.

While alcohol is consumed throughout the game, it is occasionally a problematic aspect of the slow pitch experience. One such incident took place during a tournament in which two teams who were all but eliminated from the tourney, one from Marystown and the other from one of the Caribou Complex leagues, were scheduled to play one another late Saturday night. Both teams had lost their previous two games by mercies, and neither would be advancing to play on Sunday regardless of who won. The game means little for either team in terms of the outcome of the tournament, and the players of at least one of the teams had taken the opportunity to begin drinking early.

The game starts shortly after 9 p.m., with the next game scheduled to begin at 10:30. The game is long and slow, as the team from Marystown does not seem to take the game very seriously. They take their time walking on and off the field in between innings. They draw out each at-bat by joking with the pitcher and stepping out of the batter's box. When fielding, the catcher is often far too engaged in conversation with either the batter or the umpire (who does his utmost best to speed the game along, with little success) to catch the ball after it is pitched so that he has to walk over to retrieve it from where it stops along the fence behind him, or from rolling in front of the dugout. Further, he rolls the ball back to the pitcher, throws it over his head so that someone has to go and get it, or occasionally throws it first to one of the other infielders who must then relay it back to the pitcher. Players from both teams appear to be enjoying themselves, particularly those on the Marystown team who continue to joke and laugh throughout the game. However, such behaviour elicits groans and comments from those watching to "hurry the game up." The spectators consist of both teams who are to play next, having arrived early in order to prepare for their game, along with their friends and family members who had come as spectators. As they realize that their game is going to be starting late, both teams waiting to play begin to get impatient. They urge the umpire to hurry the game along and groan loudly when a poor play or an error prolongs an inning. They also cheer loudly when the outs are made and when each inning ends. Some even exhort the players on the field themselves to hurry up and end the game. When the game finally ends, after 11 p.m., the spectators let out a loud yell of approval. While their disapproval was not expressed as being upset that the players from one of the teams were

drunk, a correlation was drawn by the spectators I spoke with afterwards to being drunk and making the games longer than usual.

A similar occurrence took place at one of Molson's league games. Earlier on the evening in question, I observed players from both teams, who appeared to be at least slightly intoxicated, play-fighting in a rough manner. At least one player, the catcher for one of the teams, was drinking on the field during the game, and in the rest period between games I stood in line as three players from the same team purchase a combined thirty-eight beers and carried them back to the team dugout. This rest period was also much longer than usual, allowing members of both teams to make repeated trips to the canteen to buy beer.

When the Molson's team approach the diamond at 8:30, they discover that the game is only in the third inning, and appears to be far from over. This causes a great deal of consternation among the men, particularly since someone points out that both teams appear to be drunk. The players are unhappy about having to wait, with a number of them openly expressing their displeasure to one another, pointing out that we will either have less time to play or will end up playing much later into the night. The disapproval expressed by the players stemmed from the apparent intoxication of the players on the field who were prolonging the game through their inability to field or throw the ball properly, their dawdling behaviour between innings, and just fooling around far too much during the game.

Our first game does not begin until 9:15 p.m., forty-five minutes late. The cooler of beer is brought into the dugout at the beginning of our first game, and the rest period between games is cut short to save time. Our games are done at 11:30 p.m. and all of the

men leave the complex immediately after. A rule is later established that a new inning is not to be started after 8:25 p.m. so that the next set of games can begin on time.

It seems that drinking at games is a controlled behaviour. While drunkenness is not overtly problematic, it is discouraged. I would suggest that intoxication does occur during and after games, and occasionally before games when players arrive after having already enjoyed a few drinks. It becomes a problem when it results in injury, for obvious reasons, or long, drawn out games that impact the time constraints in which the game is played. The licentious behaviour at the games is controlled somewhat by the work and domestic responsibilities of the men before and after the games. Further, for teams who wish to focus on winning and successful competition, excessive consumption of alcohol has a negative impact on performance resulting in additional constraints placed on the activity and quantity of drinking before and during games.

As Gusfield (1987: 83, 87) points out, the consumption of alcohol also contains potential political, legal and social conflict in addition to its close association with leisure and play. "Social controls" are then required to regulate drinking to appropriate times, places and practices, thereby institutionalizing its use into acceptable areas and activities (Gusfield 1987: 87). Chatwin (2001: 181) similarly notes that the Georgian context of drinking and eating together is rarely beset by uncontrolled drunkenness and also relies on methods of social control. Consumption is controlled through "honour-and-shame" mechanisms, by attaching specific meanings to the drinking that applies a code of behaviour limiting excessive drunkenness that may conflict with the process of solidarity and identity that takes place (Chatwin 2001: 181).

The misuse and overuse of alcohol in slow pitch is controlled by a number of team mechanisms that give specific meaning to its use. Both misuse and overuse imply a level of acceptable drinking well understood by team members. This is communicated through the collective drinking of the team, and through the values attached to alcohol as part of the game. Drinking before the game is controlled by noting its negative effects on playing ability, and drinking during the game is mitigated by this and other factors spelled out in the examples above.

6.5 Summary

The connection between leisure activities and the consumption of alcohol has been made in the research literature. This stems in part from the widespread use of alcohol as a marker of festivity (de Garine 2001: 5; Heath 2000: 14). Alcohol is used as a symbol of the shift from work to leisure, to a discrete time period separated from 'serious life' and specifically set aside for playfulness, as coffee is symbolic of a shift from leisure to work (Driessen 1992: 73; Gusfield 1987, 1991). In this context, alcohol becomes a symbol of non-seriousness, irrationality, freedom and 'fun' (Gusfield 1991: 418), a keying device that marks the transition from one frame of experience to another and defines leisure as "fun time" (Gusfield 1987).

Further, the relationships forged through the consumption of alcohol can also be significant. Gusfield (1987: 82) notes that, "[t]he cultural definition of alcohol as a liquid which develops and sustains personal and solidary human relationships is significant in cueing occasions. The drinking occasion is a contrast to the rational and hierarchical attitudes of persons as dramatic actors and actresses; as players of roles." He links this directly to Victor Turner's distinction between communitas and structure: while

relationships between people are mediated and regulated by their position in the social structure, these same relations have far less claim on behaviour in a play frame signified by the consumption of alcohol. The interaction between people is influenced by the social context in which it occurs and occasions of drinking are themselves often marked as separate: "The drinking situation enables us to provide liminal time; a way of passing from the ordered regulation of one form of social organization to the less-ordered, deregulated form of another" (Gusfield 1987: 83). In this sense, social relationships developed through drinking occasions exhibit some of the qualities typically associated with communitas.

Similarly, Oldenburg (1997: 81) writes that, "far more than the routines of daily life, the collective revelry of festival periods is an expression of social cohesion." He suggests that it is just such revelry that is evident in the informal public gathering places, such as taverns, where people come together for conversation, drinking, and sociability, all of which contributes to feelings of 'community.' As a "social lubricant," the stimulant properties of alcohol are relied upon to induce mirth, release inhibitions, and to loosen social barriers and formal attitudes in a variety of social contexts (de Garine 2001: 7; Heath 2000: 11). Sports may constitute one such context.

Messner (1992: 80) points out that alcohol, especially beer, is closely associated with the world of sports as beer manufacturers and distributors are heavily involved in sponsoring all manners of sporting events. Alcohol also plays a very important role in male peer groups. When combined with sports, this contributes to the widespread practice of having a few beers "with the boys" after sporting events of many different levels of play (Messner 1992: 80). Curry (2000) and Messner (1992) both identify a

relationship between men, alcohol and sports in constructions of masculine identity that often rely on misogynistic and homophobic discourse and behaviour. Lawrence Wenner (1998: 302) refers to this as the "high holy trinity of alcohol, sports and hegemonic masculinity" clearly highlighting the interrelationship.

Alcohol is relied upon in various contexts to create and reflect ties among men. Spending their leisure time in this way, in all-male contexts, men drink and socialize together to develop and experience strong feelings of camaraderie and solidarity (Gefou-Madianou 1992: 11). This is attributed both to the effects of the alcohol, as well as to "the social construction of the sharing of certain drinks under certain circumstances which is essential for the creation of social existence and social identity" (Gefou-Madianou 1992: 12-13). Among Andalusian men, the tavern, bar or cafe, "is a social context for the creation and maintenance of friendship and the celebration of masculinity. Drinking together creates a temporary ambience of oneness, fraternity and equality that does not exist outside the bar" (Driessen 1992: 73).

Orcutt (1991) notes that drinking is often a social activity and points to the importance of understanding the interpersonal context of alcohol use, highlighting the need to understand the "integration of alcohol use into the daily activities that reaffirm friendship and other social relationships" (Orcutt 1991: 212). In stressing the close relationship between the social contexts of one's peers and drinking, Orcutt (1991) suggests that one tends to drink with one's friends. The corollary of this is that a person becomes a friend if one chooses to drink with him or her. Oldenburg (1997) adds to this and suggests that the drinking place is a context in which group friendships are both created and maintained for the benefit of those who regularly participate. All of this

suggests that there is a relationship between drinking and friendship: as reflective of actual social relations, but also by allowing drinking together to construct and signify idealized relations between people.

Alcohol is a very significant aspect of the slow pitch experience for the men in my research. Both the drinking and the joking prevalent in slow pitch serve to define the game as separate from the everyday lives of the players. It signifies non-seriousness in contrast to the 'seriousness' of daily life. Along with the use of humour, alcohol in slow pitch also symbolizes a less serious sport, particularly in contrast to the more competitive forms of softball. The consumption of beer before, during and after the game contributes to feelings of cohesiveness and solidarity amongst team members in different ways: through sharing of selves, through commensality and shared drinking patterns, and through the enactment of various forms of reciprocal and shared relations while drinking. It seems that the systems of pooling and reciprocities practiced by slow pitch teams establishes players in a 'web' of interconnected relations, binding them one to another and to the team in a variety of ways (see Sahlins 1972: 188-189). This also includes such things as "microlevel niceties" - drinking etiquette and behaviour, the pace at which the group drinks, expectations of reciprocity and social credit, the choice of drinks, and the paraphernalia used - all of which can inform and reflect group mores, values, attitudes and emotions (Heath 2000: 106-115).

The contribution of drinking to processes of group cohesion involves symbolic elements that forge a common group identity as much as the creation and maintenance of relationships through commensality and sociality. The symbolic acts of drinking practices create and reaffirm social ties, constructing and reproducing the social world of

a group (Adler 1991: 382). To this effect, Mary Douglas (1987) points out that drinking is implicated in the reflection and maintenance of actual social relationships but also in the construction of 'ideal' worlds. As a part of this process of group identification, the definition of boundaries between groups is an essential component. Douglas (1987: 8) writes that drinks and drinking rituals provide markers of personal and group identity, and also identify boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. The different drinking patterns of the regular Newfoundland longshoremen and the 'outside workers' (Mars 1987), and of the middle-class and working-class drinking groups in an English tavern (Hunt & Satterlee 1986) provide unity within each group while at the same time distinguishing themselves from others.

Drinking, joking, insults and sociability are all involved in the construction of social identity for the Irish fishermen studied by Peace (1992). Drinking practices and discourse about drinking are all implicated in this process as fishermen drink more copiously than any other segment of the community, which is remarked upon and discussed: fishing and drinking are considered indivisible (Peace 1992: 167). As Peace (1992: 171), "it is a virtual requirement that to be a fisherman it is necessary to drink well." The social identities of the men involved in fishing is established and maintained through the drinking that takes place in the bars, through the knowledge acquired in the sociability that accompanies the drinking, in negotiating the competition with other fishermen, in expressions of masculinity and gender relations, and in the stories and personal accounts related.

It is important to note here that the emphasis placed on drinking in slow pitch is not simply an encouragement to consume alcohol as an act in itself. It must be

understood in relation to the conversations, joking and general social interaction that accompanies the drinking of beer at the games. I suggest that talking about drinking is actually a way for these men to talk about socializing with one another. In this sense, a player can still take part in the game and post-game activities without drinking, by taking part in the talking and joking that are an essential aspect of this process. If one chooses not to drink, or to drink non-alcoholic beverages, taking part in the other interactions signals one's place in the group. Drinking alcohol at the games but not taking part in the sociality in some measure is a violation of these norms, as is drinking more than is deemed acceptable by the group in the context of their team philosophy. Nonetheless, it is significant to repeat that for many of the men in my research, to play slow pitch *is* to drink, though the extent to which and the forms in which that drinking occurs varies.

Chapter 7
Humour

> "I've made the comment that I think, if I couldn't play hockey this winter coming up, I think I'd still go up and pay my money to be in the dressing room and have a few beer and talk after because it's some of the most fun you'll have."
> (Frank, Interview, September 7, 2002)

7.1 Humour and Slow Pitch

The importance of conversation and joking in slow pitch can be seen in the connection between the locker room talk in hockey and the post-game talk in slow pitch made explicit by Frank, who participates in both sports, when asked what he gets out of "playing":

> I'm doing it because I enjoy the sport. I enjoy being with the guys and the camaraderie and the fun. And I'll tell you what's more fun than any of it is the chit-chat in the dressing room and stuff after. It's just as fun as playing the game. Like we come in after hockey and the first thing, someone will always say every night, "Perfect game, guys." Not talking about the score or anything. "Perfect game, guys. No one got hurt and the beer's cold." The beer, you know, in a nutshell, that's it. And then everyone sits around and makes fun of everybody else, and stuff that they did.

If he were unable to play hockey in the upcoming winter, he says, he would still pay the required fee just to be able to be in the dressing room after the game, have a few beers, and take part in the joking and talking that occurs. Players feel that being at the game and taking part in the beer-drinking and post-game interaction, even if they don't actually contribute to the playing of the game, is an essential aspect of slow pitch.

All this was echoed by other players who made similar claims about their willingness to pay the league fee in order to come down to the game as a member of the team and be involved in the beer-drinking and talking afterwards that is such a large part of the camaraderie valued by the players, even if they do not play. This is particularly the

case because of the significance of joking and teasing amongst the players afterwards as they celebrate plays in the game, especially the humorous elements such as misplays and errors made by teammates. A "friendly rivalry" emerges between teammates as they compete for status within the team and try to outdo one another while playing, and through the exchange of insults and word play that encompass a large part of the communication at the games. The game of slow pitch is a medium through which the men interact with one another.

Dunk's (1992: 74-86) descriptions of the lob-ball games in Thunder Bay clearly show the importance of humour and sociability amongst the men on the teams. The talks before, during and after games are light-hearted and comical, full of insults, obscene jokes and fits of laughter. While the bulk of these interchanges take place between the men on the team, exchanges with umpires, spectators and even the other team also occur. As Dunk (1992: 78) explains, the stories, insults and jokes "are a way of defining the group. Those who belong understand the humour." Dunk (1991: 82) also notes that "verbal exchanges," such as "encouragements for good plays, mild insults, and ironic praise" are a part of the game experience, with "the bigger the error, the more grandiose the applause." Rather than discussing the game as a whole, though the flow and feel of the game does come up, players tend to joke and talk about, and refer repeatedly to, specific incidents in the game (as vignettes or 'snapshots'). They are celebrated in stories, but they are also the source of a great deal of joking and teasing amongst the players. It is these humorous types of plays that are remembered most from the game, and significantly contribute to the construction and expression of team identity.

7.2 Expressions of Humour

In this section I introduce and discuss some of the ways in which the men in slow pitch express humour at the game and, in so doing, construct and define the game in a particular manner conducive to notions of 'fun.'

7.2.1 The 'Team Clown'

While there is very little formal structure on the Molson's slow pitch team, an informal hierarchy based on a variety of player "traits" appears to be recognized. It is generally the player or players who are most involved in organizing the team - ensuring enough players are at games, choosing the batting order, collecting fees, and acting as a liaison between the league and the team - who are at the 'centre' of the group. Playing ability also influences one's standing on the team, as does a player's personal relationship with the men who manage or organize the team. While such positions are not always overtly recognized, they are part of the informal team structure that develops and influences player status within the group. Being the 'team clown' represents another way for a player to gain status on the team.

While watching a tournament game, I was amused to see (and hear) some of the players from the team scheduled to play next singing loudly while they wait. A large, rotund dark-bearded man was singing the verses to Stan Rogers' song, "Barrett's Privateers," while three of his teammates sitting in the stands behind him sing the background ("How I wish I was in Sherbrooke now!") and join in for the refrain. When they are finished the song, Bill, who plays regularly in one of the leagues at the complex and whose team is to play these men next, walks up and begins to joke around with the bearded singer. The jokes and ensuing laughter carry over into the game as the team

takes every opportunity to make fun of Bill, who is pitching. I am told after the game, by one of his teammates, that the bearded man is new to their team. Having played against him for years in their local league on the southern coast of Newfoundland, he joined their team this year much to the enjoyment of the other players.

"He's the joker of the team," I am told, "He always keeps the guys laughing. We laughed all last night at the campsite. I don't remember when I've laughed so hard."

The status of this player is not unique, as it seems that many teams have at least one player (and sometimes more than one) who is recognized for being the funniest person on the team; that is, a player who adds to the enjoyment of the game through his contribution of humour. The rest of the team adds to the humorous atmosphere of the game as well, but it is "the joker" who is characterized as much by his humour as by his ability in the game.

This humour takes many different forms: jokes, funny stories, word play during and after the games, as well as a particularly amusing style of play in the game itself. The Molson's team has two such players, each of whom contributes to the levity in different ways: Mike, who was described by one player during a game as "a one man three-ring circus," and John, whose relaxed style of play and his constant reaffirmation of "fun" helps to keep the other players laughing and relaxed.

Mike is not the most skilled player on the team, but his energetic play that is occasionally prone to misplays and errors, in addition to his willingness to laugh at himself, makes him a popular player for generating laughter during any game in which he is involved. John's antics in the game - particularly his running style - and his reminders to other players that the reason to play slow pitch is "for fun," most often accompanied by

funny comments delivered with a straight face, contributes to his popularity as both a teammate and an opponent. As such, no other player on the team garnered as many personal comments from players on other teams as did John.

7.2.2 'Razzing', Teasing, and Insults

Amidst the congratulations and consolations that players give one another for making a good play, or not making a play, players also take the opportunity to tease, insult, and make fun of one another in humorous ways. . The players call this 'razzing' and it is ubiquitous in the game. As one player described it with a chuckle: "They raz you for making a good play, and they raz you if you make a bad play. Sometimes it's better not to make a play at all."

Oldenburg (1997: 53-4) refers to razzing in reference to the verbal exchanges that take place between men who drink together, characterized by apparent rudeness, insults and teasing done in a humorous manner. While in an ordinary setting such impoliteness might be responded to by disapproval and offense, in this setting it is responded to enthusiastically and in like kind. Oldenburg (1997: 53) explains:

> Much is communicated by these personalized excursions into low humor. The victim and the assailant have known each other for sometime. Their relationship is not fragile. An invitation to a duel of wits has been extended. A fraternity exists here . . . much of the talk sounds like rudeness and gains its effect from doing so but is calculated to delight and communicate the strength of fraternal bonds.

In slow pitch razzing has many forms and functions. It can serve as a levelling mechanism, such as when a player seems to be elevating himself above other members of the team or when the game situation suggests that this might occur. For example, an infielder who makes all three outs in an inning, or an outfielder who is catching the

majority of the balls hit to the outfield, is jokingly accused of being a "ball hog" by his team-mates and asked if he is going to let anyone else play. Similarly, after Eli had already hit a homerun earlier in the game, Adam calls out to the opposing pitcher to walk Eli in his next at-bat, to prevent him from hitting another homer and then boasting about it to the rest of us. In this way, players are warned, albeit in a light-hearted tone, of the dangers of taking themselves too seriously, of claiming superiority over the other men and thereby upsetting the egalitarian ideal of the team. This type of razzing is an important mechanism in treating the tension that exists between individual and group achievement in slow pitch. When applied to better players, it serves as a reminder to restrain their egos for the benefit of the team. When applied to poor players who are playing well, it is a compliment to their level of play as this form of razzing is typically reserved for the more successful players.

Players 'raz' one another when errors are made, taking the opportunity to laugh at the misfortunes and weaknesses of teammates. This often draws upon similar themes. A player who fails to get a hit is told, "You'd better stay home and wash the dishes and do the laundry" suggesting that he should stick to domestic duties if he is unable to hit the ball. In another instance it is alcohol that is invoked when a player who hits a slow moving ball to first base, and gets out, is told that it's because he's "had one too many cans of Molson Light." References to alcohol and gender are common in the manner of joking about other players in a seemingly derogatory manner. These often incorporate insults about a teammate's playing ability as well.

On the Molson's team, it is Adam who receives much of the razzing, as he is one of the men who gives it out the most to the other players. For example, when he hits a

ball caught near the outfield fence, Eli laughs and yells out for him to "give it up, you've only got warning-track power." When he finally gets a base hit in the second game of the night, after going hitless in the first game, John asks the opposing team's pitcher if he can have the ball to give to Adam as a memento of his achievement. It is not only doling out these insults that is significant, but also knowing how to handle them good-naturedly without taking offense. Often, an initial insult is responded to in kind so that both players attempt to outdo the other in their humorous take on the other's abilities. When one player tells another that he doesn't want to play first base because he's "no good at first base," the other responds laughingly: "That never stopped you before." To this the first player responds, "Maybe I should play second, I can't be any worse than you" and the conversation quickly moves on.

The use of verbal taunts and the escalation of insults - giving a snappy comeback after receiving a jibe that is responded to in turn, and so on – are seen as characteristic of men's friendships in other sporting contexts (Curry 1991; deGaris 2000: 89; Fine 1985a). Apte (1985: 95) indicates that the form and content of this "verbal dueling" varies widely. Here, the interchange among slow pitch teammates varies from the short initial insult and immediate response, to a more lengthy exchange that goes back and forth, to a group session in which multiple players make fun of one another during the course of conversation. While Apte (1985: 95) says that both scatalogical and sexual humour are common in such verbal exchanges, the content of the vast majority of the insults by the men at slow pitch games refer to the playing ability (or lack thereof) of the other men.

Such razzing, teasing and insults in this context serve to reinforce the group dynamic. It seems to dissolve the structural relationships that the men may have outside

of the group, in their daily lives, and reinforces that all are equal here. However, as relations on the team may generate friendships in other areas of the men's lives, as co-workers who play together might develop an additional level of intimacy, 'outside' relations do find their way onto the team. When Roger joins the other players in razzing Adam, he appears to accept the joking relationship on the team. However, he quickly recognizes that there might be additional consequences to this sort of teasing when he follows it with the comment: "Maybe I shouldn't be bugging him. I have to go to work tomorrow." Roger seemed to be a little uncomfortable with teasing Adam, who is in a management position at the company that he works. Unfortunately, Roger was laid off later in the summer when the company experienced financial difficulties. He stopped coming to the games shortly after and many of the other players attributed this to being laid off and having to play ball with two men still employed with the company, one of whom was likely involved in the decision. This suggests some discomfort in the relation between interaction at work and interaction in the context of the slow pitch team that implies that the boundaries between the game and the men's everyday lives are permeable and flexible so that the everyday social identities of the men are masked rather than dissolved

Importantly, being insulted signals a general acceptance as part of the group. While many of the initial comments made to me in my first few games were generally complimentary ("nice hit," "good hustle") or consolatory ("hard luck"), by early August the men were less forgiving about my mistakes and more willing to make fun of my errors. This form of joking is something that occurs when a certain acceptance is felt within the group. It signals a level of comfort - with me as a person, as a player, as part

of the team - on the part of both myself and the other men. Once they know that I can add to the team both on and off the field, and that I can laugh at my mistakes, they do the same. Turner (1992), too, notes that the use of self-deprecating humour is a key element in the social interaction and group bonding process that occurs at his recreational hockey games. When players make fun of their teammates' abilities, or of a poor hit or a missed catch, it can act as a signal of in-group belonging - as being accepted as part of the team. It is important to note that such joking is also able to transmit advice and information to each other without direct confrontation.

Players use humour to 'raz' their teammates by boasting about their own individual accomplishments in the game or to make fun of themselves. For example, the ability to hit homeruns is reflected in the jokes and humorous stories that are used within the game. Stories about homeruns emphasize the feat as a memorable act. After Frank hit a homerun in the final game, he proceeded to tell those of us in the dugout that he hadn't actually hit the ball at all. Instead, as he related it to us, the ball had hit his elbow as he swung the bat and bounced out over the fence. In this case he simultaneously devalues the accomplishment as an inadvertent act, while also signifying the strength needed to send a ball flying over 300 feet using only one's arm.

In a second instance, a player stepped up to the plate with two runners on base and, after finding out that they needed three runs to avoid losing the game and the championship series because of the mercy rule, he announced to his teammates that he was going to hit a three-run homerun despite having not hit one all year. After a couple of pitches he hit the ball over the fence in center field, just shy of the outstretched glove of our fielder, much to the delight of the other team and to the amusement of my own

teammates. After the game, as both teams went to the nearby club for a beer, the player joked with his teammates about the hit, inviting them to sit in a circle at his feet so that he can tell them the story of his homerun. In this version, he laughingly recounts how he hit the ball over the fence despite hurricane winds that were blowing in against the direction of the ball. Furthermore, he had done so with a sore back and a 'bad' leg. Two weeks later, at the league banquet, he continued to tell the story but had added a cracked wooden bat to the new version of his accomplishment. Other players jokingly lamented that they would have to listen to this homerun story for the entire winter. The impossibility of the event, as well as the power and skill of the batter, is emphasized through a humorous retelling of the homerun.

Jokes and humour are used to transmit the values associated with hitting a homerun. Players who are incapable of hitting a ball over the fence are asked if they are going to hit a homerun tonight or encouraged to do so when batting, even though teammates are aware of the impossibility of the feat. This reversal of ability is a common way of teasing players, and is also apparent by calling a player who runs slowly "Speedy," encouraging him to use his speed to get on base, or telling a teammate that he's a superstar after he has made a number of defensive errors. Not being able to hit the ball over the fence, but continually trying to do so and failing, is associated with the term 'warning track power', meaning that the player can hit the ball to the fence, where it is usually caught for an out, but is incapable of actually hitting it over. Such comments by players continue to emphasize the symbolic value of the homerun or other skills that only some players are able to embody, but also the importance of knowing one's limits. In this

way, information can be transmitted to others in an indirect way while also using ridicule to induce conformity to group norms of behaviour (see Sabo & Panepinto 1990: 119-20).

Not all homeruns are equally valued in this regard. While a homerun hit over the fence is representative of the strength and power that remain the ideal associated with traditional notions of masculinity, an 'inside-the-park' homerun, although it has the same effect in terms of the score, is somewhat devalued. In one game the first batter in our line-up, the leadoff batter, proceeded to hit inside-the-park homeruns in each of his first three at-bats of the night; quite a remarkable feat in any league. After the game, Chuck tells everyone with a wink and a chuckle, "He didn't break the record, the record is four inside-the-park homeruns in one night." Another player - who, it should be noted is capable of hitting the ball over the fence - quickly pointed out that, while they were 'good hits' in terms of hitting the ball hard and deep, they were still inside-the-park and so had more to do with the speed of the runner than with power. While Chuck suggested that the player's feat had been bested in the past (there are actually no records of this sort kept by the league), the value of the hits were recognized by the other player in terms of the score and the effect on the game but not given equal value in terms of power and strength. Razzing then is able to signal a bond of friendship, and also to subtly demean others.

7.2.3 Nicknames

The use of nicknames are another way of teasing and joking with team-mates, as well as signifying inclusion through the development of a persona as part of the group. My own introduction to the team landed me quickly with the nickname, "Lenny," derived from the former professional baseball player who shares my surname, Lenny Dykstra. There is a functional aspect to the name, as it distinguished me from three other members

of the team whose first name was similar to my own, but it also became an important part of my team identity. When, midway through the season, I failed to respond to a player calling me by my proper name because I had become so accustomed to answering to Lenny, the other players thought it extremely funny. I suggest that this indicated to them that I had fully accepted the name given to me as part of the team. Additionally, over time my nickname itself incurred various combinations, with players occasionally calling me "Leonard" and later, after being told that Lenny is an Ontario name, some players took to calling me "Glenny."

Other nicknames are reflective of physical or personality traits of the players. Names such as Big Kahuna, Bologna, Papa Joe, Buckshot, Cujo, and Timbit reflect memorable aspects of the players by the people that named them. This is a key aspect of nicknames, they are usually not chosen *by* players, but are instead chosen *for* them by others in the group. These need not be used constantly, and players may be referred to by their nicknames only at specific moments in the game, often in combination with other nicknames or informal forms of address.

Nicknames are also shortened versions of, or variations on, a player's actual name and express a casual familiarity and informality by other members of the team. Some names are thought up at the spur of the moment, and used throughout the duration of the game underway, but discontinued afterwards. One player was referred to for the rest of the night as "Special K" after he struck out; while another was called "The Big Hoochie-Mama" by his team-mates for an entire at-bat, and then "Big Daddy" the next time he batted. In another instance, while drinking beer after a game, a player commented that he

was "dumb as a stump," after which players took to calling him "Stumpy" for the rest of the evening, much to his chagrin.

Another version of the nickname is the term "rookie," used to refer regularly to the newest member, or members, of the team. The term is a reminder to players that they occupy the lowest rungs on the informal social hierarchy of the team by virtue of being a new player. Players are denied privileges on this account, as when Eli asked to pitch but was told by Adam that he was still a rookie and had no choice in where he wanted to play, or they are required to perform minor tasks, such as carrying the cooler of beer, as a result of having a relatively low status on the team. The term was usually applied to younger players, as when older players were the newest members of the team I rarely heard them referred to as rookies. However, I did not observe any overt attempt to shame or ridicule these players, including myself, other than the occasional use of the term 'rookie' at certain times. There were no ritual behaviours to initiate new members, nor were there constant reminders of their status, and the term was quickly shifted when additional players joined the team. Instead, the term appeared to be used most often as an additional means of teasing players in the game.

For the longshoremen in Pilcher's (1972) ethnography, the use of crude and insulting nicknames accompanies other verbal 'assaults' and physical horse-play between the men. The nicknames are "assigned" by other men in the work group but not in a random fashion as they are usually derived from an individual's physical characteristics, from a distinguishing activity in which the individual is involved, from a pun on the man's real name, or from ethnic or religious background (Pilcher 1972: 105). These nicknames stand as a symbol of group membership. Nicknames are seldom given to men

who are not generally well liked and are discontinued if the individual vehemently objects to their use. They are used only in the longshore work group and not in any other context, particularly one where women might be present. The principal function of this behaviour is the reaffirmation of group solidarity and identification; outsiders are not expected to take part in this process and it is dangerous for them to do so (Pilcher 1972: 107). New members do not initiate this behaviour until more established men signal their acceptance into the group by vilifying them in the same manner as other established group members. Relationships between individual group members are also reflected in the extent of joking, insults and use of nicknames as those who openly dislike one another do not engage in joking behaviour while those who are close friends insult each other constantly and continuously (Pilcher 1972: 107). This description of longshoremen bears great similarity to the use of nicknames in slow pitch.

In addition to signifying group identity, the use of nicknames, joking and insults by these men also serve other functions. Apte (1985: 54) points out that, by permitting this behaviour only in the work environment and in the context of the work group, the longshoremen are also clearly separating the domain of work from that of their home and family as the use of nicknames in the wrong context results in censure and even fist-fights to punish the transgressor. Also, nicknames and gentle ribbing among male drinking companions serves to deflate pretensions and act as a form of levelling that promotes an equality through "mutual vituperation" (Oldenburg 1997: 79; Pilcher 1972).

In this manner, nicknames in slow pitch act as a signal of an identity within the group, a "softball persona," but also represent a level of informality and familiarity that

separates the relationships that the men have with one another from other aspects of their lives, such as work and home.

7.2.4 Funny Stories and Memories

The post-game interaction is replete with stories about games and events of the past that often involves a number of the players and most often has some sort of humorous aspect. Occasionally, these tales will have an underlying moral that further reflects the notion that team-mates should not put on airs and act as though they are better than the other players. The following example serves to illustrate this point:

> While Jimmy plays pool, and Chris is on the video lottery terminals, Paul, Jack, Johnny and Joe all reminisce about when they were younger and played hockey together. "That was the best times of my life," Jack laughs. Johnny tells a story about someone they used to play hockey with. He would show up at the arena all dressed up in a fancy suit and expensive shoes, and would act superior to the rest of the players on the team. One game, having had enough of it, Johnny decided to teach him a lesson. He took the man's expensive shoes and nailed them to a bench in the dressing room - with a very long nail (J. describes the length of the nail using his hand and acts out the hammering motion on the table). After getting cleaned up and dressed after the game, the man went to grab his shoes off the bench, but was amazed and confused to find them stuck to the bench. He pulled and pulled and in the struggle to get them off, ended up tearing his expensive shoes. This story leaves all the men laughing uproariously, pounding on the table and grasping at their sides, in wild fits of laughter. (Excerpt from fieldnotes, August 11, 2002).

In this instance, the story reiterates their shared identity forged through common experiences, while also providing a clear message about the dangers of team members who elevate themselves within the group.

Other group memories involve bouts of drinking in which one or more of the players said or did something memorable, tournaments in which the team played exceptionally well or very poorly, past games, former team-mates, or other times that the team gathered together. Many of the same stories crop up repeatedly throughout the

course of the summer so that it appears that there is a repertoire that the players make use of, with new tales being added each year. Additionally, new team members may bring stories from their own past, leading to new activities which then lead to the generation of new stories, and the men who leave the team may take stories with them. These stories, then, contribute to the collective memory of the team by which they define themselves (Dunk 1992: 86).

7.3 Summary

The humour that appears to dominate the game setting has many different forms, emerges in various contexts, and with varied purposes and functions. This includes the general laughter that accompanies a funny comment or humorous event in the game, and also more specific uses of humour that helps to define slow pitch. Sociologist John Kelly (1983: 150-151) comments, in his discussion on the development of identities in leisure activities, that for some games and sports, such as bowling and softball, the joking, social interaction, and 'fun' atmosphere that takes place in and around the activity is often as important to the sporting experience as the exercise of skill and the generation of excitement that results from the contest itself.

This is no doubt linked to the importance of conversation and sociability in the leisure experience (Kelly 1983; Stebbins 1992). Oldenburg (1997: 26) writes that when people meet together in places away from home and work, no matter what else is going on, it is conversation that is the primary and sustaining activity. Some activities, such as games, not only facilitate conversation, but aid and encourage it: "To be more precise, conversation is a *game* that mixes well with many other games according to the manner in which they are played" (Oldenburg 1997: 30). Oldenburg (1997: 30) points out that there

is a great deal of conversation during a card game, in which the game gives added stimulus to the talk of the players; as much on the individual players - their characteristics, past plays and previous incidents - as on twists and turns of the play itself. Though some games and leisure activities do little to stimulate conversation, some are well suited to high levels of social interaction.

Conversation, joking and laughter are characteristic of many sports, particularly recreational sport in which sociability is a large reason for participation. Jokes and insults are typically associated with the male group bonding process particularly as it relations to constructions of masculinity (Fine 1985a; Lyman 1998). These same social processes are involved in the bonding process in other ways among sports teams. Fine (1985a: 62) explains that interactions between players and coaches during Little League baseball games, and in the formal talks held before and after the games, contain moral messages about the way the game is to be played. Post-game meetings are held not only for analysis and improvement but also to establish and enforce a moral consensus about the meaning of the game for the team (Fine 1985a: 77).

For the women's hockey team studied by Nancy Theberge (2000: 102-103), the locker room talk that takes place before and after their games is an integral factor in the development of team identity in a manner similar to, yet different from, men's teams. Talk of hockey, work, equipment, players, and of sex and sexuality, "provided the stuff of daily chatter and a focus for group identification" (Theberge 2000: 105). "These discussions of daily events provided the context for shared commentary, laughter and teasing" which strikes Theberge (2000: 104-106) as essential for "the group's shared identity and connections as athletes and hockey players.

In describing his recreational hockey game, anthropologist David Turner (1992: 80) writes: "Actually, the main point of Sunday Morning Hockey is to get back to the dressing room for a beer after the game," and, for some while, the most popular player on either team was the one that brought the beer. The conversation that ensues in the dressing room after the weekly game is integrally connected to the beer drinking, as evidenced by his discussion of some of the essential aspects of such talk (Turner 1992: 80-81). For Hilliard (1987: 173) one of the most interesting features of rugby is the "third half," an institutionalized time of sociability following the game during which the host team provides the visitors with food and drink. In this way the relation between sports, sociability and drinking is made explicit as the two teams engage in drinking contests, sing ribald songs, and exchange jokes and stories as part of the rugby playing experience.

The behaviour described in my ethnography bears some semblance to "joking relationships" as described in the context of other all-male groups (Lyman 1998; Pilcher 1972). This differs somewhat from the institutionalized social relationship discussed by Radcliffe-Brown (1952), for whom such behaviour serves to defuse hostility and conflict at points in the social structure where it is likely to occur among kin and can also act as a way to build alliances.

Apte (1985: 31) suggests that there are fundamental differences between the kin and non-kin joking relationship, particularly in industrial societies: the former is more formalized, structured and institutionalized, organized by kin category and largely obligatory; the latter is less formal and structured, and is more person-oriented and voluntary, and is frequently an attribute of friendships or other close social relationships (Apte 1985: 32; Kennedy 1970). Non-kin joking is "person oriented" in that the

relationship is established with a specific person or group of persons, and there is an element of voluntariness as one chooses both whom one jokes with and whether or not to participate (Apte 1985: 33). Further, the joking is not obligatory and far less stylized than joking relationships between specific kin in the social structure so that the form and degree of joking is largely determined by the internal values of the relationship between the people involved. It also establishes a casual and familiar style of interaction between participants in which shared life experiences that are unique to the group can contribute to the development of genuine mutual affection (cf., Apte 1985: 51). This is an important distinction to be made in relation to the type of joking that occurs among teammates on a slow pitch team. As with other forms of friendship, this bond requires constant maintenance and close social contact in order to continue (Apte 1985: 51).

Kennedy (1970) makes an additional argument that I believe is pertinent here. Drawing on his research amongst the Tarahumara Indians in Mexico, Kennedy (1970: 44) questions the validity of conflict-avoidance and the cathartic aspect of joking as a universal process in which "social conflict is avoided by providing harmless acceptable channels of release for personal frustration." Noting that the evidence may fall short in some aspects regarding the psychological nature of this argument (Kennedy 1970: 51), he suggests that it is the 'play' elements and entertainment value of the joking relationship that are significant. The persistence of joking behaviour may be the result of "positive rewards of euphoria and joy afforded by comedy and laughter, rather than negative social control functions" (Kennedy 1970: 52). Understanding this joking behaviour in terms of "sociable games," fulfilling desires for competitive stimulation and emotional excitement, suggests that the primary reason for joking relationships in this instance is for the

humorous play and friendship bonds that result rather than cathartic displacement and the venting of pent-up emotions (Kennedy 1970: 57); "Laughter and the ecstatic euphoria . . . are rewards of immense value in themselves, even though the relief of displaced desires may lend intensity to the emotional peak" (Kennedy 1970: 57). In addition to the avoidance of conflict and hostility, the creation of alliances, friendships and bonds between groups is an important aspect of joking relationships (Kennedy 1970; Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 102-104, 110-113).

Apte (1985: 54-55) also argues that the non-kin, 'friendly,' joking relationship that has been noted in industrial societies is often used for group identity:

> Acceptance of a person's joking is an indication that he or she is part of the social group. When any new person is introduced to a social group, the members generally maintain some distance and evaluate the new individual. Joking may be carried on among the members without the newcomer. A newcomer may be only gradually accepted in the group, and an individual who makes an attempt to join in by self-deprecatory joking has better chances of being included. On the other hand, the exclusion of newcomers despite their persistent attempts to participate in the joking behavior may indicate that they are being denied entry into the group and the group identity that comes with it. *In other words, joking relationships and joking itself serve as screening procedures for membership, especially in small groups, and also help to define and redefine the boundaries of differentiated social groups* [italics added].

Similarly, Fine (1985a: 126) identifies a set of symbols and social relations that contribute to the team identities of Little League baseball teams, both their structure and their 'idioculture,' including "nicknames, jokes, insults, beliefs, rules of conduct, clothing styles, songs, narratives, gestures, and recurrent fantasies." These incorporate individual and group symbols - as well as social relations between individual players and between players and the team as a whole - contributing to the construction, expression and ongoing maintenance of the team identity (Dunk 1992; Fine 1985a).

I suggest that the joking that is omnipresent at the slow pitch games falls into this same category. While it may contribute to the resolution of anxious and tense moments between individuals on the teams, its primary purposes are as a form of entertainment that adds to the emphasis on 'fun' within the game and as a reaffirmation of the bonds of the group, particularly as an expression of friendship and shared group membership; the players are able to identify themselves and others as part of the team in different ways using humour. The joking behaviour in slow pitch has other attributes as well. It is as much group-oriented as individual-oriented; that is, there is a group dynamic to the joking and any one player can joke and insult any other in the group rather than having a relationship between two individuals. Further, the men use humour to define a shared masculine identity based on balancing one's work, home life, and leisure commitments commensurable with ideas about their age and the relationships they have with their families.

Another aspect of the drinking and joking in slow pitch is the way in which these construct and reflect an idealized set of relations between players on the team: as 'friendship' and 'equality.' As friendship, the relationships between team members are informal and relaxed, predominant in their leisure activity and kept separate from the structural relations that characterize their daily lives, and suggests knowledge and comfort with the other person(s) on the team. In addition to representing the bonding of friendship, these behaviours also signify an idealized egalitarian relationship, as all are included in the joking and collective drinking that takes place at the game. As Simmel (1950: 48-49) suggests, the 'artificial world' of sociability, represented here by the interaction that accompanies drinking and joking, is one in which participants act *as if* all

who take part are equal. While group joking symbolizes equality, it is also used to avoid the tension created by inequalities among team members and thereby maintains the appearance of an egalitarian ethos (cf., Curry 1991; Lyman 1998: 179-180).[34]

This friendly, egalitarian relationship may be constructed through both symbolic and social means in the context of "symbolic negotiations," whereby people agree to relate to one another on mutually defined terms (Katovich 1993: 7). For example, the egalitarian ethos amongst the Irish fishermen studied by Peace (1992: 169) relies on relations that stress *moral equality* rather than inequality based on differences in material assets. Equality is stressed and reinforced in the interpersonal relationships of the fishermen: "The ethos is variously signalled by nicknames, greeting styles, the use of epithets, and the sustained abuse of those who, despite all, insist on proclaiming themselves superior to others" (Peace 1992: 169).

Similarly, the egalitarian ethos of the slow pitch team is maintained through the use of humour in tense situations, through razzing and nicknames, through the construction of a common male sporting identity, and through emphases placed on equality in collective drinking. This is because of, and despite, the inequalities that exist among players by their place in the informal team structure that develops, in playing ability and influence, and in income and lifestyle in their daily lives. Instead, what is stressed is equality based on their common identities as "ballplayers" and as teammates, playing the game together in a mutually agreed upon manner.

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[34] See Katovich (1993) for a discussion of the ways in which humour is used by players, fans and the media to maintain the 'mythic egalitarianism' of professional baseball.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

R. Dykstra: Why do you play ball?
John: [laughs] For the fun of it. And because I loves it . . . It's good to try hard, but also to have fun. You pay to play, and I tell the guys, it's not like you get paid a million dollars. You might get a trophy, but that's it. I go out and play but I don't try too hard . . . Going out and playing ball is a night out with the boys where you get some exercise and have a few beers. I don't care what anybody says, I'm happy out there in the field.

R. Dykstra: What about reasons to play? It appears to be a somewhat different thing for us, playing in a recreational league, when compared to more competitive sports.
Joe: Much more so. We're playing for first place, right. But it really don't matter that much. It *is* a goal and you'd like to get there but you don't think the whole year about what you could've done, right. You know, it's nice to get a little bit of a prize at the end of the game, or at the end of the year, but it's not a big driver. And it's more about being out and doing something with the boys, having a few beers, a reason to get out of the house, and it's fun. And, it's the adrenaline rush. And it's things that, I don't know, try to keep us young. When you think about it, we're all approaching forty, and it's like hanging on to our youth somewhat, right.

In this study I have explored the social and symbolic processes through which the men on a recreational slow pitch softball team construct a sense of 'communitas' and 'cohesion' for the purposes of improving their level of satisfaction and their chances for victory. In so doing, the men stress equality and a shared identification with 'the team', with each player contributing to - and occupying a space within - a group identity. Equality emerges in specific behaviours and ideas about such practices as friendship, drinking, joking, fun, and competition, though this egalitarianism may be more of an ideal than a reflection of the actual team structure.

Communitas exists in direct relation with the 'social structure' of everyday life. These two "models" of human relations are not separate or opposed, but are instead juxtaposed (Turner 1969: 97). Furthermore, the unifying capability of communitas is not automatic or complete. The celebration of unity and togetherness co-exists with

inequality, conflict and tension between and among participants (Eade 1991) such that the relationships developed within a sports team do not necessarily preclude conflict, and competition does not necessarily prevent feelings of togetherness. My ethnography shows that the tensions between the 'fun' of leisure on the one hand, and 'competition' in the game on the other, are integral to the slow pitch softball experience, especially since participation is voluntary. The players talk about slow pitch and interact in ways that reinforce togetherness and fun, and in so doing they attract and keep teammates while asserting the enjoyable aspects of leisure. Yet, this coincides with the selective processes needed to field a successfully competitive team. Though communitas and cohesion are celebrated by players, not just anybody is invited to play with a team. A player's performance and ability is assessed and evaluated as much through humour and drinking as it is by what he does on the playing field. These activities are regulated in ways that establish the conditions needed for winning, which includes building feelings of unity or excluding undesirable players. Egalitarianism does not preclude competition in this context and players express and represent egalitarian relations against the conflict, confrontation, and rivalries that may contribute to the dissolution of their team. Cohesion and communitas, then, are infused with a multitude of varied and conflicting representations surrounding equality and inequality, team identity and everyday social status, cooperation and opposition, and fun and competition, that contribute to their inherent instability.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, I asked many of the men in this study why they played slow pitch softball and, during our conversations, we talked about what it is that they get out of playing. I received a variety of interrelated responses, sometimes

offered in a list-like manner from single individuals who tried to encapsulate their interest in the sport in just a couple of sentences. What emerges throughout my study, as I examined communitas and cohesion, is the 'place' that slow pitch occupies in the lives of these men - bounded, yet important.

Sport is not a self-contained universe; its boundaries are porous. Sport and leisure activities are often discussed in terms of 'play' and described as separate from, yet related to, the structure of daily life (Apte 1985; Huizinga 1949; Kennedy 1970). Huizinga (1949: 8), for example, describes play as voluntary activity that is "not 'ordinary' or 'real' life. It is rather a stepping out of 'real' life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all its own." Its distinctiveness is compounded by being spatially and temporally delimited: "Play is distinct from 'ordinary' life both as to locality and duration. This is the third main characteristic of play: its secludedness, its limitedness. It is 'played out' within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning" (Huizinga 1949: 9). Play is essentially separated from everyday life in terms of its meaning and definition, its boundedness in specific times and places, and its implied freedom through voluntary action.

It is misleading, however, to view the separateness of play and leisure as an empirical reality. As Kennedy (1970: 53) reminds us, "the world of play is no more artificial than any of the other of man's socially constructed worlds of 'reality.'" It appears so only "because it is conceived by the participants to be secondary, temporary, and voluntarily created by their mutual consent" (Kennedy 1970: 53). As a result, leisure should be understood as a socially constructed sphere of activity whose separateness and relative unimportance appears to be more subjective than objective in nature; as

conceptually bounded as 'work' yet just as integrally integrated into the daily or weekly routine of many people.

While leisure is not directly equivalent to 'play,' which is also found in other areas of people's lives including work and home (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990), it is a time specifically set aside *for* play (Gusfield 1987; Turner 1982: 37). This does not necessarily mean that leisure is a completely separate sphere of activity (see Kelly & Kelly 1994). Recreational slow pitch, as a leisure activity, is clearly bounded by the men in terms of the time spent playing, the space in which the game is played, and in the significance they place on it in relation to other areas of their lives. Slow pitch is also very much embedded in the daily lives of the men in my research that extends beyond the spatial and conceptual bounds of the softball diamond in terms of the relationships with other men, with wives and children, with co-workers, and with their jobs. The men draw boundaries that separate it from both work and family, from what 'really' matters, while at the same time stressing its importance.

Though slow pitch may be conceptually bounded from other areas of the men's lives, the boundaries themselves are ambiguous and permeable as the effects of one are felt in the others. The importance of the concept of holism for anthropologists suggests that particular aspects of a culture must be understood in relation to its other elements. The various institutions, activities, beliefs, etc. comprising the life of a group of people are not easily compartmentalized. Though the meaning, extent and effects of such interconnections are not always agreed upon, examining them is essential to their understanding.

In the context of this study, the interrelationships that exist between work, family, friendship and slow pitch softball are key to understanding the sport. I do not suggest that these are necessarily the most important elements, nor are they the only ones, but they are interconnected in the experience of slow pitch for these men. Relationships formed and developed in the context of the team cannot be strictly separated from those at work, within the family, or in the wider community. In some cases, they overlap as when family members or co-workers play on the same sports team.

The players both separate the game from their everyday lives and recognize that it is an integral part of their weekly routine throughout the summer. Further, these two qualities are not kept entirely separate, and the men are able to combine and discuss them in their discourse about slow pitch *within* their lives. In this sense, these men carry what occurs at the slow pitch games with them long after they leave the playing field in terms of both memory and experience, incorporating the game into conversations and interactions in a variety of other social contexts. In talking about slow pitch, they are also able to speak about and express ideas about their family relationships, their jobs, and their age, among others, all of which also influence ideas about slow pitch.

An interesting way in which this connection emerges is when the men speak about slow pitch in relation to other aspects of their lives. Thus, John explained to me how his enjoyment of slow pitch softball is linked to a general philosophy of everyday life: whether it's work or play, you have to enjoy what you do. And, in part, Chuck described his relationship with his wife, and the relationships other players have with their spouses, in terms of how he balances his domestic responsibilities with his commitment to the team, and in how well she accepts his interests outside the home.

Their participation in the slow pitch team is always in combination with other responsibilities and commitments related to their jobs and their families, which, in turn, form an important, if sometimes unspoken, influence on the time and ability to participate in sports and other leisure activities. The men also forge relationships and friendships with others that extend beyond the team into their work or reflected in the ways that they participate together in other social events. Though these relationships may be limited by team membership, and exist only so long as one remains part of the team, they are no less meaningful in these men's lives than other forms of social relationships formed by regular interaction, such as those developed among co-workers whose friendship may not extend outside of the workplace or which may end quickly after one begins a new job. Additionally, the bonds on the team both reflect and construct relations between men who may work together, as well as those who socialize on a more regular basis, reinforcing these relationships, or lead to new friendships that eventually become meaningful in the men's lives.

> Frank: You've got to do something to keep yourself active. I mean, let's face it, if you sat around and did no sports, you'd get fat and ugly in a hurry, and die of a heart attack. But mostly, I think it's just the camaraderie and the sport. For me personally, I need to play something. If softball ended tomorrow and I couldn't play softball, but I also golf in the summer, I'd try to find something else to play, to get out, you know. And, in a sense, I'm sure you've heard it too, to get out of the house. To get you out of the house for a night, away from . . . As much as everybody wants to be with their family and their kids, you also want to get away from them, right. You want to be with them, but you want to get away from them too. And if you got nothing to get you out of the house then you're sitting in your house all night long, you know, with your wife and kids.

The sport also occupies a 'place' in the men's lives in terms of 'status', self-identification and their own personal life histories. The status derived from playing slow pitch comes from different aspects of participation: from the heroics and glory of making

the game-winning hit or the game-saving catch, contributing to the team's success on the field of play; from one's position in the informal social hierarchy within the team; and, from simply being a member of the team and taking part in the joking and drinking that makes up much of the socializing. In the latter instance, the stress on egalitarianism and incorporation of team-members into the group, drawing on those elements discussed throughout my thesis, allows even the worst player on the team to be integral to the playing experience. While this does not translate directly into other areas of the men's lives, it is an important element that is not easily confined to the ball diamond.

The personal histories of the men are also interlinked with the sport. Their experiences at the game trace patterns in their own lives and are not just part of the team history. Slow pitch, in particular, is an activity that is not played occasionally, when one has the time or inclination to do so, but is played regularly week after week throughout the summer by these men. More importantly, it is played summer after summer, year after year, with some men leaving the sport and/or the team over time as others join in, such that it becomes a significant part of the ongoing construction of both self- and collective memories by which these men identify themselves and others around them. Additionally, playing sports allows them to identify themselves and maintain a specific image of who they are as men. As such, participation is associated with athleticism, health, vigour, community involvement and youthfulness. Its importance can be seen not only in the way that they play the game, but also in the fact that they come to play on a regular basis. And, for at least some of the men, leaving the game is not an easy decision.

> Joe: I can't walk away and, I mean, I don't see myself retiring . . . I'm nowhere near, right, nowhere near. I'm nowhere near retiring from hockey, either. You know, I'll be forty next year, and not even close. And I'm saying, "Well, Joe, can

> I still be playing when I'm sixty?" I hope so. I mean, logically, you can't, right. It's been 33 summers, so that'd be 53 summers playing ball.
>
> Eli: I have no intention of retiring anytime soon. Sports, it's a good life. My wife is not exactly happy about the situation and would like me to give up some of my games. But I won't retire from ball entirely. They'll have to carry me off the field, or something will have to happen to make me quit playing . . . But, you've got to give up somewhere. It's a part of getting older and having a family. But it's also a part of having sports in your life.

Though I have discussed common threads throughout this study, the experience of slow pitch is not monolithic and varies among individuals, teams and leagues. Nevertheless, the game is always much more than what takes place on the field of play, in the allotted time frame for leisure activities, and is surrounded by and consists of competing interests and ideas about what the sport entails. The existence of 'fun' cannot simply be assumed in leisure activities as it is clear that the men in my research take great care to generate and express fun as a meaningful element in both the game of slow pitch and in their own lives. The underlying implication is that discourses of 'fun' have become an important way in which people in contemporary societies are able to express, identify, and understand both themselves and others that requires wider analysis in the social sciences.

My research differs from that of Dunk (1991), Fine (1985a), and Messner (1992), whose discussions of the role of sport in men's lives I cite throughout my thesis, in my examination of the negotiation of tensions within a particular sport in order to understand the ways that men relate to one another on a team. Future researchers would do well to examine slow pitch further, as well as sports and other leisure activities in general, in terms of the 'everyday' social identities through which men and women identify and express themselves, including gender, age, class, regionalism, nationalism, ethnicity,

sexuality, etc. More detailed research into the 'place' of sport and leisure in the daily lives of participants, spectators and fans in relation to ideas about work, family, and friendships may contribute to a greater understanding of sport as a social institution in post-industrial societies around the world.

Appendix A

Team names and source in Caribou Complex 'B' League:

Team Name		Source of Name
The Islanders	=	Team name reflects that most of the players from this team are from Fogo Island, off the northern coast of Newfoundland.
Parrell's Excavation	=	Sponsored by and named after local company.
Blackhorse	=	Named after a local beer product brewed by Molson's Brewery.
Molson's	=	Sponsored by and named after Molson's Brewery.
Rum Runners	=	Sponsored by and named after local tavern.
My Brother's Place	=	Sponsored by and named after local restaurant/tavern.
Sirens	=	Sponsored by and named after local establishment featuring female exotic dancers.
Labatt's	=	Sponsored by and named after Labatt's Brewery.
Designer Kitchens	=	Sponsored by and named after local company.
Custom Glass	=	Sponsored by and named after local company.
Plaza Bowl	=	Sponsored by and named after local bowling alley.
Rig Pigs	=	All players work on oil platform; team consists of 35 players who work alternating shifts so that only half the players are at any one game.

Rob Roys	=	Sponsored by and named after local bar/tavern; team dropped out of league after only two weeks.

Appendix B

The role of social networks in recruiting players for the Molson's slow pitch softball team:

Scott - Scott had been a former workmate of Frank's before Frank left to pursue a different occupation, and was invited to join while they still worked together. The two men had also played together on a company softball team, on which they continued to play for some years after the formation of this team.

Todd - Todd's brother, Don, used to work with Chuck and played on this team for a number of years. When they were looking for additional players Don invited his brother to play. His ability impressed the other men on the team from the outset and he was invited back the following week. Todd has remained on the team although Don no longer plays.

Edgar - Edgar was asked to play by Adam when they worked together at Newtel. They now work together for another company.

John - The team was looking for some additional players to play in a tournament one weekend and asked a friend of John's to play, who was asked to bring along some other players. As John played with his friend in another league, and was a very good player, he was invited to play. The men from the team were impressed and asked him to join the team, though they did not invite either of his two friends, much to their disappointment.

Mike - Mike is a long-time friend of Scott's, and used to come out regularly to watch the games. He was occasionally asked to play when they needed an extra player because he was dependable and available. Although he was not a very skilled player at the outset, he showed up for all the games and got along well with the others and was asked to play full time.

Eli - Eli joined the team only the year before, and was essentially the 'new guy' until Roger and I joined. He knew some of the men on the team because he had played against them for years in the CEI league. When he heard that they were leaving the CEI league to go elsewhere, and were looking for an extra player or two, he decided to call Frank and offered to play.

Roger - Roger worked at the same company as did Adam and Edgar when he was asked to play.

Glossary of Terms

Baserunner = A player who gets a hit and stops at a base becomes a baserunner for the next batter; also referred to as 'the runner', as in 'the runner on second'.

Bases-on-balls = Getting on base from four 'balls', pitches that miss the strike zone, rather than hitting the ball; commonly referred to as a 'walk'

Batting order = The sequence in which players hit/bat during the game, usually with the best players occupying strategic positions in the top half of the order.

Bunt = A bunt is when a batter does not swing at the ball, but instead holds the bat still in order to tap the ball to produce a short, slowly moving infield hit. Bunting is not allowed in slow pitch.

Clean-up Batter = The fourth position in the batting order, usually reserved for the strongest, most powerful hitter from whence a certain status is derived.

Cutoff man = An infielder who takes up a position in shallow outfield, or between the person with the ball and where the ball is to be thrown, and acts to relay the ball in order to get it to its destination quicker or to make an alternative play.

Double-play = Making two outs on the same play.

Forfeit = Winning the game because the other team does not have enough players to field a team or losing because one's own team does not have enough.

Home plate/the plate = Where the batter stands to hit the ball; the ball must cross the plate in the predetermined range in order to be called a 'strike'; runners must touch or run by it to score.

Inside-the-park Homerun = When a batter is able to run around all the bases and score on a hit that does not go over the fence.

Lead-off = The first spot in the batting order, usually reserved for a good hitter who gets on base often, and who may be a quick runner.

Line-drive = A ball hit hard in a relatively straight line.

Stolen base = A stolen base is allowed in both baseball and fastball and occurs when a runner on any base advances to the next base as the ball is pitched to the batter; not allowed in slow pitch.

Pop-fly, pop-up, or fly-ball = A ball that is hit almost straight up in the air, anywhere on the field, usually caught by the defense for an out.

Single, double, triple, homerun/homer = Different kinds of base hits: a single is when the batter stops at first base, a double at second base, triple to third base, and homerun all the way around the bases on one hit.

Strike out = When a batter gets 'out' from having three 'strikes' called by the umpire, either by swinging and missing on the third strike, or not swinging and having it pass through the strike zone.

Tagging up = When a baserunner must wait at, or return to, the base on which he/she was standing when the ball is caught in the air for an out, before being able to advance to the next base.

Walk = See 'Base-on-balls'

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