

ICING THE PUCK:  
THE ORIGINS, RISE, AND DECLINE OF  
NEWFOUNDLAND SENIOR HOCKEY, 1896-1996

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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NEWFOUNDLAND SENIOR HOCKEY, 1896-1996

by  
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## ABSTRACT

One hundred years ago, transplanted Canadians introduced the game of ice-hockey to Newfoundlanders. This thesis tracks the history of Newfoundland hockey within the context of the Island's socio-economic development. It identifies three broad, overlapping periods which characterize the sport's trajectory, namely: moral entrepreneurship, civic entrepreneurship, and corporate entrepreneurship. These stages are exemplified in three case studies of Newfoundland hockey playing communities – St. John's, Buchans, and Corner Brook. The infusion of colonial sporting tradition, the rational recreation movement, the involvement of women, amateur-professional controversies, civic promotion (boosterism), and the 'importing' of semi-professional players are also examined. The practice of 'importing' semi-professional players is particularly important given its contribution to the decline of community-based Senior hockey in the province. The analysis concludes by considering the growing tendency toward the corporatization of sport, and the implications of this trend for peripheral regions such as Newfoundland.

## PREFACE

"It is but a very short while back that the writer of anything but an article on seals or cod would be viewed with suspicion, and when the man who had not at his fingers' ends all the facts which pertained to these industries was not considered a true Newfoundlander" (W.J.H. 1907: 14). Although this comment was penned almost a century ago, sometimes it seems that little has changed. Perhaps we could add oil and minerals to the esteemed list, but often times it appears that little else is noteworthy. To many people, if an enterprise affords no economic recompense, it is simply not worth talking about; such an attitude is reinforced by recent economic stagnation and the accompanying resurgence of neo-conservatism.

In 1982, Stewart Davidson presented a paper to the Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education, claiming "a fully documented and comprehensive history of sport in Newfoundland has yet to be written" (Davidson, 1982: 294). Fifteen years later, this statement still holds true. Newfoundland has had a rich sporting history. For example, the province is host to the oldest sporting event in North America – the Royal St. John's Regatta. Yet, there is a dearth of scholarly research on Newfoundland sport.

Unfortunately, sport has often been regarded as marginal or trivial, and unworthy of sociological explanation. In the past, scholars have neglected sport as a serious field of cultural history, leaving it to amateur 'buffs' (Mott, 1983a). French social theorist Pierre



Bourdieu (1988: 153) insists that the greatest obstacle to the scientific study of sport is that the sub-discipline is "doubly dominated, both in the world of sociologists and in the world of sport." The sociology of sport is "scorned by sociologists" and "despised by sportspersons;" one disdains the subject, the other the method (Bourdieu, 1988: 153). But as Horne, Jary, and Tomlinson (1987: 1) point out, "the history of sociology shows... that apparently marginal social phenomena... have many times been demonstrated to possess central and surprising significance." Johan Huizinga, in his classic treatise, *Homo Ludens* (1955), argued that play was the creative element which was the mainspring of all culture. While I would stop short of such a lofty assertion, it is hoped that this study will contribute a new and unique look into an under-valued area of Newfoundland social life.

While the study to follow is far from exhaustive, it does attempt to present a broad overview of Newfoundland hockey over its one hundred years of existence. The game's development has not been sheltered from broader social processes and issues such as class and gender debates, amateur-professional controversies, urban-rural debates, issues of community identity and the like. Most specifically, the thesis traces the development of hockey through a variety of periods, culminating in the demise of Senior hockey in the province in recent years. The thesis also focuses on the development of sport in a 'marginal' area of capitalist society.

Notwithstanding the limitations confronting the academic study of sport and other leisurely pursuits, the research has been rewarding and satisfying. However, it could not

have been accomplished without the support of others. The Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) at Memorial University of Newfoundland must be acknowledged for providing the financial assistance which funded much of the study. Equally, there were numerous other individuals and organizations who helped to make the research process a little easier. Amongst these were Bert Riggs and the staff at the Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archive at MUN; volunteer archivist, Linda Murphy, at the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Archive; Barbara Power, Executive Director, at the Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association; and all the persons who lent their time, knowledge and expertise through interviews. Finally, thanks are extended to my Graduate Supervisor, Dr. Peter Baehr, who gave generously of his time and advice throughout the past two years. I especially want to thank him for allowing me to pursue a project which was stimulating to me, even if it may have seemed a little trivial to others.

Greg B. White

August, 1996

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
PREFACE .....	iii
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION:	
THEORY, CONTEXT AND METHOD .....	1
1.1 Theory .....	1
1.2 Context .....	5
1.2.1 Moral Entrepreneurs .....	9
1.2.2 Civic Entrepreneurs .....	12
1.2.3 Corporate Entrepreneurs? .....	19
1.3 Methodology .....	22
CHAPTER 2	
EARLY SPORT AND THE ORIGINS OF HOCKEY IN NEWFOUNDLAND	29
2.1 The Pioneering Of Sport In 19th Century Newfoundland .....	31
2.2 Of Walking Canes and Cricket Balls .....	36
2.3 "Kindred" Countries .....	38
2.4 The Newfoundland Hockey Association .....	41
2.5 Moving Toward Acceptance .....	45
CHAPTER 3	
MORAL ENTREPRENEURS AND RATIONAL RECREATION .....	58
3.1 Rational Recreation .....	58
3.2 The Brigades .....	63
3.3 Commercially Sponsored Sport .....	68
3.4 Hockey For The "Gentler Sex" .....	70
3.4.1 Women's Sport In The Late Victorian Period .....	70
3.4.2 The "Golden Age" Of Women's Sport .....	75
3.4.3 Is Women's Hockey Rebounding? .....	79

<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>BROKEN YEARS: NEWFOUNDLAND AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION, INTER-TOWN COMPETITION, AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR</b>	<b>85</b>
4.1 The Spread Of Hockey Outside The Avalon	85
4.2 Improvements In Transportation And Communications	89
4.3 Formal Organization:	
The Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association	92
4.4 The Depression And World War II	96
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	
<b>BUCHANS: THE GENESIS OF THE IMPORT PRACTICE, AMATEUR-PROFESSIONAL CONTROVERSY, AND COMMUNITY PRIDE</b>	<b>105</b>
5.1 Introductory Remarks	105
5.2 The Beginnings Of Hockey In Buchans And The First Imports	108
5.3 Buchans Imports And the Amateur-Professional Controversy	116
5.4 Hockey and Identity in Buchans	125
<b>CHAPTER 6</b>	
<b>RAISING THE STAKES: APEX, DEMISE, AND AFTERMATH OF THE NSHL</b>	<b>129</b>
6.1 Whetting the Appetite – The 1985 Allan Cup Drive	130
6.2 The Big Prize – The 1986 Allan Cup Victory	134
6.3 The Demise of The NSHL	140
6.4 The Aftermath of The NSHL	145
6.4.1 The Outport Era	145
6.4.2 Professional (Corporate) Hockey	147
<b>CHAPTER 7</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION: THE PERVASIVE PAST AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SPORT IN ‘MARGINAL’ REGIONS</b>	<b>153</b>
7.1 The Pervasive Past	153
7.2 Particularities and Implications	160
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>165</b>

## LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1.1:	Victorias Hockey Team, 1902	9
Photo 2.1:	Victorias Hockey Team, 1898-1901	44
Photo 2.2:	Newfoundland-Truro (Morris Cup) Hockey Series, 1901-1902	46
Photo 2.3:	The Boyle Cup	50
Photo 2.4:	Royal Newfoundland Regiment Hockey Team, 1917	55
Photo 3.1:	Church Lads Brigade Hockey Team	65
Photo 3.2:	St. Bons Collegiate Hockey Team, 1907	66
Photo 3.3:	Grand Falls Single Ladies Hockey Team, 1913	75
Photo 3.4:	Academy of Our Lady Mercy Hockey Team, 1922	77
Photo 4.1:	Travelling Grand Falls Senior Hockey Team, 1932	90
Photo 4.2:	Stuck in the Snow: Grand Falls Hockey Team, 1932	91
Photo 4.3:	The Herder Memorial Trophy	94
Photo 4.4:	First Herder Champions: Corner Brook Hockey Team, 1935	95
Photo 4.5:	St. John's Memorial Stadium in the Early 1950's	100
Photo 4.6:	Royal Canadian Navy Hockey Team	102
Photo 5.1:	Buchans Hockey Team, 1939	110
Photo 5.2:	St. Bons Senior Team, 1936	112

Boost your city, boost your town. Boost your country for all that it is worth. It is worth boosting. Its people are worth boosting. They are as fine a race as is to be found on the earth... This country breeds splendid men and women. See that they get the chance. Feed them, clothe them, house them. Let them work and play in moderation and nothing can touch them. Then they will be sports in truth. [Sports] develop men and women, fit them for their life work, make them happy, contented and willing to live in, and develop the land of their birth so that, with the best of Britain's breed, they can make and keep this country of ours what it used to be said that it was 'The richest Gem in the British Crown'. (George Ayre (April 28, 1928) from Public Bureau. Cited in Snow, 1986, CNSA .088: 1.01.003)

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION: THEORY, CONTEXT AND METHOD**

### **1.1 Theory**

Writing from a fascist prison cell during the Second World War, Antonio Gramsci (1971), pieced together his theory of hegemony. Briefly, hegemony is an exercise of power in which a dominant group or bloc is able to secure the consent of subordinate groups in society (Gramsci, 1971: 12). The dominant group is therefore able to dictate the economic, political, ideological, and cultural agendas of society. But hegemony is not a one-way process; counter-hegemony may be exercised by subordinate groups within society as well.

British cultural theorist and historian, Raymond Williams, has expanded on the works of Gramsci. Williams (1980), claims that in any society, or social period, there is a system of dominant practices, meanings, and values which arise out of hegemony. Hegemony should not be understood as crude manipulation. On the contrary:

It is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world. It is a set of meanings and values which... appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in society. (Williams, 1980: 38)

But, once again, hegemony is complex not simple, and is in constant flux. Moreover, it involves accommodation, incorporation, and sometimes tolerance of alternative and oppositional meanings, values, and practices: "Hegemony is not singular... its internal structures are highly complex and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended;

and by the same token they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified." (Williams, 1980: 28)

There is little doubt that sport can be used to promote dominant values and interests, while legitimizing the existing social order. Yet, the institution of sport is also a highly contested ideological terrain. While the structures of sport are often rigid and inhibiting, sport has been a grass-roots institution and the site of much human agency. In most cases, examples of agency within sport are of the "intermediate" variety<sup>1</sup>, involving public projects (and conflicts) to alter or transform social relations within the structure of sport itself.

Personal and collective agency creates the potential for resistance, challenge, and even change within hegemonic systems. Such counter-movements manifest themselves in "alterative" and oppositional forms and include residual and emergent practices. Residual practices are remnants of past social formations, which continue to be employed today, but whose associated meanings and values have been subject to transformation by the current dominant culture (ex. the ancient Olympic games were religious festivals, as opposed to

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<sup>1</sup>I am drawing on Perry Anderson (1980). Anderson argues that agency exists on a number of levels. Most agency is private and personal, transpiring entirely on the individual level. An example might include a person's goal to quit smoking. At the other extreme, one finds "revolutionary" agency, which includes conscious collective programs to dismantle, remodel, or transform existing structures; this type of agency is very rare. Finally, at the intermediate level, there are examples of agency which "have not aimed to transform social relations as such -- to create new societies or master old ones" (19); these movements are more reformative in nature. They set goals aimed to alter one (usually small) aspect of society.



the kind of highly commodified games they have become). Emergent practices include "new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences [that] are continually being created" (Williams, 1980: 41). These may initially be oppositional, or simply idiosyncratic, in form, but may eventually become accommodated into the dominant culture (ex. seven-aside hockey was popular before the now dominant six-aside rule emerged).

Critical theorists of modern sport have tended to favour Gramsci's notion of hegemony (see Donnelly, 1993; Ingham & Hardy, 1984; Whitson, 1984), and it is true that the concept has some purchase in explaining both the introduction of hockey to Newfoundland, and also aspects of the changing cultural practices, meanings and values associated with the sport during the various periods of its development. However it is arguable that the limitations of the theory of hegemony are also evident. In the case of Newfoundland Senior Hockey, for example, most of the conflicts, challenges, and compromises which occurred within the sport were between urban and rural centres, not members of dominant and subordinate classes or 'power-blocs.' Generally speaking, since the Second World War, in particular, the executives and officials of the various community teams which participated in Newfoundland Senior hockey have not been civic power-brokers or capitalist elites. Rather, for the most part, they have been middle-class citizens with very modest financial means, interested in producing the best hockey teams possible for the

purpose of providing various combinations of entertainment, civic promotion, and even community pride and unity.

That does not mean that a Durkheimian model of sport – as an expression of moral solidarity – is a particularly attractive alternative either. However, the merit of a Durkheimian approach is its ability to see that there must be something *in and about* sport which enables it to be orchestrated by the powerful or not-so-powerful. In other words, if there were no feelings of solidarity and community engendered or concretised by sport, there would also be nothing to manage, control and exploit. Both the Gramscian and the Durkheimian positions are saying something important: the former is arguing that much of what we think of as consent has been socially mobilized or influenced; the latter is saying that sentiments of solidarity and community are not a mere fiction, are not the machinery of the ruling class. Of course, the degree to which a sport is able to generate feelings of solidarity and community is greatly dependent on the sport in question. Hockey, for example, has been able to promote Canadian identity to a far greater extent than, soccer. The reasons for this are complex and beyond the scope of the present thesis, nonetheless it is possible to speculate that the interplay of environmental and psycho-social circumstances has been fundamental. Canadians live in a relatively severe winter climate; traditional games were adapted to the harsh winter climate and in doing so made uniquely Canadian. Another reason for the relative success of hockey as a popular cultural form relates to the fact that we have excelled at it. Equally though, the popularity of the sport

and its cohesive force is linked to social power. More will be said about this as the thesis develops. In any event, the present analysis of the historical development of hockey in Newfoundland will demonstrate some of the strengths and weaknesses of both of the above theoretical schemas, drawing on each where the evidence seems to suggest the plausibility of doing so.

More specifically, this thesis traces the development of hockey through three broad and sometimes overlapping transformations. While the demarcation of social-periods is always somewhat artificial, a construction of the student of human affairs, my research tracks a discernible movement from moral entrepreneurship, through civic entrepreneurship, to the corporate entrepreneurship which characterises much of contemporary sport. I now turn to expand on this distinction.

## **1.2 Context**

In Class, Sports, and Social Development (1983), Richard Gruneau situates the development of sport in Canada within the context of Canada's colonial past. Two factors are central to this analysis: first, the role that social class has played in conflicts over resources in Canadian society; second, the idea that class and class structures are directly influenced by metropole-periphery or heartland-hinterland relations of dominance and dependency (Gruneau, 1983).

Gruneau's (1983; 1979) analysis is in some notable respects applicable to Newfoundland. The imperial and colonial organization of institutions in both Canada and Newfoundland had several repercussions. First, it led to an over-development of banking and trade, based on the extraction of staple items, at the expense of industry. Second, because of the over-development of commercial interests, a strong merchant class was established in both colonies which eventually came to share political power with the remnants of the old ruling class from the era of conquest, notably, the landed gentry and the church. Finally, relationships were forged between the mercantile elite and the state which entrenched a capitalist *laissez-faire* philosophy that recapitulated the liberal-democratic ideals and rational utilitarian ethics of the British state (Gruneau, 1983). Recognition of these broad patterns of development is central to understanding the "range of symbolic representations and meanings associated with early forms of games and popular recreation" in the North American colonies (Gruneau, 1983: 94-95).

At its most general level, Newfoundland society consisted of two distinct groups of people from the beginning of permanent settlement into the twentieth century. The working-class, which consisted largely of fishers and servants, was usually at the mercy of the upper-classes, particularly the merchants; if the great bulk of the population was "drawn from the poorest quarters of the British Isles" (Chadwick, 1967: 20), the political economy of the colony was controlled by the gentry and the mercantile-bourgeoisie. In consequence, a politically uneducated majority confronted a minority, in whom wealth was

concentrated, and from whom jobs, credit and relief could be dispensed or withheld at whim (Chadwick, 1967: 20).

For this "politically uneducated majority" organized sporting opportunities were hardly imaginable. Much of their time was spent at economic activities which would ensure their daily subsistence and survival; time for sporting endeavours was not at a premium. This is not to say that working-class recreational and merrymaking enterprises were completely smothered. It is just that working-class amusements quite often found themselves in direct opposition with the somewhat puritan ideals of the upper-class which "took issue with the cruelty of some animal sports, and with the idleness, drinking, and profanity generally associated with sport and the alehouse" (Holt, 1989: 29). Such attitudes towards popular recreations were part of a long-term shift in values and ideals concerning behaviour which has been labelled as the "civilizing process" (Elias, 1978).

According to Norbert Elias (1978), this process began amongst the social elite in the later Middle Ages and was gradually assimilated by much of Western society. It involved a gradual shift in the threshold of shame and embarrassment, an increased sensitivity to pain and cruelty, and a steady refinement of manners. Briefly, the "civilizing process" refers to the channelling or sublimation of human impulses and emotions into more socially acceptable behaviour. Sport, for example, has generally undergone processes in which expressive violence is curtailed and emotional restraint increased (see Elias & Dunning, 1986). "Sports were caught up in a subtle and diffuse cultural shift that spanned several

centuries, encompassing such diverse phenomena as eating tidily and quietly with knives and forks, keeping clean and changing clothes, not urinating or picking your nose in front of others, and a host of other changes in manners that underpin what we now call decent behaviour" (Holt, 1989: 30). Given the uncivilized nature of many folk-games and other public amusements, it is not surprising that the dominant classes, who were concerned with promoting genteel and respectable behaviour, levied prohibitions to discourage such "repulsive" conduct.

By contrast, younger members of the Newfoundland elite would often travel abroad for their education. Upon their return to Newfoundland, they brought with them the mores, customs, and traditions of the mother country, including attitudes towards sport. For the leisured 'gentleman,' sport was a pleasant diversion from mundane occupations; but it could also serve to promote morality, discipline, and civility. Indeed the beginnings of hockey in Newfoundland clearly indicate the connection between such cultural practices and class position. The earliest pioneers of hockey in Newfoundland were members of the local upper-class elite, including bank managers, members of government, established businessmen, judges, and other notable citizens.



**Photo 1.1:** Victoria's Hockey Team 1902  
(courtesy Sports Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (SANL))

### 1.2.1 Moral Entrepreneurs

At the turn of the century, elements within the upper-middle class, attempted to rationalize sport with the aim of producing well-adapted, functional citizens for a rapidly changing society (Cross, 1990). This was the era of 'Muscular Christianity,' a philosophy with a classical 'republican' tinge which stressed that the body was an expression of not only physical but also mental and moral strength. Social Darwinism was also a popular

ideology of the period. "The popular dictum 'the survival of the fittest', albeit an oversimplified interpretation of Darwin's ideas, provided a convenient and comprehensible explanation to many of the struggle for existence which was apparent in many spheres of life" (Brown, 1988: 215). At first glance, these ideals (creation versus evolution) seem contradictory, but they were reconcilable. The Christian responsibility which was the 'white man's burden' required the cultivation of physical, mental, and moral strength. Indeed, physical and moral development was an excellent foundation for imperial and national duty. According to British sport historian, James Mangan (1992: 4), "sport was a significant part of imperial culture, and an important instrument of imperial cultural association and subsequent cultural change, promoting at various times in various localities imperial union, national identity, social reform, recreational development and post-imperial good-will".

Newfoundland, like other colonies, was not exempt from the sway of the aforementioned social doctrines and their ramifications. The Dominion's enormous conscript rejection rate during the Great War raised concern over the general fitness level of the population and lent added credence to such philosophies. "Sport in its new form, shaking of the old trappings of decadence was seen as a kind of medicine, and it was one that could be doled out to the general benefit and at little cost" (Birley, 1995: 32). Partly as a result, sport and recreational opportunities were extended to previously excluded groups including the working-class and women.



If, in the past, organized sport was largely a pursuit of elites, institutions such as the para-military 'Brigades' now sought to bring it to the masses. The Brigades were affiliated with various religious denominations and their mandate might be considered as further indicative of the broader "civilizing" process which has been so well examined by Norbert Elias and his pupils. While the Brigades may have had the latent effect of removing a potentially troublesome or militant group from the streets of St. John's, they were also the catalysts for the introduction of the club system, the provision of badly needed recreational facilities, and the establishment of youth sport in Newfoundland.

This period of recreational reform was also a time of increased involvement for women in sport. It is true that Newfoundland women's participation in hockey has always been a precarious endeavour, subject to trivialization on the one hand, and cautious acceptance on the other. Viewed over its entire career, women's hockey has involved a constant struggle for legitimacy in a masculine dominated sport (Theberge, 1995), adapting to expanding and contracting opportunities and resources as they waxed or waned. The early twentieth century, however, was a time of expanded opportunities for women's sport. The ideal of delicate femininity was being challenged by a more athletic, robust notion as reformers, concerned that the moral fabric of society was unravelling under the pressures of urbanization, sought to advertise the virtues of healthy women and mothers. For it seemed to follow that healthy women would bear and raise healthy children -- who in turn would grow up to be orderly citizens and parents.

The contrast with the period that had preceded it is clear. For much of the Victorian era, working-class recreations had been associated with physical waste and moral laxity. Folk recreations were often perceived as chaotic affairs based on local custom, and dangerous for the moral propriety of women. Now educational and religious reformers attempted to "purify" these folk games into acceptable, uniform, and codified practices (Cross, 1990). The ultimate aim was to make sports, including hockey, morally acceptable.

The game's first organizers were patriarchal amateurs in the improving tradition of 'rational recreation' who pursued 'the making of men' and the amelioration of class conflict through the provision of opportunities. They soon found themselves in conflict with municipal boosters prepared to recruit and pay players in the interests of a winning 'community' team. (Kidd, 1989: 71)

### **1.2.2 Civic Entrepreneurs**

The later nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century was a time of sustained expansion in North America. As national railroads stretched across immense virgin domains, the search for opportunities, resources, and prosperity spawned new villages, towns, and cities on the frontiers. Expansion also occurred in Newfoundland. During the early part of this century, development of the central and western areas of Newfoundland was primarily driven by resource industries such as pulp and paper, forestry, and mining. In tandem with these industries, economic and technological impacts began to assert themselves within the wider society and culture. In the 1900s railroad and

coastal boat transportation was extended across the Island, and road construction began in 1919. Also, there was an attempt to diversify the Newfoundland economy, and 'company' towns, formed around pulp and paper and mining resources, began to appear throughout the Island in places like Grand Falls, Buchans, and Corner Brook.

One of the most important aspects of this period of growth and expansion was a broad phenomenon loosely referred to as "boosterism" – that is, community promotion. Since we shall be seeing its impact on hockey in Newfoundland, some prefatory comments are in order. Boosterism occurred in many communities in North America both large and small. Some urban historians have viewed boosterism as "a coherent economic program... carried out by public and private action" (Abbott, 1981: 4). Others have exposed its haphazard side, describing it as "both something more than a compendium of super salesmanship or mindless rhetoric, and something less than a precise ideology. It was a broad, general conception that had as its central theme the need for growth" (Artibise, 1981: 211).

What was its attraction? Given the feverish expansion which occurred in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was no guarantee that any town would survive. As such, "boosters searched endlessly for any gimmick to distinguish their town from countless others" (Voisey, 1981: 155). Limited manpower and financial constraints handicapped smaller centres and challenged them to be innovative and original in their approach to boosting (Voisey, 1981: 153). To this end, boosters employed a multitude of

techniques from tax incentives to post-cards. Advertising dominated the business of boosting, and the media were central to the effort. Promotional literature was spread through books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, directories, maps and a plethora of other advertising devices (Abbott, 1981; Voisey, 1981). In an effort to raise the status of a community and attract new citizens and business interests, local educational, religious, social, and recreational institutions were promoted, seeking to instil – and advertise to the world – social order, respectability, and the drive towards material progress (Voisey, 1981: 164). In the past, moral entrepreneurs attempted to adapt this rhetoric to the empire and nation, now it was being modified to suit the smaller social unit – the community. Hence, we see how moral entrepreneurship, with its emphasis on social order, respectability, and progress, linked and overlapped with the newly instituted rhetoric of civic boosterism. One way to boost the empire, the nation, or community was by publicizing and accentuating its high moral standards.

While some of the main proponents of boosterism were real estate agents, publicists, business-persons, clergy, physicians, and other members of the professional middle-class (Abbott, 1981: 4), the value of the phenomenon was widely accepted. Good citizenship became bound-up with the business of boosting (Overton, 1989: 9): "Boosterism instantly fostered identity, civic spirit, and unity of purpose in new communities made up of a variety of people lacking common traditions to guide them" (Voisey, 1981: 171). By the same token, however, boosterism also exerted pressures towards conformity, superficial

optimism – and caricature. Sceptics of the movement were branded as ‘kickers’ or ‘knockers.’ Moreover, the booster framework was often founded more in faith and hope than in reality. While boosting certainly had its share of success stories, in many cases it failed to create the progressive, affluent communities it appeared to promise. Ironically, excessive (and expensive) booster campaigns were sometimes responsible for impoverishing the very communities they were supposed to enrich.

Of the various vehicles open to boosterism, sport is the one most relevant for my dissertation. My focus will be largely restricted to the case of hockey in Newfoundland though it is worth remarking that sport more generally has presented many opportunities to provincial and civic elites looking for ways to promote their cities through, for instance sport events and franchises (see Northam & Berryman, 1978; Betke, 1983; Reiss, 1989; Yardley et al., 1992). However, much of the literature on the relationship between civic entrepreneurs, boosterism, and sport has been limited to the analysis of larger centres, as distinct from smaller urban and rural communities where people have also realized the potential of sport to forge community spirit and put their town ‘on the map.’ Indeed, “one of the most popular vehicles for spreading a town’s reputation has proved to be sports teams, especially the ones that beat their neighbour’s teams at fairs and regional competitions” (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993: 211). The study that follows will show, in some detail, what happened when individuals and communities lost control of the vehicle they were supposed to be steering. That vehicle was Newfoundland hockey; an important cause

of its breakdown was a strategy of community promotion which brought 'imports' into Senior hockey.

The introduction of the Herder Memorial Trophy, in 1935, and formal provincial competition was a watershed in the development of hockey in Newfoundland. It was the start of a series of events in which rivalry would increase the quality of the sport, but also raise the stakes to a level where the local organizations were unable to absorb the costs of their competitive exploits. Indeed, as contests became keener (civic) teams were tempted to employ any means possible to secure a competitive edge over their rivals. In Newfoundland hockey, the competitive edge could be found in the form of 'imports' -- semi-professional players, hired in order to improve a team's likelihood of success. The presence of these athletes within the context of so-called amateur sport was not a new development, nor was it unique to Newfoundland. In fact, contrasted to mainland Canada<sup>2</sup>, Newfoundland lagged behind in this regard.

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<sup>2</sup>Writing of the Ontario Hockey Association (OHA), Scott Young (1989: 36) describes the tactics employed by hockey teams in that province early in the century: "Large city or small town, the competition became so fierce that soon the OHA had to deal with another natural phenomenon: the cheaters. Quickly there grew a breed of hockey executives who didn't mind altering anything alterable, from birth certificates to residence records, if it meant a better chance of winning." Young goes on to describe the fake amateurs or "tourists" who shopped around the league for the best deal available. Of course professionalism was illegal at the time, but under-the-table cash payments were common practice and difficult to prove. Similar occurrences took place in Western Canada where the flow of "ringers" often resulted in "bad feelings between teams and communities" (Zeman, 1986: 12).

The genesis of the 'import trend' on the Island had its roots around 1950. The cradle for its development was Buchans, a relatively small company mining town in the centre of the province. In Buchans, Company officials were ardent supporters of the town hockey team (the 'Miners') and it is apparent that they were the driving force behind the hiring of imports. Hockey provided a small, isolated, mining town with entertainment, leisure activity, and excitement. It also gave a newly established town – without the traditional networks of civic and kinship ties – a rallying point. Citizens could be proud of their community, because it was a successful and well-known hockey town. The four Herder Memorial Trophies which Buchans won in a five year period from 1950-1954 attests to the success of the import practice.

Thirty-six years after the first imports arrived in Buchans (1950), the system reached its apex. After losing in the final of the Allan Cup in the previous season, the Corner Brook Royals captured the trophy, and with it the Canadian Amateur Senior Hockey Championship, in 1986. The Royals of that season were touted as "the finest Senior hockey team money could buy" (Crowe, 1996). Four years later, the Royals were gone. Two successive runs at the national championship demanded plenty of travel and hockey talent; and these required an abundance of money. It has been suggested that the two year cost for the local hockey organization was in excess of a million dollars (Crowe, 1996). It was too onerous a burden for the Corner Brook Hockey Association to carry, and the team, like many before it, withdrew. Such behaviour begs the sociological question: why

did such a tendency remain unchecked when the disastrous consequences of importing were already becoming manifest?

By 1990, the entire Newfoundland Senior Hockey League (NSHL) had lapsed into obscurity. In the years that followed, even the Herder Trophy itself lost some of its lustre. While the trophy remained as the major prize for provincial Senior hockey supremacy, the hey day of Newfoundland Senior hockey had passed. Years of unrestrained extravagance steered the whole league toward collapse. Now a new era of Herder competition began – the outport era. The economic folly of the larger hockey communities allowed smaller villages, hamlets, and outports the unprecedented opportunity to appropriate the prestigious hardware. Unfortunately, these communities demonstrated no more restraint than the ones before them. Although it was on a much smaller scale, pay-for-play persisted as the most effective means to attract top calibre talent to community teams, and the detrimental process repeated itself.

Internally, intense rivalry and competition priced community hockey teams out of existence. While it is apparent that boosters of NSHL teams were driven by personal desires for status and prestige, it also seems likely that external pressures such as the widespread acceptance of the professional game as the 'dominant cultural form' also undermined inter-community Senior hockey in the province. Amateur teams felt under pressure to keep up with the professional game. Therefore, the study raises pertinent questions with respect to the development of sport in peripheral regions. With the



exception of Colin Howell's (1995) social history of baseball in Maritime Canada and the New England states, such research is lacking. According to Howell (1995: 8):

A half-century ago baseball flourished... every small town and hamlet had a community team. By 1960, however, the game was virtually dead at the local-community level, gradually smothered by the mass-produced paraphernalia and marketing influence of major-league baseball. To understand this tradition one must look beyond the history of the giant metropolis and of organized baseball and into the meanings and function of sport in hinterland regions.

### **1.2.3 Corporate Entrepreneurs?**

Professional sport began to challenge the amateur model very early in this century. However, it has only been in the past few decades that pro sport has blossomed to the point that corporations have seen the industry as a major opportunity for profits and advertising. There are an unprecedented number of professional leagues and teams participating in the major sports of North America. These teams and leagues are categorized into various tiers. At the top are major league franchises (such as those of the National Hockey League). Minor leagues (including the American Hockey League) make up the next level; for the most part, the teams of these leagues are affiliated with major league teams. While in the 'minors,' players hone their skills in preparation for a future career with major league clubs. There may also be various levels and rankings of minor league sport (A, AA, AAA). The final (lower) layer of the system includes the major Junior leagues (Canadian Hockey League, for example). The players in these leagues are not

professionals, but they aspire to become so. Although these leagues are not professional, the teams are often privately owned, and operated in a professional manner. All these sport teams are status symbols for the cities and communities which acquire them. But there is a hierarchy to this status, and the amount of status afforded depends upon the level of the team – major league franchises are the “hallmark” of “world-class” cities (Whitson & Macintosh, 1993).

Corporate entrepreneurship is an extension of civic boosterism in the sense that professional teams and major sporting events constitute status symbols for communities to uphold. The difference lies in the fact that, to a great degree, communities lose control over the vehicle of their boosterism. More succinctly, communities become hostages of the corporations who own and run the teams. Corporations are often able to dictate the conditions of team leases. They may demand new or renovated facilities, franchise fees, operating subsidies, and the like. Various locations may be played off against each other in a bidding war in which the professional franchises are the biggest winners.

The control of the number and location of franchises has given sports entrepreneurs leverage to exact concessions from those cities desirous of attracting a franchise as well as from those desperate to retain an existing franchise (Johnson, 1982: 217).

If a municipality does not meet the demands of the league or franchise, they will simply move on to the next community that will. Even when a centre is awarded a team, the owners may revoke franchises almost at a whim, and leave the communities they once represented with little more than bitterness and possibly even large public debts.

In the Newfoundland case, however, the applicability of the 'corporate' model is limited. Despite some centralization, the majority of the province's population base remains in rural communities. It is only larger urban centres that can aspire to attract professional sport franchises. Presently there is only one professional sport team in the province, the St. John's Maple Leafs (affiliated with the Toronto Maple Leafs of the NHL). The model may also apply to Corner Brook, where there is a circle of people who aspire to acquire a minor league or major Junior league hockey franchise for that community. Like other communities of North America, Newfoundland cities want to secure the best entertainment and sporting events possible; this brings a degree of prestige to the community, as well as the prospect of increased employment and revenue. When communities lack these amenities it suggests backwardness and marginality. Today's booster campaigns equate bigger with the notion of 'progress;' this can depreciate the virtues of smaller communities. Relatedly, there may be an inclination to try to keep up with other communities and regions in this regard, and in an climate of limited economic resources, more important things such as public health care, debt reduction may be sacrificed. Likewise, the infusion of professional teams into the community may under-emphasize and thus undermine the value of local, community-based athletics.

### 1.3 Methodology

This study of the development of hockey in Newfoundland is an exercise in historical sociology. All historical sociological accounts, according to Theda Skocpol (1984: 1), share some of the following characteristics:

Most basically, they ask questions about social structures or processes understood to be concretely situated in time and space. Second, they address processes over time, and take temporal sequences seriously in accounting for outcomes. Third, most historical analyses attend to the interplay of meaningful actions and structural contexts in order to make sense of the unfolding of unintended as well as intended outcomes in individual lives and social transformations. Finally historical sociological studies highlight the *particular* and *varying* features of specific kinds of social structures and patterns of change.

The latter is a particularly important point. Sociology, as a discipline, has often been too evolutionist in its perspective, seeing history as a series of stages or phases in which to locate – and explain away – particular phenomena. The scientific method to which sociology is in the main (still) committed has deepened this tendency. But as Marc Bloch once remarked, "hypotheses must always be refreshed by contact with experience," otherwise theory becomes sterile (Cited in Chirot, 1984: 37). Clearly, no student of sociology is going to deny the importance of systemic features of a society, or of global pressures on it. But an **historical** sociology will not only be concerned with the impact that time and agency has on social structures, it will also want to identify characteristics that are singular and unexpected. All this is another way of saying that when complex social configurations are squeezed into a particular categorical box, theory loses its power to shed

light on social phenomena and instead adds to its obfuscation. In this thesis, I have used the concepts of social theory wherever I have found them serviceable and appropriate, but I have simultaneously sought to study the evidence through a close reading of the sources. In such a manner, I have been particularly keen to learn what was unique about Newfoundland, rather than presenting the Island's experience as merely one more item of an already known phenomenon.

In preparing the thesis, a variety of historical data has been employed: I have consulted official and personal records, photographic evidence, and published materials such as newspapers, periodicals, books, and journals. The most valuable of these sources are primary materials, which are "firsthand recordings of data or the actual data themselves" (Sproull, 1988: 152). There are a number of pitfalls surrounding the use of primary and secondary sources, however. Uncertainties arise regarding the representativeness of the data, particularly in those cases where the researcher has no control over its collection. All existing data may not be known or available. Finally, there is no guarantee that these sources are accurate and unbiased. The researcher has thus to proceed with caution. (Sproull, 1988; Hubbard, 1973).

Although nothing has been written specifically by sociologists on Newfoundland hockey – hence, the absence in this thesis of the conventional literature review – the game's popularity in Newfoundland has left many accounts of it. Of particular importance in locating these accounts is the Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archive (CNSA), which,

among its many assets, is in possession of a personal collection donated by Graham Snow. Mr Snow was a physical educator, administrator, archivist, and part time lecturer at Memorial University. Before his premature death in 1986, he had been gathering material for an authoritative work on the History of Sport in Newfoundland. The Snow Collection contains a variety of documents: newspaper clippings, chapter outlines, handwritten notes, copies of official records, and a small compilation of photographs. The data covers all facets of sport development in the province and is of great value to sport historians. Following closely the chapter outline of the never-completed History of Sport, Snow's papers are categorized in series and sub-series files. Two files were especially valuable for the present study: Hockey (file 1.02.016), and NAHA Hockey Notes and Clippings (file 2.01.003). Unfortunately, data from the Snow Collection has a somewhat chaotic quality. Much of the amassed material – newspaper articles, for example – have been collected without documenting such essential information as the names of the source newspaper or the proper dates of publication. In these cases, the data had to be scrutinized carefully and checked, in order to determine whether it could be legitimately used. Where I was unable to confirm the source, I have cited the Snow Collection itself, along with the applicable file number which contains the material in question.

Inevitably, newspaper accounts were widely consulted. While the Newfoundland Provincial Library holds an index of Newfoundland newspapers from 1955 to recent times, the index is not comprehensive. For the period before 1955, I consulted the Graham Snow

Collection, the NAHA collection of newspaper clippings (at the office in Grand Falls), and the sports 'Year-in-Review' editions of two daily St. John's newspapers, the Daily News and the Evening Telegram.

For scholarly books and periodicals, Memorial University's UNICORN computer data-base proved invaluable. The Newfoundland Periodical Article Bibliography (PAB) was searched under such headings as 'sport' and 'hockey,' revealing an impressive array of material going back almost a century. Unfortunately, a substantial number of older Newfoundland periodicals have been lost, either discarded or buried in attics and cellars. Even when a source comes to light it is sometimes difficult to identify exactly where it came from. Take for example the quote on page v of the thesis, which mentions a source called the Public Bureau; while some numbers of this periodical remain, many have been lost. The Snow collection yielded photocopies of the periodical, the originals of which have eluded all provincial libraries. Although such discoveries are valuable, they are also frustrating because we cannot be sure of the proper year, volume, and number of the source.

Due to the selectivity demanded of the research process, "the knowledge the historian produces is never a total account of past activity, but rather an incomplete jigsaw puzzle of the surviving 'bits and pieces' of credible records concerning a unique event" (Van Dalen, 1973: 290). Even so, I have sought to fill numerous gaps, as well as enliven the study, by conducting a number of personal interviews with individuals involved with the

NAHA, particularly at the Senior level. These people included NAHA executives, team officials, and former local and imported players from a number of communities – most specifically, St. John's, Buchans, and Corner Brook. The interviews were semi-structured in nature. There was an established inventory from which questions were drawn. However, interviews often deviated depending on the particular expertise or experience of the interviewee. As well, although interview candidates were identified from the data sources, the 'snow-ball' sampling technique was also employed. In these instances, interviewed persons suggested other potential candidates.

The Sports Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (SANL), located in St. John's, was also consulted during the research process. SANL was started informally in 1974 by Frank Graham; today, it is a part of Sport Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose of the archives is to collect, preserve, arrange and describe materials relating to sporting activities in Newfoundland and Labrador. SANL makes available, for public use, papers, photographs, and related archival and published materials that document the history of sport in this province. The archivist at SANL is a volunteer, and although the archives contain an abundance of valuable material, it is severely under-funded and somewhat inaccessible. Nevertheless, SANL was the prime source of the photographs which are scattered throughout the thesis. These photographs bring the thesis to life, but also provide valuable historical evidence which confirms details such as travel conditions, styles of



equipment and dress, as well as the involvement of particular teams and individuals in the development of hockey in Newfoundland.

In addition to the extensive archival research, and interviewing, I also focused on three Newfoundland hockey playing communities as my case studies. This in turn facilitated a more in-depth investigation of some of the trends which occurred in the NAHA, particularly since 1950. Since the early history of hockey in Newfoundland occurred almost exclusively in St. John's and the Avalon Peninsula, chapters two and three of the thesis look exclusively at the development of rational recreation and moral entrepreneurship in this region. The fourth chapter outlines some of the changes in transportation, demography, and technology, which facilitated the establishment of inter-Island competition, and the expansion of civic entrepreneurship. It also examines the impact of the 'broken years' of the Second World War.

Next, the discussion shifts more squarely to the practice of importing and its relationship to community promotion (boosterism) and identity. The town of Buchans was selected as the appropriate case study as an early instance of this phenomenon because it was the first community to 'import' hockey players from outside the Island, with the deliberate objective of improving the local team's chance of winning. In the 1980's, importing and boosterism escalated to a new level, climaxing with the Corner Brook Royal's Allen Cup victory in 1986, and the team's rapid demise in ensuing years. This era, though in some ways similar to the previous period, exhibits its own peculiar logic (or

lack thereof), particularly as regards the pressures arising from corporate entrepreneurship. Thus, Corner Brook was selected as the third case. Finally, the study closes with a discussion of the forces which undermined community hockey in Newfoundland, outlining the aftermath of the NSHL, the establishment of the professional game in the province, and the possible implications with respect to sport in 'marginal' regions.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **EARLY SPORT AND THE ORIGINS OF HOCKEY IN NEWFOUNDLAND**

In the late nineteenth century, Newfoundland, Britain's oldest colony, was at a crossroads in its development. The Island had been established as a fishing station in the sixteenth century, and continued to have its economic development retarded by what historians routinely depict as a paternalistic, exploitive, and backward mercantile system into the twentieth century. In many respects the colony had not moved beyond its fragile dependence on the fishery, and this was reflected in all aspects of social life. Communities were isolated along the vast coast of the Island, and transportation was precarious because it was mainly limited to marine travel.

At this time, various business, community, and political leaders discussed the viability of an Island-wide railroad to open-up vast resources of the interior and to provide a more accessible link to eastern Canada. After much debate, the Liberal government of William Whiteway decided to undertake the construction of a trans-Island railway. After an initial venture by an American firm, Sir R.G. Reid, a Canadian railroad contractor, was hired in 1890, and the Reid Newfoundland Company was born (Chadwick, 1967). The monetary commitment for such an enterprise was difficult for the tiny colony, which already found itself under considerable financial strain, and is likely to have contributed to the Bank Crash in December 1894. Although the railroad never created the opportunity envisioned by its proponents, it, along with the 1894 Bank Crash, played an important role in introducing the sport of ice-hockey to Newfoundland.

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The seeds of the game, however, were evident as early as the Anglo-American War of 1812. An article from The Book of Newfoundland describes soldiers from the British garrison playing hurley on the ice of both Quidi Vidi and St. John's Harbour in order to promote troop morale during the exceptionally harsh winter of 1812 (Lemessurier, [1915] 1967: 84). Similar events took place in Canada (see McFarlane, 1990; Hewitt, 1953), and although some sport historians claim that these were the first games of hockey ever played, it seems more likely that these loosely organized matches were antecedents to the modern game.

According to Gruneau and Whitson (1993: 37), "there isn't necessarily any direct evolutionary line between the folk traditions of various sports in the past and the institutional origins of the sports we play and watch today." But, although the link between folk and modern sports is not necessarily evolutionary, in the case of hockey there is clearly a social connection with the past. If evolution is a process of adaptive change from a simpler to a more complex form, then ice-hockey is the result of selective adaption in the social sense. Hockey is almost certainly a game which owes its most basic modern form to the stick sports of the British Isles, including hurley, shinny, shinty, ricket, and field hockey. Settlers, soldiers, and other travellers to North America brought their cultural practices with them to the new world, and adapted them to the realities of a more severe geography and climate. Other sources influencing the adaptation may include rugged

geography and lifestyle, as well as indigenous cultural influences such as the game of lacrosse.

Nevertheless, it would be mistaken to assume that the adaptation of old world sporting practices to the new world was a natural process. On the contrary, in addition to the climatic, geographic, and demographic forces to which it is subject, culture is also shaped by the continuous interplay of dominant and subordinate groups within society. Dominant groups, in particular, are usually able to bring more resources to bear in determining the cultural agenda of society. Such appears to have been the case in the development of hockey in Newfoundland and Canada.

## **2.1 The Pioneering Of Sport In 19th Century Newfoundland**

Newfoundland consisted essentially of two distinct groups of people from the beginning of permanent settlement into the late nineteenth century. One group was the working-class consisting mainly of fishers and servants who were usually at the mercy of merchants employing the so-called "truck" system<sup>3</sup>. The other, dominant, class consisted of the merchants themselves, fishing admirals, military officers, governors and gentry, and members of the higher clergy most of whom were well educated, cosmopolitan individuals. Sons of wealthy citizens were often sent to England to attend private schools. In a world

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<sup>3</sup>The "truck" system was a largely cashless credit system whereby merchants set prices for fish catches, and allotted an amount of annual credit to fishers from which the latter would provision themselves for the year. Most people have regarded the truck system as an exploitive arrangement, but opinions vary on the vices and virtues of the practice.

of rapid social change, the boarding school was used as an instrument to reduce class antagonisms between the aristocratic and mercantile elite by inculcating similar values into both groups. Referring to the Canadian case, Gruneau (1979: 21) argues that the reformed private school was not merely a concession to the growing bourgeois class, but was a method by which the declining aristocracy could reaffirm its influence by "indoctrinating the sons of the bourgeoisie as gentlemen." In short, it was a "safety valve" which promoted cohesion between the influential classes in society. "The private school was designed to solidify a fragmented [colonial] ruling class that could model itself after the British gentry and thereby provide leadership and stability in the new society" (Gruneau, 1979: 22). It was also the primary agency linking the notion of 'service' to athleticism through the 'games ethic' (see Mangan 1981; Brown, 1988). Games were political metaphors designed to teach future leaders "the basic tools of imperial command: courage, endurance, assertion, control and self-control"; they also promoted loyalty and obedience and were, therefore, invaluable to colonial purpose (Mangan, 1985: 1992).

After completing their education abroad, young men would come back to Newfoundland to join the family business, and take their place among the elite social community of the Island. Upon their return, they brought with them the "social graces" and "well-heeled customs" of the imperial elite (Anderson, 1982: 2). Sports, and British field sports in particular, were among these customs. For the upper class "gentleman," sport was a pleasant diversion from the banality of day-to-day life. Sport and other forms

of recreation could also function as displays of "conspicuous consumption" carried out by a "leisure class" (see Veblen, 1935). Additionally, such activities served to promote norms of leadership, fair play, discipline, and civility (see Gruneau, 1979).

Throughout the 1800's, one of the more popular sports in the North American colonies was cricket. Cricket was particularly congenial to upper-class sensibility because it had reached a level of organization beyond the ostensibly chaotic endeavours of the "folk" games played by the common people; i.e. it possessed a uniform set of rules and regulations (Gruneau, 1979: 23). Moreover, for most of the nineteenth century, officially organized sports were not available to the general public which was often excluded not only from playing such games, but also from watching them because they took place on the closed grounds of either Government quarters or Fort Townsend. This was evident in a match played in 1851 between "the *gentlemen* of St. John's versus the *officers* of the Garrison and the H.M.S. Alarm" (Anderson, 1982: 3). Eventually, the sport of cricket fell into decline in Newfoundland as well as other parts of British North America, gradually smothered by its own exclusivity and climatic factors which favoured other more suitable pastimes (Holt, 1989: 223-224). Nonetheless, the above quote hints at the importance of yet another group for the development of Newfoundland sport, the British military.

There is a longstanding association between sport and the military. Sport was often used to promote solidarity within colonial society. Providing "amusement for those far from home isolated amidst an alien and sometimes hostile population, sport was not so

much a luxury as a necessity, a means of maintaining morale and a sense of shared roots, of Britishness, of lawns and tea and things familiar" (Holt, 1989: 208). While sport was an important source of entertainment, morale and solidarity for the military, it was also essential in maintaining fitness, developing useful skills, and keeping imperial garrisons in a state of readiness (Holt, 1989).

Commenting on the situation in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Day (1989) emphasizes the role played by the local garrison in ensuring that British institutions, including sport, would prevail in the area. Notably, the British contributed to the North American sport scene as competitors, peace-keepers, facility architects, grounds-keepers, and sport officials (Day, 1989); "administrative experience, opportunity, inclination, and tradition combined to ensure the success of the British officer in establishing the games of his homeland in his new North American environment" (Lindsay, 1985: 83). Soldiers of the garrisons, particularly the officers, were often admired by local populations; their "dashing" uniforms, education, privileged status, and wealth (Lindsay, 1985: 83), along with their presumed "upright character and strong moral fibre" (Day, 1989: 35) meant that their actions and habits were often endorsed and imitated by the civilian public.

And yet recreational sporting activities of the British military were hardly limited to "British" pastimes. On the contrary, there is evidence that soldiers and officers of the various North American garrisons took part in skating, tobogganing, and snow-shoeing, amongst other recreations suitable to the climate of British North America (Lindsay, 1985;



Day, 1989). It has even been claimed that British troops may have played the earliest versions of ice-hockey.

It is quite possible that English troops stationed in Kingston from 1783 to 1855 played hockey, as there is evidence in old papers, letters, and legends that the men and officers located with the Imperial troops as early as the year 1783, were proficient skaters and participated in field hockey. It is more than likely that the pioneers played their field hockey in those early days on skates but it is not an established fact. (Hewitt, 1953: 3)

As alluded to earlier, a similar game was played by British soldiers in Newfoundland in 1812. And although it has been generally accepted that these incidents of hurley and field hockey on ice were not the first authentic games of hockey, they may well have anticipated what was later to become our national pastime.

Another important feature of the early development of sport in Newfoundland was the appearance of the sport club. In mid-to-late nineteenth century Newfoundland, sport provided a valuable opportunity for socializing. This was evident in the growth of sports clubs within the capital city. At the turn of the twentieth century, these clubs were the main sports organizations on the Island. Clubs such as the Zulu Cricket Club, the Arctic Curling Club, and the St. Thomas Soccer club were founded and funded by interested participants, and were, initially, available only to elite citizens (Anderson, 1982: 4). Such clubs also represented a growing movement towards the rationalization of sports through their introduction of uniform rules and formal leagues (see Guttman, 1978).

By the end of the 1800's, an additional influence on the development of sport in Newfoundland was becoming apparent. Throughout the history of Newfoundland, groups of tradesmen were brought to the Island to work on a variety of projects including the Anglican Cathedral and the Newfoundland railway (Anderson, 1982). This skilled working-class was also an important fixture within the sporting culture of the colony. Not only did its members form their own sports organizations (such as the Cathedral Works Football Club), they also brought their own sports traditions to Newfoundland in the form of new sports and styles of play. It seems likely that ice-hockey was one of the sports which the Canadian tradesman would have pursued.

## 2.2 Of Walking Canes and Cricket Balls

It has been widely accepted that the first game of hockey in Newfoundland took place on a "crisp" afternoon in February 1896 at Quidi Vidi Lake, St. John's<sup>4</sup>. The event boasted a number of prominent citizens as participants. At that time, Dr. (later Sir) Wilfred Grenfell, the famous missionary doctor of the Great Northern Peninsula, was the guest of Governor Sir Herbert Murray as he made preparations for a trip to the annual seal hunt. As the story has it, several men including the Governor, his personal Secretary, Sinclair Simms, and Grenfell were engaged in a morning chat at Government house when the

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<sup>4</sup>Despite searching the local newspapers from the period, I was unable to confirm this claim. However, there is widespread support throughout the secondary sources -- such as Ronayne's (1948) retrospective and Graham's (1967) account -- that this was the first known game to be played on the Island.

conversation turned to "puck-a-hurley." Apparently the Governor and his colleagues had recently adopted an interest in the novel pastime. After some discussion, it was decided that a party would gather on Quidi Vidi to give the sport a "whirl" (Ronayne, 1948).

After an initial attempt to "sweep" off the pond became too "plebeian" a chore, a labourer was enlisted to perform the task, and the distinguished party returned in the afternoon equipped with skates, walking canes, and cricket balls. The players in this seminal match were "seven serious minded citizens," namely, William C. Job, James P. Fox, Captain Walter Melville, E. Arthur Hayward, George Whiteley, Simms, and Grenfell. How curious and amused onlookers -- "peasants," friends, and the honourable Governor amongst them -- must have been as the seven men "gyrated" around the ice with their "coat-tails flying in the breeze" (Ronayne 1949: 11). Yet if that February, 1896 match on Quidi Vidi was the first documented game of hockey to be played in Newfoundland, it seems likely that the game of hockey or "puck-a-hurley", as it was then known, had been played for some time before the Governor and his "serious minded" colleagues embarked on their "historic" endeavour. Canadians had been playing organized hockey by at least 1881. Considering the close ties between Canada and Newfoundland, particularly with respect to the railroad and financial institutions, it is probable that Canadians introduced the sport to the Island earlier than previously recorded. To be accepted as a worthy pastime, however, hockey needed legitimization by influential individuals, and this was provided on that fateful February afternoon in 1896.

### 2.3 "Kindred" Countries

The probability that Canadians brought hockey to Newfoundland should not surprise us. Since the latter part of the nineteenth century, there had been a "multiplication and strengthening of links between the two countries" (MacLeod, 1994: 3), which had forged close ties through social relationships such as the exchange of people and links between churches and various other organizations. Politically, the Canadian and Newfoundland governments often cooperated with, and assisted each other, sometimes initiating jointly-administered programs such as the building of lighthouses. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the two countries were closely tied together in transportation, banking and other economic arrangements. These relationships bound Canada and Newfoundland so closely together that historian Malcolm MacLeod (1994) has called them "kindred countries."

In 1890, Robert G. Reid, a Scottish-born Canadian, was brought to Newfoundland for the construction of a trans-Island railroad. "By 1900 the Reid conglomerate sprawled across the country's whole economy, dominating several sectors with its huge land holdings, railway, steamships, ferry service to Canada, ownership of the St. John's Light and Power Company, the street railway in the Capital, and the operation of Newfoundland's only drydock" (MacLeod, 1994: 12).

But the influence of the Reid family went much deeper than economics. The Reids also made a great contribution to the social and cultural landscape of the Island. From

1891 on, the Reids continued to extend the railroad across the Island, bringing tradesmen and headquarters staff as they went. Robert Reid and brother Harry, were themselves known as "brilliant hockey players;" but so too were many of their staff which consisted of numerous young Canadians "eager to have opportunities of playing their great national game" (Blackall, 1938: 174). Many of the skilled technicians came from Montreal (Snow, CNSA.088: 1.02.016). In tandem with the Bank Crash of 1894, which brought four major Canadian banks to the Island, the railway brought a number of Canadian hockey enthusiasts to Newfoundland. According to Blackall (1938: 174), "this ever growing band of Canadian players was the nucleus from which the host of Newfoundland hockey players sprang."

In 1897, railway and bank employees, along with members of the Feildians Club, played a number of scratch matches on Quidi Vidi Lake (Stirling, 1967). Apparently, the sport had caught on so quickly that enthusiastic "hockeyists" -- as they were called -- were utilizing all the ponds in the area during that season; the game had even spread to Harbour Grace (Ronayne, 1948). "By 1897 everybody went hockey mad. One could not visit a sheet of ice within reasonable reach of St. John's without finding two or three gangs of wild hockeyists violently practicing their new and thrilling pastime" (Blackall, 1938: 174).

The following year witnessed the first indoor hockey to be played on the Island. The games took place in the Victoria Rink which was located on King's Road (Stirling, 1937: 151). However, the Victoria Rink was a may-pole structure, with the roof supported by

central columns, and therefore, more suitable for general skating than for hockey (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 1.02.016). This difficulty was eliminated in the following year with the opening of the Prince's Rink.

The project was headed by R.G. Reid, who donated the land for the rink in exchange for shares in the enterprise. Reid enlisted the financial support of St. John's merchants, and the Prince of Wales Rink Company was formed. The foundation for the structure was laid on December 15, 1898 on the Eastern terminal of the Reid trans-insular Railway, and was opened to the general public, in a "carnival-like atmosphere," less than a month later, on January 10, 1899. The new rink was engineered by members of the Reid Newfoundland Company, but was erected by local building firms. It conformed in size and design to the Montagnard Rink in Montreal, which had been built a year earlier (Ronayne, 1948; Snow, CNSA.088: 1.02.016).

The building was, at the time, an engineering marvel, with the roof being supported by twelve massive laminated wooden ribs each with a span of ninety-two feet. This design created a domed structure which was distinct from any other rink on the Island because the entire ice surface was free of any supporting columns. The building also had another idiosyncratic feature. Apparently, the wooden ribs which supported the roof had been "exhumed" from the wreck of a ship (Ronayne, 1948). This seems an appropriate, if unintended, tribute to Newfoundland's marine history.

In retrospect, the opening of the Prince's Rink was a very significant event in the continued growth and popularity of ice-hockey in Newfoundland: "Its erection meant that hockey could move indoors from the windy wastes, spectators could witness the games with a measure of comfort and convenience hitherto unknown, and a regular league could, and was, formed to guide the infant sport to lusty maturity" (Ronayne, 1948: 11). With the growing interest in the game, hockey had quickly taken its infant steps and was becoming an emergent force in the sporting culture of the Island. The next logical move for the game's proprietors was the establishment of a formal organization for the governance of the new but growing pastime.

#### **2.4 The Newfoundland Hockey Association**

Shortly after the opening of the Prince's Rink, the Newfoundland Hockey Association (NHA) founded a seven team league in St. John's. There are conflicting reports about the date of establishment and the first President of the NHA<sup>5</sup>, however, an impressive 160 players registered with the association in the first year (Duff, 1972). Also, seven teams were accepted into the league, comprising the Victorias (made up of employees of the Reid

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<sup>5</sup>One source dates the formation of the NHA as being January, 11, 1898, and states that St. John's East MHA, James P. Fox, was chosen as president (Meeker, 1995); another cites mid-January of 1899 as the date of establishment, but claims that Bank of Montreal manager, William J. Hunter, became president (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 1.02.016). The most likely scenario is provided by another source which combines the information in other two reports. It seems that a meeting was called on January 18, 1899 in order to form the NHA. At this meeting, James P. Fox was elected as the inaugural president of the new association.

Company), the Bankers, Feildians, St. Bons, St. Andrews, the Star of the Sea Society, and a club representing the city (simply known as the city team). To cap it all, Francis J. Hunter donated a trophy – the Hunter Trophy – to be presented annually to the winners of the city league.

Even so, many appear to have regarded the new sport as a passing fad, played only by lunatics. The inexperience of the players, primitive playing equipment, and the robust nature of the game led one commentator to label the aggressive pastime as “caveman” hockey (Ronayne, 1948: 11). The following passage from a newspaper report of the day captures the chaotic flavour of the novel recreation and deserves quotation at length:

The Bonaventure Club had their first practice last night. Hardly a man on the team had ever played before, many had never seen a game played and some had never had a stick in their hands until that game. Nevertheless what was lacking in skill was more than made up for in enthusiasm, and a really rattling hour was spent by the boys. The rule of off-side was frequently violated, and on more than one occasion the points (defencemen) and goalkeeper would be found in the midst of the scuffle at the off-end of the rink, but this did not appear to matter much. The goals obtained were so numerous that it was difficult to keep count, but both sides appeared to have won. At the commencement of the second half [St. Bons] President (Greene) who had been playing brilliantly, got an ugly blow between the eyes from the puck, and had to retire. Several minor casualties lessened the playing numbers from time to time, so that at the final bell the full number were not on the ice. (Cited in Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 1.02.016)

With the exception of the Victorias and Bankers, who consisted mainly of Canadians, the majority of the league’s teams were made up of local players with very limited knowledge of or practice with the game. Such inexperience certainly gave the league a



rough-and-ready, improvised quality. The introduction of hockey to Newfoundland, and the formation of the Newfoundland Hockey Association has even been described as a "pathetic affair, a struggle for recognition and acceptance" (Graham, 1988: 62). The regular populace had little time for the novel and expensive (equipment was costly) sport of "puck-a-hurley;" general skating remained the most preferred and popular winter pastime. This was evident in the league championship game at the close of the initial season:

With five minutes [remaining], the teams tied and battling for the decisive goal, excitement at a fever pitch, the yawning skaters became so anxious to begin their evening blades that, headed by one of the rinks directors, they jumped out on the ice and broke up the game. (Ronayne, 1948: 11)

(The game was eventually replayed, and the Victorias went on to claim the Hunter Trophy with a 4-1 victory over the Bankers in the Championship game). Even the Prince's Rink itself was not ideally suited to hockey. For the first few years of the sport, there were no boards enclosing the playing surface, there was no dressing room, no player's box, games had to be played at the early hour of 6:30 pm, and players were required to secure a \$5 season skating pass before they were allowed to play (Ronayne, 1948: 11).



**Photo 2.1:** Victoria's Hockey Team 1898-1901

Seated (L to R): W.J. Higgins, J.B. Urquhart, R.G. Reid, D.P. Duff, H.E. Huestis  
 Standing (L to R): J.I. Vinicombe, H.D. Reid, W.C. Winoboro, R.F. Morkill  
 (courtesy SANL)

One thing hockey did have in its favour, however, was the support of a number of influential individuals. Canadian hockey had grown with the support of the governor of the period, Lord Stanley of Preston, several members of Parliament, as well as key business leaders (see Young, 1989; McFarlane, 1990). Newfoundland hockey enjoyed

similar advantages. As previously mentioned, the so-called "first" game was sponsored by Governor Herbert Murray, and included such players as Dr. Wilfred Grenfell, MHA, James P. Fox, the Honourable William C. Job, and Captain Walter Melville. Other early players and supporters included the Reid family, Bank of Montreal manager, Francois J. Hunter, the Honourable James S. Ayre, Supreme Court Justice, William J. Higgins, and prominent St. John's athlete James Vinnicombe, to mention a few. Yet if hockey was to grow, it needed more than upper-class support and patronage; it required a popular base, and this it was soon to achieve.

### **2.5 Moving Toward Acceptance**

By 1901, local hockey players had been playing a level of organized hockey indoors for more than two years. "Feeling a bit of respect for their own prowess," they decided to invite a number of Canadian teams to St. John's for some exhibition games (Ronayne, 1948: 12). Letters were sent to Maritime hockey teams from Sydney, North Sydney, Amherst, Moncton, New Glasgow, Truro, Sackville, and Pictou. Truro accepted the invitation and the first international match was played in St. John's on February 8 of that year. An Inter-Colonial Cup was donated by Lord Edward P. Morris, and was captured by Truro, where the Cup remains to this day (Graham, 1967: 523). The international match was certainly a learning process for the local team. While international contests helped to establish a number of new rules and regulations in Newfoundland, these games also contributed to improving the level of play in local hockey. According to Ronayne



**Photo 2.2:** Newfoundland-Truro (Morris Cup) Hockey Series 1901-1902  
(Courtesy SANL)

(1948: 12), "hockey was beginning to pass out of its state of suspended animation -- between tolerance and enjoyment -- in favour of the latter emotion as far as crowd appeal was concerned, as the bourgeoisie began to arrive at the conclusion that maybe [the] game wasn't so whacky [sic] after all." Friendly matches between Newfoundland (St. John's) and Maritime Canadian teams continued on a regular basis. Exhibition games against Canadians were very advantageous for local hockey. Not only did Newfoundlanders

improve their skills through playing tougher competition, they also learned some new methods of play. For example, in 1902, a local all-star team travelled to Nova Scotia, as reciprocation for the games the Newfoundlanders had hosted the year before. Competitively, the event was a disaster; the team lost all five of its games, being decimated in many of them (24-1 against the Halifax Wanderers). And while the trip was described as a social success, it was what the hockeyists took back that was most beneficial – the wrist-shot (Ronayne, 1948: 12).

This new style “revolutionized” the local style of play, gradually replacing the old “lift” shot which, up to that time, had been a favourite technique in Newfoundland hockey. Since the rink was poorly lit, players would “lift” the puck into the air so that it was difficult to detect. Often it would land in the net behind unsuspecting goalkeepers. While the ‘invention’ was clever and effective in the inadequate lighting of the Prince’s Rink, it was not very useful when the city team played other (Canadian) teams. The use of the lift-shot probably led to the neglect of other tactics, and actually hindered the development of the sport more generally. However, by 1903, increased experience and the use of the wrist-shot had improved the quality of local hockey so much that a city all-star team was able to secure a split in two games played against the North Sydney squad which had beaten them 14-2 just a year earlier (Ronayne, 1948: 12).

In large part due to the improved calibre of local hockey, the popularity of the game was growing not only amongst players, but also spectators. Games were now attracting

crowds of people to the rink. Moreover, by 1904, hockey was a "firmly established," popular pastime, and this was reflected in some of the key events of the year. Since hockey was "paying its own way," the league sought, and received, concessions from the management of the Prince's Rink. Amongst them were the granting of nine free passes for each team, \$50 for the league to buy medals for the champions, the starting time for the games moved to 7:00 pm with ten minutes allotted for over-time, and the promise of a dressing room for the following season (Ronayne, 1948: 12).

Another, more significant, episode of 1904 was the donation of the Boyle Challenge Cup to the local league by Governor Cavendish Boyle. Sir Cavendish Boyle was but a brief visitor to Newfoundland, but he did have a profound and lasting impact upon the Newfoundland culture, leaving behind the "Ode to Newfoundland", the (national) anthem of the Island. Governor Boyle was also a great patron of Newfoundland sport. He believed that the "vital energies" of life could be cultivated through sport, and that competition could enhance the dignity of the individual (Graham, 1979: 191-192). The exquisitely crafted Boyle Cup was "given for the promotion of Hockey on Ice in Newfoundland" (Boyle, 1904, Cited in Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 1.02.016). The reasons for Governor Boyle's emphatic embrace of sport are not clear, but some conjectures are possible. Gerald Redmond for instance (1992) has argued that Canadian governors-general used sport both to unify the young country from within, and to consolidate its links with the British Empire. While the sport of choice was often taken from the Imperial inventory

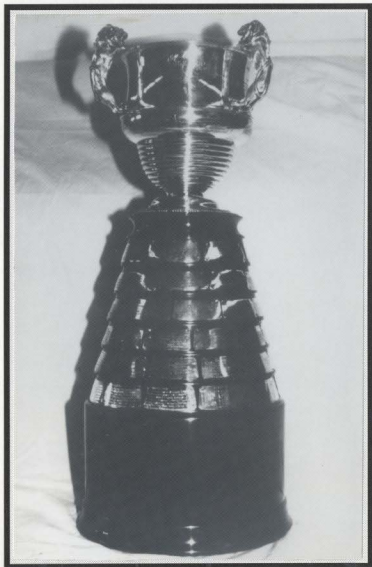
(cricket, soccer, rounders), colonial sports (such as hockey) also enjoyed the support of the crown. That some of the more revered trophies in Canadian and Newfoundland hockey were donated by aristocratic governors-general is "an indication that viceregal patronage was a living, changing and meaningful process" (Redmond, 1992: 168).

The Boyle Trophy was originally intended as a Challenge Cup to be presented to the winner of an annual competition between Newfoundland and Canadian teams, it was felt that the trophy would have a greater value in "fostering, increasing and sustaining interest and enthusiasm" if it were associated more with local hockey supremacy (Graham, 1979: 191). The uncertainty of travel between the two colonies reinforced the feeling that the Boyle Trophy should be played for amongst local teams (Ronayne, 1948: 12).

Local hockey owes a debt of gratitude to former Colonial Governor Cavendish Boyle. It was through his foresight in fostering friendly competition in an atmosphere that was amateur in every sense of the word that ultimately led to ice hockey's acceptance as Newfoundland's most popular winter pastime. (Snow, CNSA.088: 1.02.016)

In 1905, hockey continued to evolve from its original form toward the modern structure that it takes today. Until that year, hockey had been modeled similarly to seven-side rugby. Games were played with seven players on each team (all playing at once), and, as in rugby, there was no forward passing. The initial shift toward acceptance of forward passing was taken when it was deemed legal for a player to receive a forward pass from the goaltender as long as he was within a three-foot radius. And although the wrist-shot was steadily catching-on, the lighting in the Prince's Rink continued to be poor, and

"lifting" continued to be practiced. In fact, because the earliest hockey games featured no substitutions, some players would actually try to break a light so that they could take a "spell" while the rink attendants cleared the ice of glass! (Duff, 1972)



**Photo 2.3:** The Boyle Cup (Courtesy SANL)



The following year witnessed the first amateur-professional controversy in Newfoundland hockey. Although no players had ever received money specifically for playing hockey, a number of hockeyists had won cash in speed-skating competitions. The rule of the day was that a professional was defined as one who accepted money for participation in sport, and further, that a professional in one sport was considered a professional in all sports. The amateur rule created some difficulties for hockey; it wanted to rid the sport of the "evil" spectre of professionalism, but it did not want to discourage or shun its hard won enthusiasts. As a compromise, the league decided to insert the words "since January, 1905" into its amateur definition, and forgive all past transgressions (Ronayne, 1948). Incidentally, 1906 was also the first year in which a board fence was used to enclose the ice surface. This kept the puck from leaving the playing surface so easily. It also prevented players from landing on spectators. As one fan put it:

There were no boards only a ledge around and you'd be sitting down there you know, with your girl... and you'd be sitting on a chair perhaps on a bench and they used to hit each other an awful lot in those days, a lot more than they do now, perhaps as much awkwardness as it was anything else -- next thing you'd know he'd be finding himself in your girl's lap. (Cited in Davidson, 1982: 5)

Hockey was also catching on outside the capital city, particularly in Conception Bay. The early development of hockey in Conception Bay was an unstable endeavour. Although it has been claimed that the sport was initiated in Harbour Grace as early as 1897, it appears that hockey failed to gain popularity and lapsed for a time. Apparently the first team to be formed outside St. John's was established in Bay Roberts by Lewis Dawe.

Dawe had picked up the game while attending college (private school) in St. John's, and upon his return from the capital city, introduced the sport to his home community. In 1906, the "Icicles" were formed in Bay Roberts, but in the first couple of years the team saw limited action because they had no one to play against (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003).

This changed when Malcolm Roberts (later President of the Mount Royal Printing Press in Montreal) and Jack Bartlett (son of Captain Moses Bartlett, and later employed with the Canadian Marconi Company) introduced the game to Brigus in 1908. The following year, hockey was revived in Harbour Grace, and visits were exchanged with Brigus and Bay Roberts. In fact, a 1909 game played between the latter two communities may have been the first inter-town game to be played in Newfoundland, with the hosts from Brigus earning a 4-2 victory over the visitors (Snow 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003. Later in that year, the Brigus squad was invited to play a series of exhibition games in St. John's. The team had been invited in the previous season, but had to decline because many of the hockeyists were preparing for the annual sealfishery (Ronayne, 1948). This year, the Brigus club made the trip, and despite playing "manfully" and "untiringly," were "vanquished" by city teams on three successive occasions (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003 ). From then on, the tradition of inter-town competition grew as teams were established in Bell Island, Bay Roberts, and Grand Falls by 1913 (Poole, 1994), and as travel vastly improved with the completion of the Newfoundland Railway.

In 1895, an iron mine began production on Bell Island. The mine employed hundreds of people, making the community the first major industrial town in Newfoundland. Dominion Steel and Coal Company (DOSCO), the mine's developer, brought many workers and managers to the town including some Canadians. By 1913, rink construction was started on Bell Island under the direction of a Dr. Carnochan, R.R. Proudfoot, D.A. Fraser, and Cuthbert Main. Later that year, Jack Tobin and a team from St. John's crossed the ice by horse to compete in a series of exhibition games against a Bell Island team. Unfortunately, the party became marooned when the ice they crossed on drifted away, underscoring the difficulties associated with even modest travel in Newfoundland in the early part of the century. The hockeyists were not distressed by the incident, however, and the following year a Bell Island team journeyed to St. John's where they were soundly defeated 13-5 by a city team at the Prince's Rink.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Newfoundland was quick to offer its services to the mother-country. In turn, the Great War had a profound effect on the development of hockey in Newfoundland. Naturally, most of the local hockeyists were young men who were eligible for the armed forces; the Crescents, for instance, who had been champions of the local league in 1914, joined the Newfoundland Regiment almost to a man. Other teams did likewise. Enlistment was high throughout the war. The war took a terrible toll, claiming the lives of hundreds of young Newfoundlanders, including many

notable athletes. When the troop ship "Florizel," for instance, sank on February 24, 1918, several hockey players were amongst those lost.

Even so, the local league, though severely handicapped, continued to operate. Its impact was even felt abroad (Dowden, 1914). Newfoundland troops stationed in Edinburgh, Scotland, for example, continued to practice the pastime while in service, and were amongst the first to introduce the winter sport to the Scots:

The first game was a challenge from a team got together by the Canadian students at Edinburgh University. This [team] the regiment easily disposed of by a score of 16 to 1. The boys then engaged each other in a series of games to the great entertainment of the people of Edinburgh and the amazement of their newspaper reporters. (*Evening Telegram*, January 10, 1936: 10)<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, hockey was used to support the war effort financially. The Women's Patriotic Association organized many exhibition hockey games to raise funds, and matches featured Old-Timers, and Ladies Hockey (*Evening Telegram*, January 16, 1936: 10)<sup>7</sup>. The greatest event in Newfoundland hockey during the First World War, however, was the introduction of six-aside hockey. In 1917, members of the Newfoundland Regiment were preparing to be shipped overseas from Halifax when a number of them caught the measles. The entire group was sent to Windsor, Nova Scotia, to recover and gain a clean bill of health. While residing in Windsor, troops that had recuperated took part in a

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<sup>6</sup> The quote derives from a personal retrospective which was published in the *Evening Telegram*.

<sup>7</sup>See previous footnote.



**Photo 2.4:** Royal Newfoundland Regiment Hockey Team, 1917

Front (L to R): Charlie Strong, Harry Mews (sitting), Lionel Duley  
 Rear (L to R): Earnest Churchill, Rex White, 'Duke' Walker  
 (courtesy SANL)

number of games with teams from Windsor and King's College. These games were played with six players per side (rather than the previously established seven), and featured three twenty-minute periods as opposed to two thirty-minute halves. The following year, King's College and Halifax visited St. John's and the rule changes were practised in Newfoundland for the first time; further, in 1919, they were adopted by the local league

(Duff, 1972). These hockey regulations, of course, are now the norm throughout Canada and the rest of the world.

After the war, hockey was able to regain the success it had achieved before it lost many of its players to overseas service. The number of teams (which had been reduced by the war) increased again, and, in 1921, a number of further concessions were wrestled from the management of the Prince's Rink. These included player's boxes, a penalty box, a scoreboard, and some new lighting. The popularity and fan base of the sport continued to grow, and in 1922 season tickets were actually sold for city hockey games. At the same time, hockey continued to expand outside of the capital (Ronayne, 1948).

While is true that, for a number of years during and after the First World War, hockey lapsed in many of the communities of Conception Bay, it did eventually recover. On Bell Island, for example, the community rink had fallen into a "state of deplorable repair," but in 1924 the rink was turned over to Reverend E.J. Rawlins and Monsignor G.F. Bartlett who "as a great piece of community service" restored the building and revived hockey on Bell Island (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003). In recognition of his significant contributions to the re-construction of the rink, and his sports involvement with the youth of Bell Island during the Depression, the rink was named in honour of Monsignor Bartlett. Bartlett was also instrumental in establishing inter-town hockey games which eventually led to Island-wide competition. In 1976, he was elected to the Newfoundland and Labrador Sports Hall of fame (Murphy, 1995: 9). Because of the efforts of individuals

such as Monsignor Bartlett, several leagues thrived on Bell Island by the 1930's and the community was becoming a formidable hockey presence.

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With regard to the pioneering of sport in Newfoundland, it could be argued that the working-class looked to the colonial ruling class, who, in turn, looked to the British elite as a point of reference. This, however, does not mean that there was equality of opportunity amongst classes. In the early years of Newfoundland hockey, the sport continued to be inaccessible. The absence of proper facilities, the expensive cost of equipment, and the sheer novelty of the game meant that hockey was only played by a modest quantity of people. Moreover, we have seen that many of these early hockeyists were well-known and influential citizens whose support, no doubt, helped to sustain the winter pastime in its infant years. At the turn of the twentieth century, however, the social virtues of sport and recreation were becoming more evident and accepted. Religious, educational, and business leaders began to see new and expanded possibilities for sports such as hockey. Some of the reasons for this reassessment are examined next.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **MORAL ENTREPRENEURS AND RATIONAL RECREATION**

We have seen that official, organized sport, including hockey, had originally been the pursuit of the affluent in the nineteenth century. However, by the end of that century, a shift was evident in upper- and middle-class attitudes towards sport and recreations. Sport began to be seen as one possible solution to the problem of social order, useful in building not only physical strength, but also moral strength. As such, the virtues of sport were more readily deemed applicable to the 'masses.' "The zealous encouragement of sport, especially by those who had become conscious of urban problems, helped bring about seemingly permanent changes in both the means of facilitating games and the kinds of people who participated in them" (Mott, 1983b: 57). The two groups which were affected most by this shift in attitude, with respect to both hockey and sport generally, were the working-class and women.

#### **3.1 Rational Recreation**

Most historians of play, sport, and leisure, recognize that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries groups of upper-middle class reformers were leading crusades to provide supervised playgrounds and other recreational facilities and activities for a broad spectrum of people (Hardy & Ingham, 1983). This development is best understood in the context of the prevailing views of folk-customs which preceded, and to some degree



prompted, the later reform movement. One local newspaper, for instance, had regretted as early as 1854:

It is one of our social mischiefs that the great bulk of the population seem uncared for and unthought of with regard to innocent public amusements. As compared with people of other places, they have no opportunities for this sort of enjoyment. (Newfoundlander, July 31, 1854)

Such "public amusements" as there were, tended to be associated not with "innocence" but with physical waste and moral laxity; cockfighting and bull-baiting, for instance, were common in St. John's during the early and mid 1800's<sup>8</sup>. Gambling, drunkenness, and violence accompanied them. Many among the propertied classes found these practices and behaviours morally repugnant and sought the appropriate sanctions. Legal penalties and religious instruction could, however, only do so much to deter problematic public amusements; the point was to reshape them through the vehicle of organized sport, to "purify" folk games and recreations by transforming them into acceptable, uniform and codified practices. Pursued by the "moral entrepreneurs" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this strategy of "Muscular Christianity" combined Biblical injunction

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<sup>8</sup>See the notice posted by civic officials on October 15, 1830:

"Whereas information has been given to the magistrates that a tumultuous assemblage of persons took place near Quidi Vidi Pond on Wednesday last for the purpose of bull-baiting and whereas such practice is not only dangerous and cruel but a violation of the law notice is therefore hereby given that any person or persons who shall after this public notice, bait or cruelly treat bull or other animal... shall be liable to fine and imprisonment." (Cited in O'Neill, 1975: 317)

with a classical 'republican' sense of the body as an engine of moral power and physical courage. As an editorial from Newfoundland's Centenary Magazine in 1896 (ii) put it:

The ancient Romans paid great attention to the cultivation and development of the body. So did the Greeks and the Spartans, the latter of whom made physical culture a part of their laws and a large part of their gospel. Britain obtained her present supremacy to a great extent by encouraging that spirit of exploration and adventure for which the hardy habits of her youths in engaging in 'manly' sports at home was the suitable preparation. 'A sound mind in a sound body' was and is a good motto to live up to; and all physiologists will tell us that puny frames and sickly constitutions are not conducive to a higher moral position but rather the reverse.

But not everyone sang the virtues of sport. Recreational reform had its detractors as well as its supporters, and the two groups often clashed:

Periodically some wisecrack with all the pessimism of a recluse proclaims that the people of the present age are given over too greatly to the practises of sports. We cannot ignore that at all times such sophists gain willing and attentive audiences of whom they make converts after their own kind... The truth that 'in a sound body, a sound mind dwells' should weigh well with those devoting thought to the subject of health and all that that state means. The arrogance of the negative interests of sports must be considered indifference and laziness. (Taylor, 1910: 20)

Even among the proponents of recreation, there were disagreements. Some supported more regimented forms of exercise; they believed that the discipline and teamwork learned in such pastimes would be of value in business and the handling of conflict in everyday life. One such proponent was Jack Tobin. Born in St. John's in 1880, Tobin became a well-known politician representing St. John's East Extern in the House of Assembly from 1928-32, and sat as a St. John's Municipal Councillor from 1937-41. He was a long-time

participant in Newfoundland hockey, and played until 1919. After his playing days ended, his involvement in the sport continued for another fifty years as a coach, executive, and radio broadcaster of the popular program "Over the Blueline with Tobin" – a show which helped to popularize the sport in Newfoundland. He was inducted into the Newfoundland Sports Hall of Fame in 1977 (Cuff, 1990: 340). Tobin is an excellent example of the moral entrepreneurs who first advocated the 'virtues' of hockey and other sports in Newfoundland. Accordingly NHA Secretary-Treasurer, Tobin wrote in 1923:

In addition to providing physical activity, [hockey] provides wholesome mental activity when played under proper conditions, – developing the individual's initiative, ambition, enthusiasm and self-confidence – all of which are essential in a business or profession. (Tobin, 1923: 43)

Others saw benefit in simple recreations and the out-doors. Advocates of this position were critical of the more austere recreations and spectator oriented sports. The debate's religious overtones were clear:

All is not sport that passes under that name, or if so, then some of it is that kind of sport which Satan stands godfather to, and at whose orgies satyrs may well be imagined to dance with fiendish joy!... There is an abundance of sport in Newfoundland, but the best is not to be found in the crowded excursion, the noisy convention, and the huge gatherings where mistaken mortals seek recreation by vain attempts to reduce the weary dissipations of city life. These people... drag the chain and iron anklet of folly wherever they go, and it is not strange that they return to their homes and daily duties enervated in body and unrefreshed in mind, after their misnamed recreations are over... True recreation is to be found in the open air; in an entire change of habit as well as scene; in a release from the more social to the more solitary conditions of life; in a cultivation of simple habits, and a delighting in simple rural scenes and pleasures. (Centenary Magazine, 1896: iii)

Yet such disagreements do not appear to have been of any lasting consequence. Although various factions had differing ideas about how sport and recreation should be pursued, there seems to have been a general agreement on what the ends should be:

We may not all agree with regards the particular branch of sports most likely to develop the greatest interest and benefit for all, but generally speaking all sports under moral control and temperately indulged work a material bettering of the physical energies and mental spirit. The spirit of sport is the thing of most concern. The body may be brought to muscular and agile perfection by many methods, but the playground affords inestimable opportunity for the furthering and developing of that manliness on which no common value can be placed. Literary attainments, professional accomplishments and commercial successes have their meed of quality, but without culture and an inherent good spirit the true worth of a man sinks well below par. (Taylor, 1910: 20)

The key, however, was moderation. While too much play was felt to be an unproductive, unscrupulous waste of time and energy, an overemphasis on work was also not recommended. Optimum effect required that a careful balance be struck between the two. Thus, as Jack Tobin wrote in *The Newfoundland Sporting Annual* of 1922:

We have learned that all work and no play is just as bad as all play and no work, and that to mix work and play in proper proportions is the solution of a healthful and happy life... the general tendency is wholesome, making for physical, intellectual and moral improvement. (Tobin, 1922: 23)

As well, the period under examination continued to be characterised by an imperialistic logic. It was also a time when Eugenic and Social Darwinist theories lent added credence to the notion of a superior race. "[This] superior race was variously described as 'Anglo-Saxon', 'British', 'English', 'English-speaking', 'white', 'northern',

or "Teutonic" -- a loose collection of synonyms which described a group of people who had acquired common racial instincts based on a number of shared experiences including history, religion, culture, and parliamentary tradition (Mangan, 1985: 149). Within this context, sport and general fitness was believed to be a means to display individual, group, and even national superiority. In Newfoundland, the Great War had amply demonstrated the poor physical condition of the population. Forty-seven percent of volunteers and fifty-seven percent of conscripts were found to be unfit for military service overseas (Cited in Overton, 1994: 85). This shocking discovery was the impetus for a renewal of the health reform movement, promoting moral as well as physical fitness, once the war ended. That renewal was given added impetus by the Brigades movement, the origins of which went back thirty years.

### **3.2 The Brigades**

The Brigades comprised a number of denominationally sponsored para-military organizations which were founded "to minister to the physical, mental and moral welfare of the boys when released from the restraint of school" (Spearns, 1967: 238). Many of those enrolled in the Boy's Brigades came from poorer backgrounds. The Church Lads Brigade (CLB), for example, had as its objective, "the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among lads of all classes, the promotion of charity, reverence, patriotism, discipline, self-respect, and all that tends towards true Christian manliness" (Williams, 1967: 231). Under

the Brigade system, teen-aged youths were placed under the command of senior officers and were given quasi-military training, as well as opportunities for sports, games, and other aspects of physical culture which could produce fitness and discipline (Graham, 1988: xi). In such a manner, the Brigades helped train young men for national defence. For instance, when the call to arms was made for the First World War, over one hundred members of the Newfoundland Highlander Brigade volunteered for duty; of those, twenty-seven paid the "supreme sacrifice" (Munn, 1967: 241).

In times of peace, the Brigades helped keep a potentially troublesome group off the streets. They also had a profound influence on the development of sport in Newfoundland. "Manly" sports were especially emphasised: "the lads were train[ed] in physical and gymnastic exercises... boxing, gymnastic classes, shooting, rowing, ice hockey and football" (Williams, 1967: 232). 'Manliness' was a highly valued but abstract notion which appears to have been indistinguishable from the concept of 'character'. It incorporated various sentiments including: robustness, perseverance, stoicism, duty, courage, purity, selflessness, self-control, and self-reliance. Games were generally felt to be effective mediums for transmitting these virtues. And it was the Brigades that were vital in bringing (organized) sport to the masses; they were the catalysts for the introduction of the club system, the provision of badly needed recreational facilities, and the establishment of youth sport in Newfoundland. Brigade teams even provided a "feeder system" for the Senior clubs in a variety of sports (Anderson, 1982: 8).

The Church Lads Brigade (Anglican) was the first to appear in 1892, followed by the Catholic Cadet Corps (Roman Catholic) in 1896, the Epworth Guards (Methodist) in 1905, and the Newfoundland Highland Brigade (Presbyterian) in 1907. Competition between the denominationally sponsored Brigades was fierce. Given the English-Protestant/Irish-Catholic religious demography of Newfoundland, and of the capital in particular, the introduction of Brigade and Collegiate sport accentuated an already intense religious



**Photo 3.1:** Church Lads Brigade Hockey Team (date unknown)  
(courtesy SANL)

rivalry. According to Graham (1988: x), differences in religious beliefs, particularly in St. John's and other older Newfoundland communities, created a "far greater chasm separating people" than any class distinction. Similarly, as late as the 1950's, religious divisions were blamed for the backwardness of St. John's sport (Callahan, 1955a)<sup>9</sup>.



**Photo 3.2:** St. Bon's Collegiate Hockey Team, 1907  
(courtesy SANL)

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<sup>9</sup>Although religious rivalries have been tempered in recent years, the persistence of the denominational educational system in Newfoundland has been the source of continued school rivalries along religious lines. The annual Jones Shield Hockey Tournament, in Grand Falls, between St. Michael's (Roman Catholic) and Grand Falls Academy (Protestant integrated) continues to the present as a prime example of the religious competition which has been generated through school sports.



But, if sports, including hockey, were becoming more "democratized" by the early twentieth century, there was still a long way to go. Though the Brigades sought to encompass individuals from a variety of social positions, the Colleges – semi-private high schools in St. John's – were still largely reserved for children of well to do families. And it was in the Colleges and not the public schools that sport was most readily available. "For years past the Colleges have fostered athletics amongst their pupils... but as yet, nothing has been done to encourage competition among the other schools of the city." Although opportunities were increasing in football, baseball, and rowing, in hockey, "the ordinary school boy did not get a chance to prove himself" (Daily News, December 31, 1934: 46). In the following year, the editor of the Daily News continued his call for equal opportunity for all classes:

The hope for the future is in the youth of today and unless steps are taken to see that they are properly funnelled, many of them will be left [out] and perhaps some of the best material will never be seen in competition... Sport knows no class distinction and the boy of the most humble parentage may be the brightest star in the realm of competition. It is time to give him a chance. (Daily News, December 31, 1935: 46)

In addition to the Brigades and Colleges, the Scouting and Guiding movements also provided youth with opportunities for physical and moral training. The Boy Scouts were first established in Newfoundland in 1910 (Foran, 1967) and the Girl Guides followed in 1923 (Alderice, 1967). As well, the city of St. John's formed its own Playground and Recreation Association for the purpose of instilling mental, physical, and moral fitness amongst the youth of the city. The Playgrounds Movement, as it has been called, was

aimed at teaching children qualities such as "leadership" and "co-operation," and promoting "training in citizenship" (Butt, 1967: 248). For:

Through the proper guidance of games and athletics, boys and girls learn their own powers and the powers of others; their own rights and the rights of others. They learn lessons in self control, in good sportsmanship, and in obedience to established rules. Honesty, team play, loyalty, initiative, fairness and determination – those qualities which are so respected and so valued all throughout life – are developed and intensified. (Barton, 1925: 16-17)

### **3.3 Commercially Sponsored Sport**

Local businesses, too, made an important contribution to the provision of recreational and sporting opportunities, especially for their employees. In the case of hockey, there were a number of business and commercial leagues in the city within the first decades of the twentieth century. As previously stated, the sons of the local bourgeoisie often attended private school abroad; it was there that many of these young men learned the value of physical education for producing "functional" and well-rounded individuals. Many of them applied this (reform) philosophy not only in their private sporting clubs, but also within the workplace.

Early in the twentieth century, it became common practice for businesses to encourage their employees to participate in sport in order "to create a feeling of friendship and good sportsmanship amongst the employees of the different Commercial houses" (Walsh, 1923: 47). According to Mott (1983b: 61), "the objective of these firms was... the development

of the physical and mental faculties of employees, with a view to allowing them to enjoy better health and, as a result, give better service and satisfaction to both the company and those whom it served." Moreover, participation and popularity in sport became an opportunity for employees to advance their business careers (Anderson, 1982: 23). The affiliation of popular sports heroes with business enterprises has always been an effective relationship. Firms could draw public attention by having winning teams and reputable players associated with them.

Initially, games between commercial firms were played informally on the various ponds around the city, and occasionally, at the Prince's Rink. However, in 1922, St. Bon's College built the second rink in St. John's that was suitable for playing hockey (it had an unobstructed ice-surface). This facility was not only of benefit to students, but to city hockeyists on a whole. Indeed, the second rink vastly increased available ice-time for hockey enthusiasts, and allowed the sport to expand in the form of new teams and leagues. One such benefactor was the Bankers' Hockey League, which was successful in securing use of the facility through the "kindness" of one Brother Ryan, then Principal of St. Bon's Collegiate (Carmichael, 1923). Likewise, the growing interest in the sport, accompanied by the increased availability of facilities, encouraged the mercantile houses of St. John's to move beyond their informal (pond) hockey endeavours, to create a new association which would facilitate games under regular schedule and rules. The Mercantile Hockey Association was founded on January 23, 1923, and had teams representing Bowring

Brothers, Harvey and Company, G. Knowling Limited, Royal Stores, Job Brothers, and Jas Baird Limited. Although formed late in the hockey season, the league held a short, exciting, series in which Bowring Brothers emerged triumphant with a 3-2 victory over Royal Stores in the Championship game (Walsh, 1923).

These teams and leagues impacted on the local hockey scene in a number of ways. First, they offered new and exciting opportunities for both players and spectators. Second, from a business point of view, these games allowed firms to take part in "friendly" rivalries which could create a rapport between businessmen and encourage new business opportunities. Likewise, growing coverage of sport in the media gave these firms a measure of public relations exposure in the form of indirect advertising. Equally, involvement in sports such as hockey was good industrial relations for firms to the degree that it enhanced employee loyalty and quiescence. Finally, the involvement of businesses - and the Brigades - made hockey more socially accessible by widening its base. This could be counted on to provide a reserve from which to supply players to the Senior ranks, and further improve the level of play.

### **3.4 Hockey For The "Gentler Sex"**

#### **3.4.1 Women's Sport In The Late Victorian Period**

During the late Victorian era, women were typically considered to be the "weaker" or, at least, the "gentler" sex. Women were expected to be frivolous, inactive, delicate, and

submissive (Connerton, 1989: 33). Thorstein Veblen (1994) goes so far as to suggest that the leisurely quality of bourgeois and aristocratic women was the result of attempts to demonstrate "vicarious leisure" within upper-class households. Or in other words, the male head of the household was able to gain repute vicariously through the public displays of leisure and consumption performed by his "chattled" wife. The remainder of society, Veblen argued, aspired to imitate such behaviour because the "leisure class" was able to set standards of worth and norms of reputability for society as a whole.

Such opinions and attitudes towards woman were reflected and reinforced by the clothing styles of the period. Feminine apparel such as long skirts, hats, gloves, and corsets restricted movement. As one woman of the period put it: "no one but a woman knows how her dress twists about her knees, doubles her fatigue, and arrests her locomotive powers" (Cited in Connerton, 1989: 33). Such inhibiting clothing, no doubt, consciously or unconsciously, served many functions, one of which was to discourage women from engaging in vigorous activities like sports. The styles also mirrored some medical opinion of the period which asserted that intense physical activity could potentially damage the female reproductive organs (Keyes, 1989: 230).

However, the late Victorian era was also a period where femininity was contested terrain. Some medical opinion began to encourage a shift in women's appearance and thus fashion. The narrowed waist was now felt to be the cause of nervousness, weakness, and indigestion (Lenskyj, 1982). According to one popular medical text of the period. "The

wearing of corsets – whether worn tight or not – or constrictions of any kind around the body, prevent a free circulation of the blood, and also operate against its purification” (Cowan, 1919: 366).

Before the twentieth century, women were usually spectators at competitive sporting events. It was believed that their presence in this capacity would “ensure that competitive zeal did not get out of hand” (Mott, 1983b: 64), and would incite courage and a spirited contest amongst the male players. While women were still largely spectators by the turn of the century, they were also subject to a movement which encouraged females to participate more actively in sport (Mott, 1983b). “Reform” in women’s sport was encouraged by a belief, popular amongst British Imperialists, that the Anglo-saxon ‘race’ had a mission to civilize the world and combat moral degeneration. Women were part of the process: healthy mothers would bear healthy children. The links between healthy women and maternity were drawn in an article from the St. John’s, Daily News, February 6, 1899 (3):

The most admirable and attractive thing about an attractive woman is her womanliness. Everybody admires a womanly woman. She must have health, of course, because without it she would lose the brightness of her eyes, the fullness of her cheeks and her vivacity. Real health must mean that a woman is really a woman. That she is strong and perfect in a sexual way, as well as in every other. That she is capable of performing perfectly the duties of maternity.

What is also clear from the above excerpt is that the womanliness was a rather tautological ideal: an admirable woman is womanly. Nonetheless, by the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century, proponents of the doctrine of Muscular Christianity, began to recognize the value of sport and recreation for both women's health and their moral improvement (Smith, 1988). The thin, frail model of womanhood was being challenged by a more robust female form. During this period of reform women began to undertake such sports as bowling, tennis, and curling, but also more aggressive, "manly" sports such as rowing and hockey. Military style training was even introduced amongst young women.

And yet this "new celebration of robust womanhood was tempered... by fears that competitive sporting activity and vigorous exercise might exert a 'masculinizing' influence and encourage women to operate beyond their 'proper sphere'" (Smith, 1988: 121). Traditional gender roles were becoming confused, making it evident that society did not yet know how to deal with this "new woman." Such concerns led to a counter-reform in the definition of women's sporting and recreational activity. Some physical educators were beginning to express concern that certain types of competitive sport could compromise a woman's femininity with undesirable results. According to one medical practitioner of the period, there was:

no real reason why girls should participate in the same games and sports as boys. The girl does not need to have her combative instincts developed. She is not or should not be interested primarily in making or breaking records. She should be interested in events and types of activities which make for grace, poise, suppleness, quickness, agility, dexterity, beauty, general strength and endurance... events where form and skill is emphasized, rather than in events requiring great strength and speed. (Cited in Lenskyj, 1982: 160)

Inevitably, the effect was to create an atmosphere of moderation with respect to women's sport; the goal was to strike a balance between good health and feminine graces (Smith, 1988). Despite a backlash by those who favoured "graceful athleticism" over "robust womanhood," women continued to play "manly" sports such as hockey, even if the games were tempered by styles and rules designed to moderate aggressive contact.

Examining the physical education culture of Ontario girls at the turn of the century, Lenskyj (1982) found that activities requiring a direct application of force against either an opponent or any other object was considered to be inappropriate behaviour. One way to prevent women's sport from becoming overly exertive was "to require participants to wear voluminous and constrictive clothing" (Lenskyj, 1982: 8). Another was to establish rules to restrict aggressive activity in women's sport. In hockey for example, body-checking and other forms of aggressive play had to be eliminated in order for the sport to remain a socially approved activity for high school and university women. Indeed, early in the twentieth century, "the definition of a 'feminine woman' did not encompass competence in sports and physical activities beyond a level necessary for health, or more specifically, for reproductive health" (Lenskyj, 1982: 4). The result was that aggression and competitiveness were down-played in women's sport.



### 3.4.2 The "Golden Age" Of Women's Sport

The First World War and the mass mobilization which accompanied it required the productivity of all citizens, including women, and contributed to shifting attitudes toward women's abilities (Hall & Richardson, 1982: 33-34). Indeed, the onset of war was, ironically, something of a god-send for women's sport. With respect to women's hockey,



**Photo 3.3:** Grand Falls Single Ladies Hockey Team, 1913  
(courtesy SANL)

for instance, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) remark that opportunities for women's participation in the winter pastime were scant in Canada, except during wartime, when a lack of male players made ice-time more readily available for women's endeavours.

Such also appears to have been the case in Newfoundland where the Women's Patriotic Association played games during the First World War. Enthusiasm for the game continued after the war with the introduction of women's collegiate hockey in St. John's in 1921. A commentary from a periodical of the time is indicative of the reform mood of the day, arguing that sports like hockey and basketball are "great developers of the muscular powers" of women. Nevertheless, with the end of the war, the young female hockeyists were relegated to the outlying ponds of the area:

On nearly every afternoon, regardless of weather conditions, [young ladies] assembled on the suburban ponds to go through the exciting exercises. The tramp over the snow and ice-clad roads was in itself invigorating; so when the young ladies started the game, all felt fully strengthened to get the best possible enjoyment out of it. (Berrigan, 1923: 49)

The undervalued nature of women's hockey was apparently not lost on the author (see photo above), and she continues, with some feminist zeal: "we are showing the so-called stronger sex, that the gentler sex of today are greatly alive to a proper appreciation of Women's Rights in the Sporting Arenas" (Berrigan, 1923: 49). The problem was that many organizations did not appear to share such sentiments. Hence the Playground and Recreation Association of St. John's, for example, prescribed games of "football" and "rounders" for boys while encouraging girls to play "their favourite games," and learn more



**Photo 3.4:** Academy of Our Lady Mercy Hockey Team, 1922

practical skills "such as making beads, knitting, sewing and common mending" (Barton, 1925: 19).

Contrasted with the **pre-war** years, however, the period from 1920 to 1935 was a time of significant opportunity for women athletes, prompting some commentators to call it the "golden age" of sport for women (Hall & Richardson, 1982; Keyes, 1989). Though it is

unclear what became of the players who formed the Women's Patriotic Association team or the school girls who "tramped" to the suburban ponds of St. John's to play hockey during the 1920's, in the 1930's women's teams were playing the game in St. John's, Harbour Grace, Carbonear, and Bell Island. The most famous women's squad were the Bay Roberts Roverines who went unbeaten over a three year career, led by their star player Mereida Roach Murphy. Although there were just five women's teams in Newfoundland, they would travel from community to community by train to compete (evidence of the effectiveness of improvements in transportation for advancing and promoting inter-town sport).

By all accounts, the women attracted quite a following. Although initially "intrigued by the novelty of women playing hockey... once they [the fans] saw them in action, it became obvious that these players had mastered the fundamentals and took the game seriously" (McFarlane, 1994: 104). Russell's Rink in Bay Roberts was packed by capacity crowds whenever the Roverines played. Outside, owing to the lack of room in the rink and the inflated price of admission during the Depression, "seamers" watched games through cracks ("seams") in the walls of the arena (McFarlane, 1994: 104). In 1938, the Roverines captured the All-Newfoundland Ladies Championship with a 2-1 victory over the St. John's women at the Prince's Rink. Thus documented evidence suggests that, in the 1920' and 1930's, women's hockey was gradually building a wider acceptance. Circumstances, however, were not kind to the nascent women's game and it received yet

another setback when the Prince's Rink burned to the ground and the Russell's Rink was closed (McFarlane, 1994: 105). Unfortunately, the loss of these facilities "altered everything and there was not time to give to the ladies games" (Daily News, Dec. 31, 1941: 72)..

Following the Second World War, many women were forced to relinquish their war time jobs to returning veterans. Women were, further, encouraged to resume their more "traditional" roles as wives and mothers (Hall & Richardson, 1982: 36). Along with these changes, came new standards, ideals, and models of behaviour. The feminine sporting ideal was reformed once again, and modeled after athletes like Barbara Ann Scott; the tiny, blonde, dainty, graceful, figure skating champion. Once again, it was believed that a woman could not handle the physical demands of vigorous sport (Keyes, 1989: 241). As a result, participation and spectator interest in women's hockey faded temporarily in Newfoundland after 1945. However, the events of last decade or so, seem to indicate the makings of a revival in women's hockey.

#### **3.4.3 Is Women's Hockey Rebounding?**

Signs of its re-emergence in St. John's came in the late 1950's - and demonstrated once again that male attitudes towards women's sport were still in flux. A newspaper account of a match noted: "With men complaining that women have invaded every branch of their lives, St. John's hockey players were amazed to see a close, fast moving game at the

stadium on Saturday night." The report continued: "the encounter itself was fast with the girls making up with effort what they lacked in finish" (Daily News, Dec. 8, 1959: 10). Another source from 1965 states: "Mrs. Doreen Facey of St. John's... has accepted the task of coaching a Pee Wee hockey team for the season. A slightly unusual undertaking, you might think, especially for a mother of five" (Vedette, 1965: 73). Yet despite such patronizing sentiments, women persisted in their hockey endeavours. Throughout the seventies and into the eighties, a women's hockey league was in place in the capital, and in 1982 the province sent a team to the first annual Women's National Hockey Championship to compete for the Hoffman Cup (named after the famous athlete and Olympian Abby Hoffman) and placed fourth. Women's hockey was finally recognized by the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) in 1981, "just 89 years after the first recorded woman's hockey game in Barrie, Ontario" (Kalchman, 1983: 91). But at home, women hockey players continued to feel that they weren't being "taken seriously" because the game was still perceived as a "man's sport" (Allan, 1983: 30). There was even concern that, because of the lack of a feeder system, women's hockey might be in danger of folding in the province. Due to the absence of a minor hockey program for girls, women often didn't begin playing hockey until they were fifteen. It was thus feared that when the older players retired from the sport, there would be a shortage of younger athletes to take their place.

In 1987, this concern was addressed with the inauguration of a league for high school girls in St. John's (Sunday Express, December 6, 1987: 14). In the same year, approximately 80 girls registered in minor hockey in the province (Evening Telegram, March 8, 1988: 16). But it was too little too late for the Senior women's league; lack of available ice-time in the city forced it to fold. To add insult to injury, citing lack of interest and growth in the sport -- a self-fulfilling prophecy if ever there was one - the Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association (NAHA) also decided to cut funding to the women's all-star team which had regularly represented the province at the National Championship's, (Evening Telegram, March 8, 1988: 16).

Ironically, in the next few years the problem for women's hockey was completely turned on its head. Whereas, in the past, women and girls had limited opportunities to play in their youth, in the late 1980's and early 1990's, there were few opportunities for them to play **after** they reached age fourteen. The problem was that girls who played minor hockey were forced to play with boys. For the first few years this was not a problem. However, once the youth reached pee wee age (14 years of age), the rules were changed to allow body-checking. The increase in aggressive play led to concerns that girls would be unable to compete with boys for fear of serious injury. Moreover, there continued to be an attitude of non-acceptance amongst parents and peers. In the words of a female minor hockey player:

I remember when I first walked into the dressing room. It was really awkward having to go over and sit down for them while we all got ready

for the game. It was really embarrassing... They treated me different than the other boys on the team. It's like they felt I didn't belong. (Evening Telegram, January 15, 1990: 9A)

Quite simply, attitudes change slowly, and in the latter 1980's and into the 1990's expectations persisted in certain circles that women and girls should not play hockey. These attitudes are reinforced by media parodies which outline the life of a "hockey family," where the boys play, dad coaches, and mom is the "main cog in the machine." The "dedicated wife and mother" is "the busdriver, manager of equipment and responsible for scheduling... and their number one fan" (Sunday Express, January 22, 1989: 15) – the implication being that she is certainly **not** a player!

Yet even with these obstacles of socialization and organization, hockey continues to grow in popularity among women and girls. In 1990, there were over 200 girls participating in hockey in the province. Also in 1990, Frances Wiseman made national minor hockey history, when she was elected Minor Hockey Chairperson as well as being appointed NAHA female coordinator (Evening Telegram, January 15, 1990: 9A). Additionally, in recent years women's tournaments have been played at the minor, high-school, and Senior level in Newfoundland.

Some of the local successes have followed national and international accomplishments, particularly Canada's domination of women's hockey at the international level. Related to this has been the 'birth' of "star" players at the national level. Individuals such as Manon Rheume – who signed a professional contract with the Atlanta Knights of the



International Hockey League in 1992 – provide women with role models to emulate and have been the impetus for many young women taking up the sport. As one young female goaltender observed, “I want to be like Manon. She’s so determined and I’m really determined too. I want to keep getting better and I’m not afraid to take chances or try new things” (Evening Telegram, February 28, 1994: 14).

Into the 1980’s and 1990’s there has even been a more widespread acceptance of women’s sport on the part of males, as the culture of equal opportunity has spread. Messner (1988: 207), has argued that we must be wary of the possible consequences of this culture since “imbedded in the liberal ideal of equal opportunity is a strong belief that inequality is a part of the natural order. Thus it’s only fair that women get an equal shot to compete, but it’s really such a relief to find that, once given the opportunity, they just don’t have the physical equipment to measure up with men.” The assertion is that the rhetoric of equal opportunity has sometimes been used to solidify male domination over sport. Unfortunately, such a line of reasoning attempts to have it both ways by censoring not only those who oppose women’s participation, but deriding those who are supportive of its extension through equal access and enlarged opportunity.

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In sum, although a sporting culture developed rather slowly in Newfoundland, by the turn of the twentieth century it was firmly entrenched on the Island, especially in St. John’s and other major communities of the Avalon Peninsula. It is clear that sport and recreation were

becoming socially accepted activities, envisaged as the means to address questions of public morality and civil order. Members of the religious, educational, and business communities were some of the pacesetters in this regard. It is important, however, not to see the reform movement as an entirely upper-middle class affair. Subordinate groups often shared the movement's agenda and accepted its rationale (Hardy & Ingham, 1983: 294). Such attitudes resulted in the provision of recreational and leisure activities to a wider stratum of people than had been involved hitherto, and in the establishment of a number of clubs and formal organizations for the cultivation of an assortment of sports including hockey.

In the coming decades, the game continued to thrive and spread throughout the Island. At the same time, the Newfoundland economy began to diversify somewhat, and industrial towns were established in places such as Buchans, Grand Falls, and Corner Brook. These towns had a heavy Canadian influence because many of the directors, managers, and other employees of the companies came from mainland Canada. The new industrial towns quickly became established on the hockey map, and by the early 1930's there was a movement to initiate a formal Newfoundland Hockey Championship. The time was also ripe for consolidation, and the institution of an Island-wide governing organization. Despite the setbacks of the Depression and Second World War, hockey would move beyond its modest beginnings to a level where, with some validity, it could claim to be the most popular winter sport in Newfoundland.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**BROKEN YEARS: NEWFOUNDLAND AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION,**  
**INTER-TOWN COMPETITION, AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR**

Up to this point, the analysis of the development of hockey in Newfoundland has been mostly limited to St. John's, supplemented by sporadic reference to various other communities on the Avalon Peninsula. However, while the beginnings of hockey in Newfoundland may be traced to the capital city, the sport became a very popular winter activity throughout the settled portions of the Island. With the development of industry outside of the Avalon, 'company towns' came into existence. In the larger of these centres, recreational facilities were quickly constructed. Many of these communities built rinks and began playing hockey within a few years of establishment. The following chapter will examine the factors which contributed to the spread of the game throughout the newly developed areas of the Island. It will also look at the forces which contributed to the formal organization of the sport on an Island-wide basis. Finally, the turbulent events of the Second World War will be considered as they affected the sport.

**4.1 The Spread Of Hockey Outside The Avalon**

At the turn of the twentieth century, Newfoundland was still largely an underdeveloped society, highly dependent on the fishery. When the colony was first populated, initial settlement occurred on the eastern portion of the Island, particularly the Avalon Peninsula. This pattern may have simply been the result of the area's closer physical proximity to

Europe – ie., the first land to be discovered was the first to be settled. However, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the older settlements of the Island were becoming economically overcrowded. In response, surplus populations began to spread northward in search of unexploited areas and new economic opportunities (Rowe, 1980: 128).

If, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the search for economic opportunity had been the catalyst for migration away from ancestral communities, similar events led to resettlement and centralization during the twentieth century. While the bulk of the population remained rural, there was a gravitation towards larger urban centres. Several factors facilitated this shift, including the extension of the trans-insular railway, the process of industrial development, military base construction during the Second World War, and the increasingly questionable viability of small, isolated villages given the availability of modern facilities and amenities within the larger centres of the Island (Rowe, 1980: 129-131).

Demographic change and technological advance have not only influenced Newfoundland's socio-economic development, creating employment opportunities and altering settlement patterns; they have also asserted a lasting effect on the sporting culture of the Island. As a result, hockey began to gain popularity outside the Avalon Peninsula. The Anglo-Newfoundland Company (ANDCO) had operated a paper mill in Grand Falls since 1909. Similarly, other company towns were established in Buchans and Corner Brook in the inter-war period. By 1940, the three aforementioned communities had a total

population of over 30,000 residents (Rowe, 1980: 130). As Rowe (1980: 130) points out, many of the new residents of the recently established company towns had immigrated from small villages and outports in such areas as Bonavista and Notre Dame Bays. In the years immediately prior to, and during, the Second World War the process accelerated. Base construction and resettlement programs led to the growth of other towns such as Stephenville, Gander, Argentia, Botwood, Port-aux-Basques, and Deer Lake.

It is not surprising that people began to migrate to these Company towns. They afforded some of the highest living standards in Newfoundland, providing employment opportunities with relatively good wages. As well, the towns offered numerous amenities such as schools, water, sewer, electricity, and social and medical facilities. Indeed, to unemployed and struggling Newfoundlanders, the 'Company town' seemed to promise "an oasis of prosperity and contentment" (Rowe, 1980: 342).

The provision of sport facilities is an excellent example of the social amenities which were furnished within the new towns. In many cases, sport was encouraged either directly or indirectly by the companies involved, and the value of sport for industrial and community relations seems to have been widely accepted. In the case of Corner Brook, work began on the construction of the paper mill in 1923, and informal hockey games were played on the frozen Bay of Islands during that winter. In the following year the Company granted permission for players to set-up a rink in one of the mill's paper sheds. Early in

1925, a league was formed and the competitive games drew many fans to the makeshift rink (Western Star, Sept. 22, 1955: 11)<sup>10</sup>.

The introduction and spread of hockey throughout Newfoundland may be interpreted as a simple case of 'cultural diffusion' – the appearance of a cultural activity in one society as a result of direct contact with another society. The company towns of Newfoundland were, for the most part, constructed in previously unsettled areas. In these communities, social activities were imported from elsewhere. Although residents of St. John's settled in the new towns, and brought hockey with them, the sport was also transplanted by Canadian managers, tradesmen, and other individuals who travelled to the Island. In building towns and acquiring technical staff these companies brought many individuals of diverse nationalities to Newfoundland, including Canadians, British, and Norwegians (Anderson, 1982: 25). Foreign influence did much to 'flavour' the sporting culture of these towns and the Island as a whole. However while cultural diffusion may explain how ice-hockey was introduced to the new communities of Newfoundland, it does not explain why the sport thrived. Environment was a critical factor. Given the particularly harsh and cold nature of Newfoundland winters, the geography and climate itself was instrumental in determining the success of hockey over other less conducive pastimes. Natural ice was readily available for skating and hockey during the long winter months.

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<sup>10</sup>This information comes from a retrospective of hockey in Corner Brook, commemorating the opening of the Humber Gardens in 1955.

Thus, one must avoid reductionism when considering the processes by which sport is adapted from one culture to another. Ludic diffusion, as it has sometimes been called, is a complex phenomenon involving intentional and unintentional, direct and indirect, accidental and incidental, formal and informal processes (Mangan, 1992: 4). Factors explaining the process involve a combination of the intrinsic qualities of the sport in question, the climate and geography of the setting, as well as the political, economic, and cultural power vectors of the individuals and societies involved in the process. It is also imperative to recognize that it is not a unidirectional phenomenon – it is dialectical and complex. This is why the concept of ‘cultural hegemony’ more appropriately describes the dynamic of ludic diffusion than the notion of ‘cultural imperialism’ (Guttman, 1994).

#### **4.2 Improvements In Transportation And Communications**

But it was the railway, above all, that made the most significant contribution to the initiation of inter-town competition in Newfoundland. Rail travel increased the speed and comfort of travel between communities. It reduced the expense of transportation, and allowed teams to visit neighbouring communities more readily – although not without difficulty (see photos below). And while the advent of the railway was of immense value for inter-town travel, the introduction of public transportation such as the cable-car was important for progress in intra-community competition. Although the Reid Newfoundland Company was best known for its involvement with the trans-Island railway, it was also



**Photo 4.1:** Travelling Grand Falls Senior Hockey Team, 1932  
(courtesy SANL)

responsible for introducing the cable-car to St. John's in the early twentieth century (Rowe, 1980: 333), a vehicle which provided the general public with an accessible means of transportation around St. John's, and helped make recreational opportunities available to increasing numbers of people.

Another notable technological feature was the development of a communications system which allowed for the dissemination of information throughout the Island. In Newfoundland, the telegraph had existed since 1876, long-distance telephone service





**Photo 4.2:** Stuck in the Snow: Grand Falls Senior Hockey Team, 1932  
(courtesy SANL)

became available in 1920, and the first radio broadcast was made in 1921 (Rowe, 1980). The first (unofficial) radio broadcast in Newfoundland of a hockey game was conducted by James Collins in 1922-23 from the Prince's Rink in St. John's. O'Neill (1975) claims that this 'primitive' sportscast was the first remote radio broadcast of any sort in Newfoundland. The legacy of sportscasting has been followed up over the years by such pioneers as Jack Tobin, Jack Foresy, Harry Brown, Bob Cole, George MacLaren, and Rick Wyman (Evening Telegram, June 22, 1985: 20). Radio coverage was touted to be of great value in attracting fans. Certainly technological innovations such as telegraph, telephone, and radio would have provided further publicity for the sport, promoting greater awareness and interest in the game. Additionally, improvements in communications would

have strengthened the links between Newfoundland's scattered major communities, and contributed to the instigation of inter-town sport competition.

#### **4.3 Formal Organization: The Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association**

In the decades between the wars, hockey regained the momentum which had begun in the early 1900's. Canadian hockey had long established itself as the major winter sport of the Dominion. Numerous popular amateur, semi-professional, and professional leagues spread across the country. In Atlantic Canada, the Maritime Professional League (established in 1911), featured teams from Halifax, Moncton, New Glasgow, Sydney, and Glace Bay (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993: 89). In Newfoundland, hockey remained far behind the level of development which it had reached in Canada. Still, the sport continued to grow and the Newfoundland Hockey Association began adopting Canadian Amateur Hockey Association rules and standards. The strides that Newfoundland hockey had made since its inception were impressive. A commentary from a St. John's daily newspaper of 1928 remarked: "In former years, the game was not appreciated as it ought to have been, there was much prejudice, the ignorance which hockey has battled for years has now given way to a better understanding of the game and its merits" (Evening Telegram, Dec. 31, 1928: 4). The ever increasing popularity of the sport inevitably led to calls for such Island-wide competition:

Intertown competition is making rampid [sic] strides. In the towns outside St. John's there is greater interest in athletic events and greater efficiency is being shown by all sides. The old idea once prevailing that the only athletes in the country were in St. John's is now forgotten and it is realized that in all branches the youth of other towns are able to hold their own. (Cited in Snow, CNSA.088: 1.01.003)

Moreover, an editorial from the Daily News sport-year-in-review for 1933 praised the value of competitive sport for its ability to promote "community pride when individuals or teams achieve victory over more doughty opponents" (Daily News, Dec. 31, 1933).

In 1935, the Herder family, owners of the St. John's Evening Telegram, and ardent hockeyists in their own right, offered a trophy for competition in order to determine a hockey champion for the Dominion of Newfoundland. In that year, the inaugural Herder Championship series took place in the capital city between the Eastern (St. John's-Avalon) Division Champion, Guards Athletic Association, and the Western (mainland) Division champs from Corner Brook, with the western representatives emerging as the victors. The significance of this logistical achievement should not be underestimated. Geographic and climatic concerns alone made the All-Newfoundland series a monumental undertaking. Although travel conditions had improved greatly in the early twentieth century, expeditions across vast distances of harsh and undeveloped country were still long, arduous, and precarious.

The success of the first Herder Championship reinforced the desire for a regular annual series. Support for the continuation of Island-wide competition and the



**Photo 4.3:** The Herder Memorial Trophy  
(courtesy SANL)

establishment of sport governing bodies also came from sportspersons themselves. Shortly after the Herder Championship of 1935, St. John's lawyer and later Chief Justice of the

Newfoundland Supreme Court, Robert Furlong, circulated a letter throughout the various regional hockey bodies of the Island calling on members to "make the first step in forming what has long been felt... to be a necessity -- a Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association" (Furlong, Oct. 23, 1935).



**Photo 4.4:** First Herder Champions: Corner Brook Hockey Team, 1935 (courtesy SANL)

Following further correspondence and discussion, an agreement was struck for the consolidation of the Newfoundland Amateur Hockey Association (NAHA). The constitution of the NAHA (1935) stated the following goals for the organization:

- 1) To introduce hockey and skating into every possible settlement and town in Newfoundland as a much-desired healthy, educational and co-operative community-interest-for-all during the winter season.
- 2) To foster inter-settlement and inter-town competition.
- 3) To furnish uniform rules, rule interpretations, and general hockey information, and to build up the finer points of the game.
- 4) To constitute a representative central executive and organizing committee for hockey in Newfoundland.

The consequence of this agreement was the establishment of a central bureaucratic body which routinized legitimate governing authority over all aspects of the sport within the Association's membership and executive. Broadly speaking, such organization may be viewed as an extension of an ongoing process of "rationalization" which, as Max Weber predicted, has gradually spread throughout the Western world.

#### **4.4 The Depression And World War II**

The inter-war period in Newfoundland was characterised by considerable economic, social, and political strife. By the early 1930's, the government was bankrupted. A Royal Commission was struck to examine Newfoundland's political and social history in order to make recommendations to prevent the dominion from defaulting. The result of the commission was a recommendation to suspend Responsible Government, replacing it with a temporary Commission of Government with the broad mandate of political and economic "reconstruction." The report was accepted by the Dominions Office in Britain, and Commission of Government was installed in February, 1934.

It has been argued that the prolonged period of isolation, exploitation, backwardness and underdevelopment had taken a toll on the Newfoundland psyche, encouraging a national "inferiority complex" amongst particular segments of the population. Perhaps this argument is simplistic. Yet it is not implausible to suggest that the Depression and the resulting suspension of Responsible Government reinforced deep feelings of insecurity and disillusionment within many Newfoundlanders. Some felt, perhaps naively, that increased participation in sport would increase Newfoundland's success both locally and internationally, and contribute to enhanced national esteem:

There are many branches of sport in which, even now, we could enter competitors with the utmost confidence. A failing of Newfoundlanders is to underestimate what we have all around us and we find it hard to believe that in many connections we are just as good – even better – than our friends from other countries. We must begin to recover from that inferiority complex, it will be to our advantage. (Daily News, Dec. 31, 1938)

It was hoped that the increased exposure to inter-town competition would help to diminish Newfoundland's lack of confidence through and in sport. However, two events of the 1940's punctured, or at least delayed, this aspiration.

The first was the Second World War. The onset of hostilities between Britain and Germany led many young Newfoundlanders, like other members of the Commonwealth, to enlist in the armed forces. This created a shortage of available players, and the Herder Championships were suspended for most of the war. Although the popularity of the game was regained after the conflict, the war did take a toll on local hockey. Many fine hockey

players were counted among the casualties, including the athlete eulogized in the following newspaper report:

When we learn that another who is added to the roll of honour is one whom we knew so well and were so closely associated with, there is a sense of deep personal loss and a cause for grief. That is the feeling that came over us on New Year's Eve when we heard that John 'Honor' Veitch was amongst the number that will not return, whose cheery laugh we will not hear again, whose fine athletic ability we will not see demonstrated any more and a friendship which we prized so much has been severed. (Daily News, January 4, 1944: 8)

The other event which had a severe impact on hockey during the decade was the burning of the Prince's Rink in 1941. The loss of the Prince's Rink was not just a blow to hockey, but to numerous other sports because the rink was also used for skating during the winter, and for indoor track competitions, boxing and wrestling during the warmer months (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 1.01.003). Since the Herder championship series took place late in the winter season, fluctuating weather conditions could make the availability of ice dubious. The artificial ice surface of the Prince's Rink thus made the facility the natural site of the annual Herder series – making the loss a particularly devastating blow for hockey. In effect, the loss of the Prince's Rink affected not only St. John's hockeyists, but all hockey players across the Island. As suggested above, one problem lay in the fact that there were now no artificial ice surfaces on the Island. Another difficulty was that many players lost their equipment in the fire of 1941, and the exorbitant price of replacing it during the war resulted in a widespread shortage of gear (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003).



The destruction of the Prince's Rink was felt to be such an enormous blow that there were calls for a new arena even before the Second World War had ended. One newspaper declaimed, "it was a terrible blow to winter sport in St. John's and unless something is done it may serve to be a death blow" (Daily News, Dec. 31, 1942: 70). In response, a Rink Committee was struck, chaired by NAHA President, Robert Furlong, which submitted a report to the St. John's City Council in 1943. The report stated "that the establishment of a skating rink in St. John's was not only highly desirable, but at the same time most necessary, in order to afford facilities for entertainment and exercise." It continued:

The need exists not only from the point of view of physical exercise for young persons, but also as an outlet for youth, and as a notable and worthwhile contribution to the maintenance of public morale..... the committee feels that the establishment of such a rink is well within the bounds of possibility and should not be put aside for further consideration, but should be proceeded with forthwith in so far as is possible. (Daily News, Oct. 30, 1943: 14)

To the dismay of city hockeyists and other supporters of the rink, construction costs of such an undertaking were simply too high during the war. Understandably, the arena was not a priority during a time of conservation and rationing, and a new rink was not constructed until 1950 when Memorial Stadium was opened.



**Photo 4.5:** St. John's Memorial Stadium In Early 1950's  
(courtesy SANL)

Yet another problem concerned the suitability of the only remaining St. John's rink which was available for playing hockey. After the Prince's Rink was destroyed, the St. Bons Forum became the new site of league games. Although some improvements were made to the Forum in 1943, its extremely small ice surface made for an overcrowded and congested playing area. In response, the St. John's league reduced the number of players

from six to five, dispensing with the centre-man. Those in St. John's tried to influence the NAHA to accept the five-man rule Island-wide, its proponents claiming it allowed "a much prettier, thrill-packed, wide-open game" (*Western Star*, Feb. 10, 1944: 11). They also proposed that the rule offered many advantages at a time when teams were short of equipment and players. While the suggested rule change was tested by other communities, it was eventually rejected.

But not everything was going wrong. Members of the armed forces played a significant role in improving local hockey during the war. For the duration of the conflict, St. John's became a garrison for Canadian troops. American soldiers were also stationed in various locations throughout the province including, Stephenville, Botwood, Argentia, and St. John's (at Fort Pepperrell near Quidi Vidi Lake). Local newspapers indicate that factions of the armed forces including the Canadian Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as the American military contingent, created an inter-service league, which sometimes played games against local teams. Although the Americans did not fare well competitively, they were responsible for the construction of an "ultra-modern out-door rink" at Fort Pepperrell (*Daily News*, January 8, 1944). Today the phrase "ultra-modern out-door rink" would be something of an oxymoron, but at the time the rink would have been a welcome addition to the area's sparse recreational facilities. Canadian units, on the other hand, iced powerful squads of players with "extensive experience in the best amateur

and professional hockey circles" (Cited in Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003). Exposure to such high-calibre competition did much to improve the quality of local play.



**Photo 4.6:** Royal Canadian Navy Hockey Team (date unknown)  
(courtesy SANL)

While foreign servicemen did much to support Newfoundland hockey during the war, they sometimes found themselves, due to no fault of their own, in the midst of controversy. This occurred in 1944 when Grand Falls hockeyists attempted to use servicemen, who had played in the local league during that season, on the town all-star team. The Buchans

team, who were not fortunate enough to have military personnel playing in their league, objected and appealed to the NAHA for a ruling. The NAHA subsequently agreed with Buchans, and Grand Falls pulled out of the All-Newfoundland series on the basis that they could not ice a team of locals who were strong enough to compete (Snow, 1986, CNSA.088: 2.01.003). The attempted use of Canadian soldiers in Grand Falls hockey during the war foreshadowed the coming 'import' controversies.

With the termination of hostilities, foreign servicemen exited the hockey picture. It was not long, however, before another dispute tainted the Herder Championship. This time it concerned employee transfers from Canada to Newfoundland; and, in an ironic twist, it was Buchans which sought to benefit from the arrangement. The American Steel and Refining Company (ASARCO), operator of the Buchans mine, also ran a mining operation in Kirkland Lake, Ontario – a town which had a tremendous reputation for producing top-level hockey talent. In an attempt to strengthen the local team, ASARCO transferred several hockey players from Kirkland Lake to Buchans. At the time, "suspected importing of players" was frowned upon by the NAHA and was grounds for "forfeiture" (NAHA, 1945). The Buchans transgression did not go unnoticed, and the entire incident marked the start of a new era in Newfoundland hockey – the 'import' era.

\* \* \*

The evolution of hockey in Newfoundland was intricately inter-woven with the predominant events in Newfoundland's socio-economic development. The first half of the

twentieth century was a period of rapid technological advances in the areas of transportation and communication. These advances contributed to the creation of national sport bodies such as the NAHA. However the development of sport, in both Canada and Newfoundland, has always been dogged by conflict and struggle; notably between urban and rural areas, and the debates concerning amateurism and professionalism, particularly the use of semi-professional 'imported' players. These issues were closely related to civic boosterism, particularly as it occurred in the newer towns of the Island, and were of great significance to the rise and demise of Senior hockey in Newfoundland. New company towns, with smaller population bases, such as Buchans, Grand Falls, and Corner Brook, could not hope to compete with the metropolis of St. John's. In order to beat that 'significant other,' and bring pride and attention to their communities, the town teams from the newer industrial centres enlisted the assistance of semi-professional (usually Canadian) hockey players. It is to the consequences of this practice that I now turn.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**BUCHANS: THE GENESIS OF THE IMPORT PRACTICE,**  
**AMATEUR-PROFESSIONAL CONTROVERSY, AND COMMUNITY PRIDE**

**5.1 Introductory Remarks**

Buchans is a small town in central Newfoundland. Although named after the nineteenth century explorer, David Buchan, who sailed the Exploits River in 1818 searching for Newfoundland's now extinct indigenous Beothuk people, its most fateful year occurred in 1906. It was then that Matty Mitchell, a Micmac woodsman, discovered vast quantities of ore in the bed of the Buchans River (Smallwood, 1967).

Around 1915 the American Smelting and Refining Company (ASARCO) began to take an active interest in the area's extensive copper, lead, and zinc deposits. However, the mineral rights to the region were owned by the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company (ANDCO), operators of the pulp and paper mill in Grand Falls. After some negotiation, ASARCO entered into an agreement with ANDCO, in which the former would manage and mine the property in exchange for a percentage of the profits. By 1928, mining operations began, and in the same year the first shipments of ore were shipped to Botwood (Smallwood, 1967). Since the highway to Buchans was not constructed until 1956, travel to and from the community in the early days was conducted primarily by rail (there was also a small air-strip). In fact the Company built its own rail line to Millertown, where it could connect with the trans-Newfoundland line.

With the onset of the Depression in the 1930's, the mine operators were forced to either cease, or intensify production. The latter course was chosen, and the brutal hardship which affected so many communities in that era all but by-passed the small company town. It has been said that "Buchans was a good place to be during the depression years but home was still the outports where each family still had its roots" (Neary, 1981: 47-48). As a recently settled community, Buchans drew its population from various regions of the Island: St. John's, Conception Bay, and Trinity Bay in particular. One would think that the lack of traditional civic and kinship ties along with its sheer isolation would have made Buchans a rather unappealing, lifeless and destitute place. On the contrary, Buchans seems to have been a bustling, thriving community. As Neary puts it:

The pioneer lifestyle which prevailed in the early years at Buchans created a happy and robust community spirit. The population, aware of the many deprivations of life on the outside, enjoyed the relative security of the new town. Families, although from different parts of the Island, shared traditions linked with the sea and fraternized easily in the compact community. Social life centered around house parties, picnics and teas. Movies and amateur dramatics were regular features at the town hall. For recreation, tennis, soccer and baseball were popular; there was also excellent fishing and hunting within walking distance; at Red Indian Lake, boating was a favourite pastime for those who had lived by the sea. In the winter, skating, hockey, and skiing were popular. The Buchans Social and Athletic Club was formed in 1929 and remained active for more than 40 years. The club organized local and intertown sporting competitions and developed a caliber in athletics at Buchans which was the envy of many Newfoundland towns. (Neary, 1981: 48)

Not that Buchans was the land of milk and honey. Differences in life-styles, backgrounds and interests caused friction between single (male) workers, married workers,



and ASARCO management (Neary, 1981: 48-49). Additionally, industrial relations between the Company and its labour force were not always smooth. In 1941, for example, the Buchans Workmen's Protective Union served the company a list of forty-one grievances and walked off the job. In response, the company called in the Newfoundland Constabulary to issue the strikers a back-to-work injunction under the 1940 Emergency Powers Defence Act, a piece of legislation which outlawed strikes and other work-stoppages during the war period. The tactic was unsuccessful, and worker solidarity remained intact. Given the enormous requirement for ore during the war period, the work-stoppage could not drag-on, and the strike was eventually settled through a compromise arranged with the aid of a Government Tribunal (Yetmen, 1986).

Another problem which hovered over the town concerned the long-term viability – or, rather, lack of it – of mining operations. Increased production during the Depression era prematurely utilized much of the mine's estimated fourteen year life expectancy, and the town faced an uncertain future. However, fortunes were reversed in the late 1940's when additional reserves were discovered in the area, giving the town and its citizens a new lease on life.

With the success of the mining operations during the 1950's and 1960's, a level of stability was achieved in the community and, for the most part, Buchans was a town blessed with full-employment. Although the Company and local labour organizations certainly had their share of differences, there is no account of any major strike or work

stoppage at the mine between 1941 and 1971. These factors contributed to the expansion and permanent settlement of Buchans. Moreover, as we have seen, the Company was instrumental in constructing or improving a number of amenities in the community, including an assortment of recreational facilities.

The town which was on the verge of becoming a ghost town was revitalized by the renewed mine life expectancy. The Company built 40 additional housing units, mostly of the four family style, to accommodate 140 families. In 1956, one of two retail businesses which were destroyed by fire, was re-established in a new and more permanent building. The first service station was opened also in 1956 by the Irving Oil Company. In 1957, the Company opened a modern, well-equipped, 20 bed hospital. In 1958, a Buchans branch of the Boys' Club was organized and the Royal Stores built a modern concrete structure to house its retail business and to replace the rambling wooden structure erected in 1927. In 1960 the Buchans Lions Club, a member of Lions Clubs International, was formed. Also during this period a new Salvation Army Citadel and Roman Catholic Convent were built. The Company provided a recreational center and assisted with the construction of an outdoor swimming pool. A sailing club was organized on nearby Sandy Lake. A highlight of the era was the building of a powerful Buchans Miners senior hockey team. (Neary, 1981: 52)

## **5.2 The Beginnings Of Hockey In Buchans And The First Imports**

ASARCO's involvement with hockey in Buchan's began early in the town's history. In 1929, one of the company's ore sheds was converted into a natural ice-rink. The dimensions of the shed were not conducive to a regulation sized ice-surface, and while the rink was regulation in length, it was only 59 feet wide, and thus narrower than most rinks. The building was equipped with a ticket office, dressing rooms, a score board, public

address system, canteen, and a large section of wooden stands suitable for a large number of fans (Red Indian Lake Development Association [RILDA], 1992).

While the presence of an indoor rink was a luxury for the small town, the natural ice-surface made actual play uncertain; obviously, the availability of ice depended on cold weather, and weather cold enough to create ice was unusual before December. In later years, this would prove problematic for the use of imports. The NAHA's residence rule stated that all competitors who played on community all-star teams had to have arrived in the community before the November 31 deadline. Hence, years in which the ice was late in forming created difficulties for management who wished to import athletes to play on the town squad. If the company imported hockey players before the arrival of ice, the latter had had little to do. In these cases, the coach of the Miners would enlist the athletes in dry-land training exercises to ready them for the upcoming season.

In the 1930's and early 1940's, the town hockey team – the Miners – consisted of Newfoundlanders. While some players were imports in the sense that they came from elsewhere on the Island, few were Canadians. Even in those days, the company was interested in hiring young men who were good hockey players. Bill Scott, a Newfoundland born player from Quidi Vidi, related the circumstances of his recruitment to the mining town during the late 1940's:

"I was playing baseball for St. John's in 1948 and we made a trip to Grand Falls for the All-Newfoundland. I had no job at the time, and I met a fellow in Grand Falls who said Buchans was interested in a few hockey players if you play hockey. I didn't know what type of hockey

player he was looking for but, out in St. John's, I was just an ordinary hockey player; so I said yes, I'm a good hockey player. So he told me to get a hold of Phil Veitch in Buchans, and I did, and he told me to come on." (Scott, personal interview, 1996)

This modest gentleman married a local woman and settled permanently in the community. He went on to play seventeen years of provincial-level Senior hockey, winning five Herder Memorial Championships along the way.



**Photo 5.1:** Buchans Hockey Team, 1939  
(courtesy SANL)

Many of the hockey players who came to Buchans were doubtless attracted by employment opportunities. However, from the company's perspective, it was a man's hockey prowess which gave him the advantage necessary to secure employment. In

addition to the strong Buchans Miners all-star squad, there was also a local league comprising the various departments of the company. For years, teams representing the miners, mill workers, machine shop, and surface employees carried out a fierce rivalry which provided recreational opportunities for employees and entertainment for the citizens of the town (RILDA,1992).

But it was the all-star team that garnered the most community interest and adoration. From the outset, management of the Buchans Mining Company was interested in having a top-level hockey team, and throughout the 1930's and 1940's, an import-free Buchans team won the Western Newfoundland Championship several times. But after 1949, ASARCO management decided to bring in players from mainland Canada. Two explanations for this decision were related to me during my research.

The first explanation involves ANDCO's construction of a new artificial ice-rink in Grand Falls in 1948. Over the years the two towns had built up quite a rivalry. The close proximity of the communities allowed the towns to establish an adversarial relationship in sports and athletics. Rivalry was also generated by the joint business relationship between ASARCO and ANDCO. Understandably, ASARCO management were sometimes irritated by the (unmerited) profits which (the absentee landlord) ANDCO extracted from the Buchans mine. When Grand Falls opened their new stadium, Buchans felt the competitive balance had been shifted in favour of the paper-town. Artificial ice meant that ice time was readily available to the Grand Falls hockeyists; it allowed them to begin practising and

playing long before other communities including Buchans. The employment of a professional coach -- former Toronto Maple Leaf, Nick Mackowski -- by Grand Falls exacerbated the problem, and Buchans responded to its disadvantage by bringing in imports from mainland Canada.



**Photo 5.2:** St. Bons Senior Hockey Team, 1936  
(courtesy SANL)

The other explanation has become something of a folk-tale. In 1948, Buchans was playing in the Herder finals against St. Bons, the powerhouse team from St. John's. It seems that Buchans Mining Company General Manager, George Thomas, was watching his team go down to defeat when a number of St. Bons supporters began to taunt him about the imminent loss. Feeling somewhat agitated by the harassment, Thomas promptly announced to the hecklers that he would provide them with able competition for the following season. He certainly did!

In the ensuing year, Buchans brought in a number of imports from Kirkland Lake (see below). However, they did not meet the NAHA residence rule because they arrived past the deadline for branch transfers, and were disqualified from competition by the NAHA. The result was that a "cold war" developed between Buchans and the NAHA. The following year, Buchans would not be denied. ASARCO, the parent company of the Buchans Mining Company also owned Toburn Gold Mines in Kirkland Lake, Ontario. At that time, Kirkland Lake, and all of Northern Ontario, had a reputation for producing skilful and tough hockey players. The connection was fortuitous for Buchans, and local management contacted Kirkland Lake management about approaching players to transfer to Buchans for the remainder of the hockey season. In 1950, six high-calibre imports arrived in Buchans, including: Jim Hornell, Frank Bowman, T. Barrett, K. Joy, J. "Red" Croteau, and P. "Scotty" Macphail. As former mine geologist and Buchans Athletic and Social Club executive, Eric Swanson, told me:

"When we brought in imports, we actually had them sign-on as employees. So they weren't professional imports, they were employees of the company... Some of them actually would go to work. They would practice in the morning; they were supposed to check-in at 8 o'clock. And I think the first lot did; they'd check-in at 8 a.m., and they would show-up. I don't know if they ever did anything or not, but they did show-up in the afternoons." (Swanson, personal interview, 1996)

The bolstered line-up was more than enough to push the Miners over the top, and the Buchans squad comfortably defeated the same St. Bons team to claim their first Herder Championship. Buchans continued to bring in the Kirkland Lake imports through the 1952 season, but after that they relied more heavily on Maritime Canadian players such as Hugh "Red" Wadden, Frank Walker, and Mort Verbisky (whose son was instrumental in the discovery of the Voisey Bay mineral deposit).

Why did these imports come to Buchans – "the middle of nowhere" – to play hockey? There were some incentives. In return for their services, imported players received their expenses, a decent monthly salary, free accommodation, and a job on the surface. According to Eric Swanson, "it was a nice life-style you know, nicer than going underground." Additionally, after their return to Ontario, the imports were sent engraved wrist watches and medals in recognition of their services to the company and community. A letter from George Thomas to Mr. W.W. Hotchkin, General Manager of Toburn Gold Mines Limited, Kirkland Lake, read; Dear "Hotch":

Have sent you by registered mail: six wrist watches, six medals... The medals are a gift from the Buchans Mining Company Limited, and the watches were given by Mrs. Thomas and Mrs. Courage... In making the presentation will you please thank the players for their fine



sportsmanship and general ability, etc. while here, on behalf of the Company, myself, and the people of Buchans. (NAHA Collection)

Compared to larger communities like St. John's, and even Grand Falls, Buchans was at a disadvantage: it was difficult to draw any quantity of high-calibre athletes from such a small population; also there was no large fan base from which to garner financial support for the team. Therefore, "the whole exercise depended upon the company" (Swanson, personal interview, 1996). The company built and operated the rink, they supported the Buchans Social and Athletic Club, and they brought in the imports who made the Buchans Miners a championship team. According to George Neary (1981: 52), "the Buchans Miners hockey team, a focal point of community spirit through the long winters received the moral and financial support of the company." A letter from T.A. "Gus" Soper, of the Buchans Athletic and Social Club, to mine Manager, George Thomas, on August 31, 1951, summed up the relationship between the Buchans hockey team, the community, and the company:

Quite apart from winning local championship, the Buchans teams of the past two seasons have gained a high reputation by virtue of its many exhibition series with visiting Mainland teams. The recreational value to the people of Buchans has been tremendous; the whole community has shown keen interest in the Buchans teams and is extremely proud of the two successive titles that have come to this town during the past two seasons... we could never achieve the results mentioned above were it not for the aid and backing of the Company. (NAHA Collection)

The company provided monetary support to societies such as the Buchans Athletic and Social Club as a matter of industrial relations and good-will. The facilities and events

supported by this money provided the community with a measure of entertainment and excitement. But it also contributed to the happiness and solidarity in the town:

"Hockey, was a great source of unity in the town. It brought a lot of contentment, there's no doubt about it. It goes right back to the thirties and forties, and the advent of the imports just made a big impetus to it, so that now Buchans could win the Herder Memorial; and did three or four years in a row." (Neary, personal interview, 1996)

### **5.3 Buchans Imports And the Amateur-Professional Controversy**

The amateur-professional controversy which occurred in Newfoundland hockey during the 1950's began much later than it did in its Canadian counterpart. It has been depicted as a "battle between those who would preserve participation in local sport for local players, and those who claim[ed] that importation of the better calibre athlete will serve to improve the brand locally -- at a price" (Callahan, 1956: 7) On the mainland, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) had gone through the dispute over the use of professionals in the sport very early in the twentieth century. "The sport was irrevocably split into amateur and entrepreneurial sectors, with those advocating a limited professionalism in the community interest forced to choose sides... Up until the late 1920's, the amateurs held the upper-hand... But in a few short years, the NHL entrepreneurs gained practical and ideological domination of all Canadian hockey" (Kidd, 1989: 71-72).

The popularity of the NHL and other professional circuits reduced the revenue and reputation of the CAHA, and pressured it to adapt a more liberal definition of the amateur.

As well, the growing realization that rural communities could not genuinely compete with larger urban centres led to opposition against amateur purism. The first resistance came from the Prairies. As Mott (1990: 14) observes, "the conflict in Manitoba in the early twentieth century was not between members of different classes. The fight against the pure amateurs was led by *rural* people." Quite simply, rural Manitobans wanted changes in the amateur definition in order to give them a chance to compete with teams from Winnipeg. Similarly, Metcalfe (1995: 41) adds:

Reality dictated that [a] conservative definition doomed [Prairie teams] to failure in the increasingly important national championships. The reality of a small population base made it impossible for teams and individuals from the Prairies to compete with the more populous Central Canada unless they could include players who had either played professional sport or had played against professionals.

Thus, contrary to accounts which view the amateur-professional conflict in Canadian sport as primarily class-based (see Cosentino 1975; Jones, 1975), it is apparent that the introduction of professionalism in hockey was, above all, an urban-rural issue which cut across classes.

Developments in Newfoundland mirrored the Canadian trend, but the Island's tardy economic development and the advent of two World Wars slowed the process considerably. As we have seen, in 1950 Buchans brought in the first imports from Kirkland Lake, and were able to capture their first Herder Championship. The loss of the Herder to Buchans disturbed a faction of St. John's hockeyists who, accustomed to dominating the Newfoundland hockey scene, accused Buchans and, later Grand Falls, of

"professionalism" and "shamateurism." But there were also sympathizers in St. John's who supported the presence of Canadians in Newfoundland hockey. Recollecting the early games between the city and visiting Maritime clubs, a letter to the editor of a local paper declared: "their style of play and teamwork was so superior that we were forced to change our own methods... if Newfoundland hockey is to improve, we must bring it up to the Canadian standard, and the only way to do that is to play against them and thus learn at first hand from the experts" (Evening Telegram, February 10, 1949: 14). The simple reality was that towns like Buchans and Grand Falls had to bring in assistance from outside the community to be competitive. How else could a centre like Buchans, with a population of 2,500, compete with the metropolis of St. John's?

Into the early 1950's, St. John's hockeyists continued to wield considerable leverage over the NAHA. It was no secret that NAHA members in the capital city were opposed to the use of imports. A letter from NAHA President, (later Supreme Court Justice) Robert S. Furlong, to Buchans' Mining Company manager, George Thomas, on February 20, 1950, mixed cordiality with menace:

I agree with you that Buchans has been the target for a lot of 'careless talk' during the last year or so... It is recognized that an industrial concern such as yours must, of necessity, have a certain number of employees coming in from the outside world for varying periods of residence. It is all to the good of hockey to have the effect of new blood being brought into the game..... [However], frankly, if I felt that there was any good grounds for supposing that any of your players were not amateurs, or had been 'imported' by you specially for the purpose of creating a hockey team, I should have no hesitation in inviting the

NAHA to start an investigation. I have never felt that this was the case.  
(Snow, 1985:.088.02.016)

Despite the diplomatic tone of the letter, the suspicion of the St. John's' hockey establishment lay just below its surface. It has to be said, however, that the response of Buchans' supporters could be just as disingenuous. For while they claimed that employing imports allowed them to be competitive, it was **winning** that really mattered. And win they did. In the years 1950-1952, the Buchans Miners emerged victorious in three successive Herders, before losing in 1953 to a much improved Grand Falls Andcos club.

By the mid-1950's the wheel had turned full circle. Originally, the powerful Senior teams of St. John's had been a key reason for smaller communities to dabble in the import practice. Now St. John's itself was regarded by many as a "hockey-backward town" (Howlett, 1956: 11). The burning of the Prince's Rink had left the capital city without adequate facilities, and a conservative denominational system prevented St. John's from icing a united all-star team from the city. It also kept denominational 'outsiders' from participating in the city league; if a player came from away, or was not from one of the major religious groups in the city, he had little opportunity to break into the local league. As well, the city continued to oppose the use of imports on principle, a decision which rendered it unable to compete against the stronger line-ups of Buchans and Grand Falls.

City teams [do] not belong in the same league with teams who employ players who are paid to play hockey all day long. You can't expect St. John's hockey players who work all day at different jobs, and practice at night to perform against guys who are going at it steady crack all day.  
(Daily News, March 21, 1953: 10)

The result was an extended feud between St. John's hockeyists and other members of the NAHA, and the temporary withdrawal of the capital city from the all-Newfoundland play-downs.

Also during the mid-1950's, the hockey centres outside the Avalon Peninsula had increased their representation and influence within the NAHA. At the annual meeting of 1954, the NAHA continued with its adaption of the CAHA standard that "an amateur is... one who is not in organized professional hockey," defeating St. John's motion to return the definition to a 'simon-pure' definition (Evening Telegram, September 11, 1954: 18). When the St. John's branch finally decided to rejoin the NAHA all-Newfoundland playoffs in 1955, there was some concern regarding "the question of whether the amateur status of players participating against the paid players on Buchans and Grand Falls Senior A teams would be in jeopardy" (Daily News, January 15, 1955: 13).

In 1957, a Hockey Investigating Committee was struck in St. John's with the purpose of recommending ways to improve the sport in the city. In its final report, the committee called for "the continuance of hockey in St. John's on a completely amateur basis. It has been traditional here that the game be played for the game's sake and any tinge of professionalism or commercialization of the sport would be repugnant to the majority of people" (Cited in Daily News, September 10, 1957: 10).

Another controversy of the period resulted from the NAHA's decision to eliminate the 'B' section of the all-Newfoundland play-downs. Until 1959, the NAHA had had three

sections for all-Newfoundland competition, Senior 'A', Senior 'B', and Junior. With competitiveness spiralling due to the introduction of imports, smaller communities, who (supposedly) used local players exclusively, would play-off for the Evening Telegram Trophy in the NAHA's Senior 'B' section. The problem was that there was nothing to prevent larger communities from entering teams in both sections, using a mixture of 'imports' who had settled in the communities and local players in the 'B' section. This, of course, skewed the competitive balance and led many to argue that smaller towns needed their own league:

The towns of Gander, Buchans and Bell Island as well as Conception Bay and others to come like Clarenville, cannot produce hockey players like Grand Falls and St. John's and like Corner Brook could produce... They don't have the population to draw from and they can only compete with the larger centers when a fairy godmother like the mining company at Buchans or [Frank] Moores at Harbour Grace open their pocket books. And the pocketbooks are opened for players –not coaches. And if that isn't playing loosely with amateurism I don't know what is. (*Evening Telegram*, November 3, 1959: 12)

The second league did not materialize, and all the above mentioned smaller communities, including Buchans, were eventually driven from Senior 'A' competition and marginalized.

It was, however, not only the smaller communities which began to find themselves in difficulty. In 1961, Corner Brook Hockey Association (CBHA) president, (now Mayor of the city) Ray Pollett, revealed that his organization had lost more than \$3,500 in the previous season. Pollett cited inequalities between the community hockey organizations as the major problem. Corner Brook, for instance, was a "self-supporting" team as

opposed to those with "company backing" such as Buchans. He continued, "Corner Brook is not prepared to lose any more, even if we have to drop from the NAHA. Unless we get some consideration, we will be forced to drop" (Western Star, September 25, 1961: 10).

Local players were complaining about the state of local hockey as well. Orin Carver, Captain of the 1962 Herder Champion Corner Brook Royals, threatened to resign as vice-president of the CBHA claiming that local hockey was "misdirected":

There are two fellows getting paid to play. They're pros and they should earn their money..... It is a shame that the senior hockey league should hire two coaches for the kind of money being paid, and they are not available to minor hockey. They do nothing all day. They'd probably look forward to working with the minor leaguers. (Western Star, October 13, 1962: 9)

Although travel was still difficult, by the 1950's much of the Island was accessible by both rail and road. In 1962, transportation improvements and increased interest in the game allowed the NAHA to initiate an Island-wide series with a full forty game schedule. It was proclaimed to be "the crucial test concerning the future of hockey across the province" (Evening Telegram, Feb. 26, 1963: 9). And by the later part of the inaugural season, there were reports that the "plan that was expected to make or break NAHA hockey in Newfoundland has turned the sport into a great success, competitively and financially" (Evening Telegram, Feb. 26, 1963: 9).

However, accounts of the success of the new system were premature. Internal wranglings continued to trouble the NAHA throughout the period. In 1963, Corner Brook was threatening to withdraw from the NAHA series once again. The problem was



finances. While the Corner Brook team had made some money in their home games, it was not enough to cover their costs while travelling:

A big chunk of the expense on the road is player's salaries. The association pays each player \$10 a day in lieu of salary lost in getting time off from their jobs to travel... Corner Brook is the only centre that pays salaries while on the road. In other centres such as Buchans and Conception Bay the players get time off from work to play and don't lose their salaries. (*Western Star*, March 16, 1963: 9)

The introduction of a full-schedule also placed additional emphasis on importing because expenses associated with extensive travel throughout the province required teams to play before larger crowds of paying spectators. In order to attract fans to the arenas, team officials had to provide a competitive, high-quality product; the use of imports was one way of expediting this.

"So many things have changed. Back in the early days before the imports, hockey was a bit of a novelty. It was a short season then, and not a lot of people watched hockey because you had to give something up to go to the game because the ice might be gone tomorrow. Hockey was a big thing for the players, but I don't think it meant so much to the fans. But when you begin bringing in the imports, who were alleged to be hockey players, with a reputation and that sort of stuff, then the fans thought they were going to see something, so they started coming to the rink, especially if the team was winning. And they got used to seeing that class of hockey, and they sort of got it into their heads that if you don't have these people [the imports] there, the hockey is no good. And that was the furthest thing from the truth that you could imagine. You don't have to have a bunch of guys from the NHL to have a good hockey game... The first few years they brought in the imports; you could pick them out because they had a different style of skating and so on, but five or six years after that you couldn't find them. You could pick out the good hockey player, but the good hockey player might be a local player." (Hillier, personal interview, 1996)

Commenting on the role of imports in attracting fans, and their relationship with non-imports, former local player, Mike Kelly, stated, "the imports were used as a drawing card so I suppose they got a little more attention than the local players, but it didn't bother me" (Evening Telegram, October 29, 1994: 29).

In the first decade of the inter-Island league, the use of imports was closely monitored so that it would not get out of hand. Quotas were employed in the interest of league parity, so that a town like Buchans might be allowed three or four, while St. John's might only be permitted one. According to former NAHA and CAHA President Don Johnson, the use of import quotas:

"was the one single reason why the league was so successful. Because I, as President, was the only one that was allowed to decide on the number of imports. Everyone had a different [idea on the number], and we had some awful arguments from time to time, but there was one year when I was President in the six-team league, and they had a face-off in the corner with nine seconds to go in the league. We had played all winter, and... there was about one point separating the six-teams." (Johnson, personal interview, 1996)

As time passed though, import regulations became less stringent. In the 1960's, the NAHA affiliated with the CAHA. CAHA regulations allowed teams a maximum of four imports, but, initially, the NAHA prevented its clubs from employing this rule; it was felt that if all teams could use four imports, St. John's would emerge as the dominant hockey power in the province. Therefore, the NAHA attempted to maintain a semblance of parity within the Island's Senior hockey circuit.

Eventually, however, the local rule began to decay, and teams were allotted from four to six imports each. As well, if a player had been an import in the previous year, that same player would be considered a local in the next season. Hence, theoretically, teams could bring in five imports per season for four years until the entire roster of twenty players were 'imported.' Moreover, they could all be paid players. To be an import had nothing to do with money, it simply meant that a player came from a different branch of the CAHA. A Corner Brook native who had been to Halifax for university, for example, would be considered an import upon returning to the province from his studies.

The escalation of salaries to semi-professional imported players coupled with the costs of travel began to put pressure on the hockey teams, particularly those in small towns such as Buchans. The result was an irreversible snow-ball effect in which community teams had trouble sustaining themselves in the face of their often excessive competitive exploits.

#### **5.4 Hockey and Identity in Buchans**

In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (1915), Emile Durkheim wrote that collective consciousness is created when groups represent and celebrate their common identity through a variety of symbols and rituals. Similarly, Paul Connerton (1989) asserts that collective memory is embedded in commemorative ceremonies, practices, performances, styles, and habits. Symbols and rituals are useful devices in the "construction of community" precisely because they are versatile and malleable; people can

give radically different meanings to the same symbols and rituals (Cohen, 1985). Sport itself can be used as a vehicle for these rituals, events, and ceremonies, supplying a measure of meaningful association.

But solidarity and common identity, though real phenomena, can also be orchestrated and shaped; and it is not fanciful to see companies such as ASARCO and ANDCO playing an active role in this process. The celebration of hockey, and the initial success of the import phenomenon, helped create an identification of the town with the players, and both with the company. Conflicts of interest between workers and management could be channelled into rivalries between different social agents i.e. competing communities. Particularly in towns which lacked traditional civic and kinship ties - towns composed of recent labour immigrants - hockey afforded a means of social integration and excitement. To the degree that a company was responsible for promoting the game, it could also take some of the credit for its consequences. So it was that, in Buchans, the successful hockey years were also good ones for the community more generally. While the Miners continued to provide a source of entertainment to the small community as they had always done, the town-team's accomplishments during the early fifty's instilled pride in the community, created unity, gave citizens a common identity, and put Buchans "on the map":

"Buchans always had its identity in the mining world and during the thirties and forties it had a pretty good identity in Newfoundland as a prosperous little town that could provide work, because the Depression was hardly felt in Buchans... But I would say that, socially, hockey definitely put Buchans on the map more than anything else, particularly in the fifties and sixties... Buchans got a lot of public relations through

hockey... But it also polarized groups so that there were people who didn't think much of Buchans in the forties, and hated Buchans in the fifties." (Neary, personal interview, 1996)

Yet if the Miners were the symbol of community success and prosperity during the 1950's and 1960's, by the 1970's the team's demise was mirrored by the declining fortunes of the mine and community as a whole:

"It was really great, but I think it was kind of sad for the town when, in the mid-sixties, Buchans started to decline again in inter-town Senior hockey... Times changed in the late sixties and seventies; the town was wide-open, the company was selling their houses, there was a good highway so people could travel, and also there was television, so that there wasn't the same reliance on a local team. But in its era it had a terrific impact... all sports... formed the total sporting and social fabric of the town, but hockey, during those three or four decades, was more important than all the rest of them put together." (Neary, personal interview, 1996)

By 1970 the ore reserves were near exhaustion and full production could no longer be maintained; in consequence, the town, and the Miners with it, were in jeopardy. "It was driven by the economics. In the early seventies when the mine started to go down, management, for the sake of the town, had to run as tight a ship as possible. By running a tight ship you extended the reserves a little" (Neary, personal interview, 1996). The depletion of the orebodies, of course, spelt the end of Company support to the Miners; while the best years for the hockey team were also profitable years for the Company, the reverse held true. In 1969, the Miners withdrew from NAHA Senior hockey; they returned for one year in 1977, but without Company backing they were ineffective. After that season, the Miners disbanded indefinitely – the glory days were over.

There is a certain sadness about the story of Buchans. A visit to the community today leaves one with a sense of desolation. The mine has been closed since 1984, and despite attempts to find alternative industry, the community continues to struggle for its existence. With an aging population, and little prospect for employment, the outlook for this once prosperous town is bleak. Derek Yetman (1986: 47) offered an appropriate epitaph when he remarked that the people of Buchans "face[d] an irony as old as mining itself. Each day of work brings the end one day nearer, until finally, when the riches of the earth have been taken, there is nothing to fill the emptiness that it left behind." The collapse of the once potent Buchans Miners hockey team has certainly deepened this sense of loss. Yet, in the short term, the Buchans experience had little impact on other teams. The import business continued unabated; a practice once considered reprehensible was now, it appeared, respectable and mandatory. That it was also suicidal would take a little longer to learn.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**RAISING THE STAKES:**  
**APEX, DEMISE, AND AFTERMATH OF THE NSHL**

Beginning in the early 1980's, teams from Newfoundland began to make serious attempts to win the Canadian Amateur Senior Hockey Championships (the Allan Cup). This represents a continuation of the civic promotion – through the vehicle of sport – which began in such towns as Buchans, Grand Falls, and Corner Brook, after the introduction of Island-wide competition. By the 1980's, the widespread use of imports in the NSHL made the league a semi-professional circuit. Although the quality of play in the NSHL deteriorated from time to time because of the infusion of inferior teams, overall the level of play had improved steadily. As former Corner Brook Royals head coach, Mike Anderson recently commented on the quality of his 1986 Allan Cup winning team:

I'd love to have that team playing in the American Hockey League today. I really feel that, with enough ice-time, we could have developed into a competitive AHL team. I know there are people who will say 'If they were so good, why didn't they make it to the AHL?' And I say the answer is discipline. Some of the players who had enough talent to make the AHL didn't have the discipline it takes. (*Evening Telegram*, April 10, 1994: 17)

With the backing of 'boosters' in the form of fans and organizers, Newfoundland clubs began making concerted efforts at winning the Allan Cup. By far, the most successful of these teams was the Corner Brook Royals, particularly during the years 1985 and 1986.

### 6.1 Whetting the Appetite – The 1985 Allan Cup Drive

After sitting out the 1981 and 1982 seasons in order to erase a \$125,000 debt, the Corner Brook Royals returned to the Newfoundland Senior Hockey League (NSHL)<sup>11</sup> in 1984, losing to the Stephenville Jets in the Herder finals. In the following season, the underdog Royals upset the favoured Jets in the NSHL final to capture the city's seventh Herder Memorial Trophy. The final games of that season were so popular amongst local hockey fans that 'scalpers' were able to sell \$6 tickets to the final game for as high as \$25 (Western Star, April 1, 1985: 1). Additionally, the Royals hosted the Allan Cup playdowns in that year. However, the first series was not entirely successful at the box-office.

In a move that seemed a little greedy to some Corner Brook hockey fans, ticket prices for Allan Cup playoff games were raised from the \$6 which was charged during the Herder playoffs to \$10. Corner Brook Hockey Association (CBHA) president, Cliff Gorman, defended the decision to raise ticket prices claiming "we're not trying to make money on this, the object is to break even on a (minimum) four game series" (Western Star, April 10, 1985: 17). Gorman cited the high cost of hosting the national playdowns as the reason for the price hike, explaining that, in addition to their own expenses, the CBHA was responsible for the travel and accommodations of the visiting teams and officials. As well, the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) received 10 per cent of all gate

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<sup>11</sup>As of the 1967-68 season, the NAHA's provincial Senior league became known as the Newfoundland Senior Hockey League.



receipts from the playdowns (Western Star, April 10, 1985: 17). The raised ticket prices should have reflected an enhanced product on the ice, but, in the opening series, Corner Brook fans didn't appear to think that the calibre was any better than in the Herder finals.

The first series against New Brunswick's Riverview Tigers drew crowds well under the 2,100 person capacity of Humber Gardens. Several complimentary reasons can be advanced to explain the limited attendance, a notable decline when measured against the Herder Championships which had filled the rink in the weeks before. The escalated ticket price was simply too high for many fans. Others were misinformed about the availability of tickets to the games. Finally, the Royals won each game against their Atlantic Canadian rivals a little too convincingly, disposing of the New Brunswick representatives in three straight games, and when it became obvious that the Royals would easily defeat their guests, attendance dipped as the series continued.

In the next series, the Royals hosted another pride of Tigers when they played the like-named team from Dundas-Hamilton, Ontario for the Eastern Canadian title. However, once again, it was the Royals who demonstrated that they were the 'class' of the series, sweeping their rivals in four straight games to become the first Newfoundland team in history to capture the Eastern Canadian Senior Hockey Championship, and with it, the Boulton Memorial Trophy. The following day, the local newspaper celebrated the Royals achievements, but also looked to what lay ahead.

The champagne corks popped again Monday night as the Corner Brook Royals topped yet another peak in their quest to become king of the

mountain in Canadian senior hockey. [Monday] night they came within sight of the pinnacle posting their seventh straight Allan Cup playoff victory in a 4-0 series sweep of Dundas-Hamilton Tigers..... It's an effort born in a bunch of local players with pride in their city and another bunch of talented recruits who, too, have been doing what they do best -- playing hockey. Bolstered in the last 10 days by five other recruits, the team has been further transformed into an unbeatable combination. (Western Star, April 16, 1985: 6)

One might just as well have said, though, that the Royals were a team of mercenaries; less than half of the players who actually dressed for the Allan Cup playdowns were Corner Brook natives.

For the Allan Cup final, the Royals hosted the defending Allan Cup Champion, Thunder Bay Twins, in an historic series. The Twins were trying to become the first team to win consecutive Allan Cup Championships since the 1933-34 Moncton Hawks. Equally, however, the Royals were looking to become the first Atlantic Canadian team to win the title since 1935, and the first Newfoundland representative to ever accomplish the feat. Early in the series, it looked as if the Royals would continue their dominance over their Allan Cup opponents. The Corner Brook team surged out to a three games to none lead over Thunder Bay, winning by scores of 9-5, 3-0, and 9-5. But the Twins had gained a reputation as a tenacious team in their previous series, coming from behind to win their league semifinal and final series. They also came back from a 3-1 game deficit in the Western Canadian Senior Hockey Championship. Carried by timely goals and stellar goaltending, the Twins rebounded with 4-2, 8-3, and 2-0 victories over a stunned Royals' hockey club, and set up a seventh and deciding game showdown at Humber Gardens.

Twins coach Ron Brusniuk reflected upon the situation prior to the final game: "The Allan Cup's a hell of a trophy. They're trying for their first and we are trying for our first. This is a classic, all the makings are there. This is good hockey, and that's what the fans pay their money for, good hockey" (Cited in Western Star, May 3, 1985: 7).

Unfortunately, the Royals', Corner Brook's, and Newfoundland hockey fans' dreams of becoming national champions were dashed by a 5-4 victory for the Thunder Bay Twins in the final game. Still, all in all, it was a great year on the ice for the team and its supporters. The success of the Royals helped to bring much local pride and national attention to a city whose economic future was in question, particularly given the decision by Bowater Limited to cease operations at its local pulp and paper mill. Shortly after the end of the Allan Cup final, the city hosted a civic reception for the Royals at City Hall, where Mayor George Hutchings thanked the team and its officials for their accomplishments. Hutchings boasted, "indeed the Corner Brook Royals are the best team since confederation, I've never seen anything like it in my life." Coach Mike Anderson reassured local hockey fans that this was not the end of the Royals' quest for the national title saying, "it'll be here sooner than you think;" Cliff Gorman reinforced this claim stating that the Royals' successes of the past year were "just a beginning" (Cited in Western Star, May 6, 1985: 5).

Over the next week, the celebrations continued. The Royals were honoured by a motorcade around the city. Also, a full two-page advertisement was taken out in a local

paper featuring pictures of each member of the team and the illustrious silverware which they had collected along the way (the ad also featured advertising for 60 local businesses around the perimeter of the promotion). In a last hurrah for the 1985 Royals, the provincial government honoured the team at a banquet a few nights later. The event featured Humber East MHA and Justice Minister, Lynn Verge, Humber West member, Ray Baird, as well as Provincial Minister of Culture, Recreation and Youth, Bill Matthews. It seemed that everyone was scrambling to associate themselves with the popular team's exploits.

A final (and rather romanticized) editorial on the 1985 season thanked the Royals for a "gutsy show" and hailed as "martyrs in a valiant cause":

The story has been well-documented, but nowhere is Allan Cup '85 likely to be better remembered than in Corner Brook – where its team rose from the depths of infamy to throw the scare of a lifetime in the best team Canadian senior hockey had to offer this year. Some 60,000 fans, a record in Newfoundland hockey, watched at Humber Gardens this year [as] history [was] being made. (Western Star, May 10, 1985: 7)

## **6.2 The Big Prize – The 1986 Allan Cup Victory**

Despite the memorable efforts of the Corner Brook Royals during the 1985 Herder and Allan Cup playoffs, concerns lingered over the viability of the NSHL. Even before the 1986 Herder finals began, people were pondering the future of senior hockey in the province. Dave White, sportswriter with the Western Star, claimed that the Central

Beothuk League could be a suitable alternative for hockey fans if the troubled NSHL should crumble:

The Central Beothuk League, with four of its six teams currently playing in semifinal action, may not be the NSHL with all its highly-paid imports, but from what I can gather, it does provide a decent brand of hockey..... And for all their effort and the enjoyment they've brought their fans this season, [they] will have spent \$15,000 to operate. That's a far cry from the hundreds of thousands being spent by the provincial senior teams... I would not like to see the senior hockey league fold, but if it does, it seems there's a lesson to be taken from organizations that get by with only local players on their roster. (Cited in Western Star, March 6, 1986: 7)

Meanwhile, NSHL teams continued to stock their rosters with semi-professional players as debates erupted between team executives and media-persons over the contentious issue of importing. Late in the 1986 season, for example, the Royals brought in an additional import, Tim Cranston, to bolster their lineup for the playoffs. Rumours ran wild regarding the salary that Cranston was receiving. CBHA president, Cliff Gorman, responded to the accusations arguing: "Cranston's pay is in line with what the other import players on the team are receiving. No one on our team is getting anywhere near this \$1,000 a week that Dave White is saying is rumoured around town. That's what Lee and Collucci (two earlier acquisitions) wanted and that's why they were sent home" (Cited in Western Star, March 11, 1986: 6). We may never know what the actual salaries were, but once the Herder finals began, Royals' officials decided to raise ticket prices to \$10 a game -- double the regular-season cost.

On the ice, the Royals had their own issues to deal with. Even though the team led their rivals, the Stephenville Jets, three games to one in the best-of-seven Herder final series, the memory of the stalled Allan Cup drive of 1985 meant the Royals were "taking nothing for granted" (*Western Star*, March 17, 1986: 6). Although the team faltered in the fifth game of the series, it responded with a 7-4 victory in game six to win the best-of-seven final four games to two. In the past, a Herder victory would have been a significant event for the city, but this year it seemed as though it was just a stepping-stone to the more coveted prizes. City fans, with their appetites whetted by the events of the previous season, seemed to take the Herder victory for granted: "There was never any doubt in the Royals' fans minds that their team would get the Herder. That was elementary. What we are concerned with now is if they'll win the Allan Cup" (*Western Star*, March 26, 1986: 15). This attitude may be indicative of some of the problems which faced the NSHL especially during its later years – rising expectations. Whereas it was once enough to be successful locally and provincially, by the 1980's, teams, officials, and fans expected achievements at the national level. Such accomplishments did not come cheaply.

Nor was the competition getting any easier. The first opponent for the Royals on their 1986 quest for the Allan Cup was the Flamboro Motts' Clamato hockey team. The Ontario Hockey Association Senior Champions from Flamboro had five former National Hockey League players on their roster including former Boston Bruin, Stan Jonathan, ex-Toronto Maple Leafs, Rockie Saganiuk and Pat Graham, Graeme Nicolson who once played for the

Colorado Rockies, and goaltender, Ken Ellacott, who had played a stint with the Vancouver Canucks. The team also had players with previous Allan Cup experience, as well as two of the sons of NHL great and hockey hall-of-famer, Bobby Hull, namely, Blake and Bobby Jr. (Western Star, April 9, 1986: 9).

Unlike the sedentary experience of the year before, the 1986 Allan Cup playdowns would see the Royals pursuing victory on the road. Eastern Canadian Senior Hockey Championship games were played at the Brantford Civic Centre before crowds of 3,500 and more, and although the Royals were the visitors, they received substantial fan support nonetheless. The exciting series went to a seventh and deciding game, with the Royals emerging triumphant in an 8-5 win over their hosts. The victory "delighted about 1,500 transplanted Newfoundlanders who attended the seventh game as well as the thousands listening on radio" (Western Star, April 21, 1986: 1). The Royals also won the acclamation of former CBHA president, now Corner Brook Major, Ray Pollett, who praised the Royals for defending their Eastern Canadian Senior Hockey Championship "with great effort against tremendous odds." He continued, "all of Newfoundland and Labrador is behind the Royals" as they move on to the Allan Cup final (Cited in Western Star, April 21, 1986: 1). Additionally, the team, and community as a whole, garnered national media attention on The Sports Network (TSN) and the Canadian Television network (CTV).

In the Allan Cup finals, the Royals travelled to Nelson, a town in northern British Columbia. The Nelson Maple Leafs were said to be a quick and rugged squad, who were adept at intimidating their opponents. Apprehension was compounded by the fact that several of the Royals had already played the Boulton championship and suffered injuries in the process. But the Nelson team had its own problems. Injury, sickness, and suspension had severely depleted the hosts' lineup, and the team was said to be only a "shadow" of the squad which had defeated the St. Boniface Mohawks just a few days earlier to win the Patton Cup and the Western Canadian Senior Hockey Championship (Western Star, April 29, 1986: 6). The Royals took advantage of the Maple Leafs' misfortune and jumped out to a three games to none lead in the series with 6-4, 6-5, and 5-2 wins. On Monday, April 28, 1985, the Royals' capped their memorable season by securing the Allan Cup with a 7-0 victory over the Maple Leafs.

Major Pollett personified the civic-booster mentality as he summed up what the victory meant to the small Newfoundland city:

"The win again shows that the city has some leadership qualities, as it should be remembered that it was a Corner Brook team that was the first in Newfoundland to win the Herder Memorial Trophy, the Boulton Memorial Trophy, and now the Allan Cup. All of Newfoundland and Labrador should feel proud of the Royals. Corner Brook residents can stand taller and prouder today. The Royals efforts have made the city known throughout Canada." (Cited in Western Star, April 29, 1986: 1)



Indeed, some have suggested that the Royals' Allan Cup performances in 1985 and 1986 actually paved the way for Corner Brook to win the bid for the 1999 Canada Winter Games – yet another event which will put the western Newfoundland city on the national stage.

When the Royals returned home via Stephenville airport, they were greeted by a festive atmosphere. Many schools and businesses closed early for the civic celebration and hundreds of supporters, along with a motorcade that reached 7 ½ kilometres in length, hailed the victors. Thousands of fans, assembled at Humber Gardens, chanting "we're number one" as they paid tribute to the team and viewed the renowned hockey trophy. Local dignitaries included Major Ray Pollett, NAHA president, Claude Anstey, and Humber West MHA, Ray Baird. Congratulations were also sent from Premier Brian Peckford (a full-page ad was even taken out in the Western Star, on behalf of the provincial government and the Premier, to congratulate the Royals). Humber/Port-aux-Port/St. Barbe federal MP, Brian Tobin, sent his best wishes to the national champions as well. In the evening, a private reception was hosted at Blomidon Golf and Country Club by provincial and city officials and once again included the provincial Minister of Culture, Recreation, and Youth, Bill Matthews. A local paper praised the 'Royal' effort saying, with a hint of regional embitterment:

Every hour that will be bestowed on you in the next few days is well-deserved. You made a city and an entire province proud with your Drive in '85 (even though we didn't make it all the way to the top), but this Fix in '86 more than makes up for that... you've made those people up-a-long realize that there is a greater Canada than the one that stretches from Vancouver to Halifax. (Western Star, May 1, 1986: 7)

### 6.3 The Demise of The NSHL

"I'm looking across the room now, and what I'm seeing is a cup of tea that is slowly cooling." (Robert S. Furlong cited in Evening Telegram, June 22, 1985: 20). Although these words were spoken to signal the end of an interview with Evening Telegram reporter, John Browne, they also relayed a deeper message about the imminent demise of Newfoundland senior hockey. In the 1985 interview, the late Supreme Court Justice and former NAHA president protested adamantly against the use of imports in local senior hockey: "I call it professional hockey today, and I don't think it's a good idea. I'm totally opposed to the use of imports" (Evening Telegram, June 22, 1985: 20). Mr Furlong, it will be recalled, had been one of those who warned Buchans against the use of imports as early as the 1950's. It is impossible to say if anyone could have seen the repercussions of the import practice back then, but by the early 1980's the consequences were becoming ominous. Although a few teams such as St. John's, Corner Brook, Stephenville, and Port aux Basques continued on, several other teams had pulled out of the NSHL either temporarily or permanently – they had simply priced themselves out of existence.

\* \* \*

After the Corner Brook Royals captured the Allan Cup in 1986, the league struggled on for another three years. In central Newfoundland, Bob Molloy, who ran a Senior franchise in Grand Falls until 1983, said that town had no interest in a return to the NSHL because the league was "just about 100 per cent professional." He continued saying that even if a

Grand Falls team could afford to pay for six imports, it would still be unable to compete, adding "most teams have twice that amount because of the way the rules work regarding mainland players" (Evening Telegram, September 10, 1987: 26). Paid players, along with other expenses, were killing-off the community teams one-by-one.

And yet, there were those who continued to argue that the NSHL needed paid imports. St. John's Capitals' playing coach, Bill Riley, an import himself, argued, "quality players who play a good brand of hockey attract fans. To make money you must invest money and senior hockey in Newfoundland can be a money-maker" (Evening Telegram, October 17, 1987: 17). Riley also predicted that Canadian senior hockey would be revitalized:

"The game is changing on the professional and amateur levels. It's now harder to get a job in the American Hockey League because the teams are going with younger players which opens the door for former NHLers and minor league players to play in Europe or senior hockey. With quality players in senior hockey it will bring out the fans, giving senior hockey a good future." (Cited in Evening Telegram, October 17, 1987: 17)

But Riley's speculations were soon proved to be erroneous. In the late 1980's, the league continued to disintegrate with the 1987-88 season regarded as "one of the worst seasons in recent memory." The lacklustre play of the 'import-free' Gander Flyers was a tremendous disappointment and embarrassment for the league; also, the league's scheduling was terrible. Moreover, although the league imposed regulations limiting the numbers of imports that teams could use, it was having difficulty enforcing the rule. Players were switching teams before and during the season at an alarming rate, it was the

"latest trend" in the NSHL (Sunday Express, March 20, 1988: 14). To add insult to injury, after playing all season and the first three games of the Herder Championship series, the St. John's Capitals announced that, due to a scheduling problem, they would not travel to Corner Brook for the remainder of the final series. Not wanting to "disappoint the fans and put a black mark on the Herder Memorial Trophy," Corner Brook Hockey Association president, Cliff Gorman, refused to accept the default victory. Although the problem was eventually resolved, the incident, and entire year for that matter, was indicative of the controversies surrounding the NSHL. The Island's senior hockey circuit was becoming so ludicrous that it found itself compared to "soap opera" (Evening Telegram, April 9, 1988: 15).

Large debts and squabbles between teams were common. As well, battles were developing between the media and team executives concerning the state of the league. Some reporters blamed the wretched state of the league on "poor management." But team officials fought back, blaming the media's pessimism for the difficulties. In an editorial to the Evening Telegram, Pat Daly, Business Manager and Treasurer of the St. John's Capitals Hockey Club, commended his organization's volunteer board for "good management" in reducing its deficit; at the same time, he sniped:

"It would be a day to celebrate when the members of the news media agree that they are well versed in the 'negative,' and take a course in the 'positive'... We are distressed by recent developments affecting the Newfoundland Senior Hockey League but maybe we are members of the cat family and have another life." (Cited in Evening Telegram, September 24, 1988: 16)

In fact, the old 'cat' was quickly running out of lives.

The 1988-89 season would be the final campaign for the NSHL. Initially it looked as though the league would not operate Island-wide. NSHL officials were looking at an east-west format, reminiscent of the older days of Herder play. However, officials from teams on the west coast felt that they needed regular games against St. John's to maintain interest. Stephenville Jets' president, Fred Stagg, commented, "without St. John's, we realized the league would not be as appealing and we felt a certain amount of moral pressure (to accommodate them)." Corner Brook's Cliff Gorman agreed, stating: "I'm certainly glad St. John's is in. They make the league twice as strong and we always found the Caps to be a good draw" (Evening Telegram, October 26, 1988: 24). Thus, at the eleventh hour, an agreement was reached between St. John's, Stephenville, Corner Brook, and Port aux Basques to continue on an Island-wide basis.

During that season, NSHL chairman, Mel Andrews, tried to underline the fact that the extravagant use of imports was undermining the league:

"When we first started, it didn't take a great number of dollars to operate a senior hockey franchise. But today, you're talking big business. The message I'm trying to get across to the four teams today is that they are operating as a business and they're all directors. They should be co-operating instead of one trying to cut the other fellow's throat... There's a place for [imports], but there's also a limit... If you're going to keep adding to the weak team, [they] will end up with 12 or 13 imports. And where does this leave them? Can they afford that many? What will happen to them and the rest of the league?" (Cited in Sunday Express, December 11, 1988: 15)

NAHA president George Fardy later added:

"I think we've got to be more realistic [about expectations] and if that means staying out of national competitions, then so be it. The system being used at the present is not going to go on. It'll eventually die a death of its own...The problems in lots of cases are self-inflicted. Until we can come to people who are willing to make a rational approach to utilizing few imports and the majority of local players then we're going to continue to have these problems." (Cited in *Sunday Express*, July 2, 1989: 15)

The warnings were not new; people had been predicting the end for some time, but the prophecies always fell on deaf ears. At the end of the 1989 season the NSHL ceased to operate. St. John's sportscaster and columnist, Carl Lake (1988: 102), lamented the loss of the NSHL:

The Newfoundland Senior Hockey League is dead..... They tried to provide entertainment for the hockey fans but the import rule eventually caught up with senior hockey and now it is going the way of the steam engine and it had to happen sooner or later... The league just couldn't afford to pay an import player a large salary and expect a local player with the same talent to go out and work just as hard for no financial reward... senior hockey is big business and they have priced themselves out of the market... After all it costs over \$300,000 (a year) just to ice a team on this Island and it's too expensive.

For the next couple of years, attempts were made to reform the NSHL in order to revive the once vibrant league. All were unsuccessful.

## **6.4 The Aftermath of The NSHL**

### **6.4.1 The Outport Era**

As a direct consequence of the demise of the NSHL, smaller towns were able to compete for the Newfoundland Senior hockey title. By 1990, with the NSHL defunct, Senior hockey reverted back to community hockey. Intermediate level Senior hockey leagues, such as the Central Beothuk League and the Avalon East League, were all that remained of Senior hockey in the province. In these leagues, most of the teams represented small communities; teams included the La Scie Jets, Badger Bombers, Flatrock Flyers, and Southern Shore Breakers. Some hockeyists felt that it was an insult and embarrassment to have small towns play for the prestigious Herder Memorial Trophy. Others, such as NAHA executive, Harold Hillier, who recalled the meagre roots of hockey in the province were more accepting:

"This business of Flat Rock playing for the Herder Trophy, I don't think there's anything wrong with that at all. Because even St. John's didn't always play for the Herder. There were years when only Grand Falls and Buchans played for the Herder; the other teams knew that they couldn't beat Grand Falls or Buchans so they didn't enter... The idea was that the winner would have a legitimate claim to be the best team on the Island. And they did then, and they do now... Southern Shore is the best team on the Island." (Hillier, personal interview, 1996)

Over the past six years, a number of the small towns alluded to above have etched their name on the coveted award. There is little doubt that the victory had a terrific impact on each and every one of these communities. However, the 1994 victory by the La Scie Jets is indicative of just how much winning the Herder meant to a small community,

particularly considering the uncertain future that many of these communities faced given the fishing moratorium of the 1990's.

La Scie is a small fishing community on the Baie Verte Peninsula with a population of 1,800. When the fishery closed in 1992, La Scie, like hundreds of other fishing villages around Newfoundland, was devastated. In addition to forcing fishers to discontinue their trade, the northern codfish moratorium also caused the closure of the town's National Sea Products fish plant, leaving the community with an unemployment rate of 75 per cent (Evening Telegram, May 1, 1994: 9). Community spirit was crushed.

Two years later, the ravaged community got a brief reprieve from its immense problems. "A ray of hope – sparked from the blades of hockey skates – brought new life to the town's proud folk" (Evening Telegram, May 1, 1994: 9). When the Jets won the Herder over the Southern Shore Breakers, it ignited a celebration in the town, the likes of which had not been seen before - or since. As the team returned to La Scie from the east coast, it was greeted by a number of cars at the access to the Baie Verte Peninsula, and the procession gathered momentum from there. By the time the motorcade reached La Scie, it was several kilometres long. A few nights later, an awards banquet was held at the arena, and 800 people turned out to honour the team. A newspaper account captured the spirit of the events: "As the festivities wound well into the evening, the town glorified in its success. Hockey is integral to La Scie's soul, and for the team to be defending Herder



champions is like a beacon in these troubled financial times" (Norwester, April 27, 1994:

3). Another article put La Scie's victory in perspective:

Don't tell any of the hundreds who made the Herder Memorial Championship a reality for the La Scie Jets that small towns can't compete with the larger centres. Don't try and tell them that civic pride and hard work can't make up for the lack of resources possessed in the mighty interior..... The community fought hard to keep the team alive, even during a time when it needs fighting to keep itself alive. No fish plant shut down could dampen the spirits of La Scie Jets supporters and in fact, the presence of the hockey team likely worked wonders to keep a community vibrant, developing pride, the kind of pride which overflows into other aspects of life. (Norwester, April 27, 1994: 8)

#### **6.4.2 Professional (Corporate) Hockey**

In addition to imports and travel expenses, another factor which contributed to the demise of senior hockey in the province was the pursuit of a professional American Hockey League (AHL) franchise for St. John's. Beginning in the early 1980's, business and community leaders in the capital city aspired to attract a minor league hockey team to the area. In 1983, the city hosted an exhibition series between four AHL teams in order to ascertain the level of interest for minor league professional sport in St. John's. Predictably, the Sealer's Challenge hockey tournament organisers positively gushed 'civic-booster' rhetoric as they championed the value of the event for St. John's. Chief organizer, Ian MacKensie, stressed the benefits of the tournament and the prospective franchise for the city and province:

"Naturally with four teams involved in the tournament, about 150 visitors will be in St. John's and this will mean more money for the local economy. Hotels, airlines, taxis restaurants and local businesses will reap the benefits. The same applies to an American Hockey League franchise. But there are also other benefits. The first major benefit would be a new or expanded stadium... It would mean more jobs initially in refurbishing and building a new stadium. Jobs would be created for Newfoundlanders in running the arena and running the franchise. An AHL franchise would serve as an image for our younger hockey players. The team would be involved in the community and player development. It would also help amateur sports groups... We would have a major winter facility in place for such events as the Canada Games." (Cited in *Evening Telegram*, September 30, 1983: 16).

MacKensie also pointed out that Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island were the only provinces in Canada without a professional sports franchise, as if to underline the backwardness of these areas.

But the establishment of an AHL franchise in the city was no easy task. The primary concern was the provision of a facility which met league standards. Either the existing Memorial stadium would have to be renovated and expanded, or a new arena would have to be constructed. Both projects would involve substantial financial expenditure – presumably with the support of public funds. As well, there would be a considerable franchise fee associated with securing a team for the city. Moreover, the distance between St. John's and other AHL cities meant that the St. John's club would have to provide a travel subsidy to the rest of the league. Nevertheless, MacKensie and his committee were confident that they would receive a franchise. The committee read like a who's-who of the

St. John's business community, and its members were certain that whatever capital was required to secure the team would be provided (King, 1983).

However, the deal fell through. In fact, several times over the next decade the city would come close to obtaining an AHL franchise, only to have the efforts collapse at the last minute. Proponents of an AHL team persevered, and in 1991, the city struck a deal with the Toronto Maple Leafs to bring their farm-team to the city. Years of unsuccessful attempts to bring an AHL franchise to St. John's were temporarily ended.

Interestingly enough, Senior hockey supporters in St. John's did not seem over-concerned about the arrival of professional hockey in the city. Pat Daly, of the St. John's Capitals organization, felt that it was possible for Senior hockey to coexist with the professional league. Even if the AHL hindered the revival of Senior hockey, that was all right: "Even if it kills the Caps, I'm all for it. It has to be a lot better hockey, quality wise, so it'll be good for the fans and good for the city. Plus, if they get that franchise, that's the only way we're ever going to get a new stadium" (Cited in Sunday Express, April 21, 1991: 15).

Shortly after the new AHL franchise arrived, media hype enveloped the new team and the city. According to Evening Telegram reporter, John Browne: "The American Hockey League in St. John's grabbed the attention of the mainland media last weekend. It's as if they finally discovered Newfoundland" (Evening Telegram, October 26, 1991: 27). In addition to local commentaries, reports on the team were circulated nationally on the

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC) renowned television program, *Hockey Night in Canada*. There was also coverage on the Atlantic Satellite Network (ASN) and The Sports Network (TSN). Browne continued tongue-in-cheek: "You can't buy that sort of publicity for the capital city... Come to think of it, you can. The city paid \$3 million over five years for the right to let professional hockey play in our backyard and that's why mainlanders are interested in us for the moment" (Evening Telegram, October 26, 1991: 27).

But who does this attention really benefit? While civic promotion and pride are not to be scoffed at, there is little doubt that there are some who benefit more than others from the public capital investments which go into urban development measures, such as the construction of sport facilities and the attempts to attract professional franchises. Decisions to pursue professional sports teams are imbedded in broader issues of urban politics.

Boosterism – which seeks to equate the interests of business, the ideology of progrowth, with the interests of the city as a whole – now appears as a campaign that not only promotes the material interests of the hegemonic fractions of the dominant classes but also seeks to legitimize political solutions to the urban crisis by symbolically reconstructing the consensus. (Schimmel et al., 1993: 240)

The authors' phrasing is somewhat overwrought, but the decision to lure the Maple Leafs to St. John's, and the accompanying debate surrounding the construction of a civic centre to house the team, has certainly been a political matter involving both municipal and provincial levels of government. Although recent discussions suggest that substantial

funding for the building of a new civic centre will come from the private sector, much of the investment will come from public finances. Thus, the politics of urban development and professional sport boosting is contentious. Some members of the public, who are against the building of a facility with public money, have fought back:

There has been much discussion about a new facility – a civic centre – for St. John's. Plans have been presented by various proponents, private groups, now anxiously looking for a return on their investment. Even the new premier has been drawn into the issue and is proposing generous millions from the hard-pressed public treasury, better spent on health or education..... To have a civic centre in the downtown seems eminently desirable for those engaged in service industries downtown, particularly the owners of George Street bars and restaurants. These are self-serving wants that clearly do not reflect the public need..... In the new economy of realism, civic centre proponents have confused their own wants with the public need. At this time of fiscal restraint, the general public has no obvious need of a new civic centre. We are victims of a nearly successful soft sell by the smooth civic centre proponents and their carpetbagger friends. (*Express*, April 24, 1996: 42)

Even among sport fans, and followers of the Leafs in particular, the arrival of the franchise has been a mixed blessing; while it has brought renewed interest to hockey, it has also raised issues to do with accessibility of games to the average person - a classic case of 'social closure.' The cost of tickets to professional AHL games is quite high (approximately \$16) compared to the modest ticket prices (\$4 to \$5) which were associated with NSHL games (even Allan Cup matches were only \$10). Demand for the AHL continues to be brisk, particularly amongst the professional and business community, who often buy season-tickets as a business expense and, hence, as a tax write-off. Although it may be somewhat exaggerated, the sentiment has been expressed that, "it was a working

man's game back then, it's more of an executive crowd these days" (Evening Telegram, February 11, 1995: 33). This concern has been used by the proponents of the civic centre in an attempt to swing more public support in their favour. The argument that a new and expanded facility would actually increase public access to games may soon be put to the test.

**CHAPTER 7**  
**CONCLUSION:**  
**THE PERVASIVE PAST AND ITS IMPLICATIONS**  
**FOR SPORT IN 'MARGINAL' REGIONS**

"Play, games, and sports are... irreducibly constitutive of our social being. They are, in differing ways, all forms of social practice. As a result, even their essential or formal qualities cannot be conceived of independently of the organizing principles, expectations, conflicts, and disappointments that define lived social experience at any given historical moment" (Gruneau, 1983: 50-51). This has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, and we have seen evidence that the history of hockey in Newfoundland is interwoven with a broad array of factors. My purpose in this concluding chapter is to synthesize the major themes presented and, in addition, offer some comments on the implications of the preceding study particularly with regard to the future of sport in 'marginal' regions such as Newfoundland.

**7.1 The Pervasive Past**

The sport of ice-hockey has had a significant impact on the cultural landscape of Newfoundland as it has on the rest of Canada. Though the origins of the sport link back to the colonial past of the two dominions, hockey has made a prominent contribution to forging the national identities of both, independently and since Newfoundland joined the Canadian confederation in 1949. Early antecedents of the game were played throughout areas of British North America – including Newfoundland -- by the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries, but most sport historians agree that the modern game did not emerge until 1875 when the McGill rules of play were adopted in Montreal. However, the new sport did not appear in Newfoundland until 1896 when railroad contractors and bankers from Canada introduced the sport to the Island.

While there is little primary documentation to verify this claim, the deficiency is not surprising considering the lack of media attention dedicated to sport at the turn of the century. Equally, given the novelty of the game, it would be unlikely that anyone would have taken the time to record what must have seemed to be an undistinguished event anyway. Despite the apparent absence of primary documentation concerning the seeds of hockey on the Island, there is certainly no shortage of secondary accounts of the sport's infancy in Newfoundland. Chronicles of the early years of ice-hockey on the Island are relatively consistent and there appears to be no plausible reason to question the accuracy and validity of these accounts. Many of the authors of these texts were former players and followers of the game who, although failing to record the events as they occurred, did document them retrospectively. Such accounts depict a colorful beginning for the sport in Newfoundland; they also indicate the influences of social, economic, political, religious, geographic and climatic conditions.

Although the foremost pioneers of ice-hockey in Newfoundland were Canadians, locals were quick to take up the sport. The original Newfoundland hockeyists were members of an emerging upper-middle class elite who sprang forth from families of the



old dominant class which was comprised of colonial gentry, fishing captains, and members of the merchant elite. The old elite was evolving, as sons of privileged citizens pursued their education abroad to become members of a new professional class which included captains of industry, doctors, politicians and lawyers. While at the time of its inception the sport was largely the pursuit of a privileged few, many of these first hockeyists were 'moral entrepreneurs' committed to promoting moral improvement and civility throughout society.

The Rational Recreation movement reflected a general shift from impulsive, chaotic pastimes to activities which were characteristically less spontaneous, more organized, regularized, codified, and bureaucratized. It was a movement which resulted from the synthesis of a variety of ideals including Classic Republicanism, Muscular Christianity, Social Darwinism, and even Eugenics. Moral entrepreneurs were generally civic minded men; often they were ardent proponents of British imperialism interested in building strong, morally superior and productive nations, colonies, and communities. In this way, "love of country was subsumed within love of Empire" (Mangan, 1985: 148). From this perspective, it is not difficult to see how 'moral entrepreneurs' laid the foundations for the 'civic entrepreneurs' who were to follow; to some extent they overlapped and were, at times, one and the same.

As part of the process of imperial socialization, it has been argued that sport was more meaningful than literature, music, art or religion; for many, sport was considered "the

social cement of the empire" (Mangan, 1992: 4). Within this context, reformers promoted the virtues of healthy recreation for its ability to cultivate physical, mental, and moral fortitude amongst all citizens. Sport was a particularly potent medium in the advancement of 'character', "a highly charged term of portentous significance for the late Victorians" (Field, 1983: 26), and an attribute which could be readily adapted to everyday life whether it be in political, commercial or familial affairs. In fact, the belief in the character-building potential of sport has been extremely pervasive, remaining intact to the present.

As a result of the new attitudes which had their foundations in the late Victorian era, sport and recreational opportunities were made more accessible. While opportunities for subordinate groups remained limited compared to those of the middle- and upper-classes, it was an era of general advancement for Newfoundland sport. Clubs and leagues were established and expanded during the period and the Island's sporting culture began to take on a more systematic appearance. A number of voluntary and community groups spearheaded the process and in the inter-war years sporting opportunities became more freely available to a wider spectrum of people including, youth, women, and the working-class.

Local churches, for example, were paramount in establishing the para-military Brigades – institutions designed to facilitate the physical, mental and moral welfare of youth. While the latent ambition of such organizations may have been social control and national defence, the manifest consequence was the expansion of sporting opportunities,

particularly amongst young men. Equally, schools were taking an expanded role in the provision of sport to youth. Still, the public (state) school student's exposure to sport remained meagre relative to the student of the St. John's private 'colleges'. This disparity did not go unnoticed however, and some local journalists were openly critical of the lack of opportunities available to the 'ordinary school boy'. Needless to say, the opportunities for the 'ordinary' school girl were even more scant and sport continued to remain a low priority especially for working-class women. Improvements were, however, realized amongst upper-class collegiate school girls and a small portion of young Newfoundland women were playing hockey and other 'manly' sports by the early twentieth century. Unfortunately though, the lack of facilities and resources available to hockeyists resulted in the general marginalization of women's hockey in Newfoundland.

Despite the continued expression of class differences in sport, the sanctions and stigmas previously attached to leisure activities were eroding under the weight of changing social conditions. Ideals which condemned sport and leisure as wasteful indolence continued to give way to the notion that it could be harnessed for physical, mental, and moral improvement. Yet, attitudes remained somewhat ambivalent about sport and leisure especially in relation to the expanding middle-class work ethic. Even if the social virtues of leisure were more widely accepted, the body remained an object of suspicion. Leisure, therefore, took on a utilitarian orientation – an adjunct to work, necessary to rejuvenate the body and mind.

Businesses also took a more active involvement in providing chances for sport to their employees. In St. John's, for instance, commercial leagues such as the Bankers' Hockey League and the Mercantile Hockey Association were established by the 1920's, providing increased opportunities for the employees of the business sponsored teams. Involvement in sport allowed employees to promote themselves within the community – success in sport circles was not incompatible with success in business life – and many fine players were able to advance their professional careers due, in part, to their prowess in the sporting arenas. There were also gains to be made by the owners of these businesses in that the (perceived) development of the mental and physical competencies of employees through sport was felt to be beneficial in business relations. Moreover, the provision of such opportunities also helped to foster corporate loyalty and solidarity, while enhancing the image of the business within the community that it served.

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the sport of hockey was firmly incorporated within the sporting culture of St. John's and other populated areas of the Avalon Peninsula. As the Newfoundland economy diversified, populations began to germinate beyond the older settlements of the Avalon Peninsula. Mining and pulp and paper company towns sprang-up at Buchans, Grand Falls, and Corner Brook; later airport towns were built at Gander and Stephenville. Residents of these new communities were quick to enlist the companies to provide leisure opportunities for their employees. At first these opportunities were simply entertainment for the citizens of the new centres.

Eventually, however, sport became a source of keen and sometimes bitter rivalry between communities. Occasionally urban-rural antagonisms found expression on the hockey rink.

Traditionally, St. John's had been the economic and social hub of the Island. As the new company towns emerged, most often it was in relation to the 'other' of St. John's that they attempted to define themselves. In many cases, this definition occurred through the vehicle of organized sport -- especially hockey. Teams like the Grand Falls ANDCOS, Buchans Miners, and Corner Brook Royals were a great source of entertainment but also identity for their respective communities. To challenge and beat St. John's teams as well as one another mobilized a tremendous amount of civic pride and unity in those newly established communities which lacked the traditional civic and kinship ties found throughout the older settlements of the Island. Moreover, hockey teams -- and successful ones in particular -- lent a great deal of publicity to the company towns which they represented. In short, community hockey teams provided formidable instruments which 'civic entrepreneurs' consciously and unconsciously used to boost their communities both internally and externally.

Civic entrepreneurs and boosters emerged in these communities; many would not settle for second-best with respect to their local hockey teams. Outgunned by the St. John's metropolis, smaller communities could not hope to secure competitive hockey teams from their comparably minute populations. As an alternative they turned to the practice of 'importing' (semi-) professional hockey players to play on the local teams. This inevitably

brought moral entrepreneurs into conflict with the civic entrepreneurs, and was the source of friction and conflict between the two groups. Such confrontations typically took the form of amateur-professional disputes. Invariably, the civic entrepreneurs seemed to win out, and the importing of (semi-) professional players became accepted practice in Newfoundland Senior hockey – it was even believed that it was a necessity in order to maintain parity between the various teams.

Eventually, however, the practice snowballed and got out of hand. Rules which were initially accepted as equalizing mechanisms gradually became bent and broken in attempts to secure a competitive advantage over rival teams. As soon as one team gained an advantage, others had to scramble to attain parity, or throw the balance in their own favour. This cycle continued unchecked until the teams of the Newfoundland Senior Hockey League gradually folded one by one.

## **7.2 Particularities and Implications**

Works such as Gruneau's Class, Sports, and Social Development (1981), Gruneau and Whitson's Hockey Night in Canada (1993), Guttman's From Ritual to Record (1978), and Elias and Dunning's The Quest for Excitement (1986), are valuable contributions to the sociology of sport. They are enlightening in their treatment of sport as an object of social inquiry in the grand sociological traditions of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. However, they are also limited insofar as they focus on issues of sport development in the capitalist

heartlands. The development of sport in so-called marginal or peripheral regions, however, is of a markedly different nature from that found in dominant economic and cultural centres. In contrast to the latter, the introduction of professionalism to Newfoundland hockey was largely a result of limited resources rather than an abundance of them: small populations found it difficult to produce great quantities of high-calibre athletes, therefore they resorted to the import practice. Nor was the professionalization which occurred in Newfoundland anywhere near the scale that it has reached elsewhere. Even the highest paid players in Newfoundland received relatively minuscule compensation compared to that of players in other professional leagues. A final striking example of the distinctive character of the development of sport in a region like Newfoundland concerns attitudes to the profit-motive. In Newfoundland Senior hockey, team officials and executives often supported the teams out of their own pockets, with little chance that they would ever see the money again.

"Fellows mortgaged their homes; ten or fifteen guys would take out personal loans. That is the way they financed it... The best they could ever hope for was that they would get enough community effort through bingos and raffles to get their money back. No body ever made money on hockey except the players... I guess they did it out of the goodness of their hearts. The guys who promoted the teams and so on did what they thought was best for their teams, but they weren't really very good businessmen." (Hillier, personal interview, 1996)

In contrast to the wealthy owners of professional sports franchises, the organizers and leaders of the community teams in Newfoundland Senior hockey were not elite power-brokers. Assuredly, they were well-known and influential people, but, for the most part,

they appear to have been people of modest means, and therefore, economically indistinguishable from most of the general public. If they had a greater status within the community, it seems to have stemmed from their dedicated – some claimed fanatical – involvement with the community hockey teams.

The early associations between Newfoundland hockey and civic-boosterism were similarly local undertakings. Teams were community based and run by local organizations and individuals interested in building the best hockey teams possible in order to provide good sport entertainment. In doing so they generated civic pride within the community, and publicity outside of it. The ambition for victory led to the importing of semi-professional players, the snow-balling of the practice, and the collapse of top-level Senior hockey in the province. Many towns have discontinued their Senior hockey programs and teams. In St. John's, supporters of professional hockey have been successful in attracting an American Hockey League (AHL) franchise to the city.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there has been a tremendous amount of rhetoric involved in these negotiations. The benefits that a community might expect to gain from the presence of a professional sport franchise include an improved economy, an expanded tax base, enhanced quality of life for citizens, an additional entertainment and recreational amenity, and an instrument of civic cohesion, identity, pride and promotion (Johnson, 1993: 62). As in the case of importing, however, there may be unforeseen and dangerous consequences of this action. There are enormous expenses associated with the



management of such an enterprise. Apart from the costs of daily operations, there are franchise fees, operating subsidies, and facility expenditures to consider. In fact, there is evidence that pro sport franchises, and the new or renovated stadiums which usually accompany them, have an uncertain if not negative impact on local and regional development (Baade & Dye, 1990). The expenditures which support such projects can result in a huge public debt. More generally,

today's ephemeral consumer identities are radically reduced identities, insofar as the act of pursuing our interests first and foremost as consumers may actively undermine the livelihood of the communities we live in and whose vitality we depend on in other parts of our lives... This trend seems to translate, for many people, into an almost supernatural worship of the market and, coincidentally, into a belief that the best and most attractive communities are the ones that offer the most dynamic entrepreneurial environments as well as access to world class entertainment and shopping (Gruneau and Whitson 1993: 221).

And yet, support for these provisions continues. The provision of top-quality products and services – be it shopping malls or professional sports teams – is seen as a significant mark of ‘progress’ for communities. To lack such amenities is said to be a sign of economic backwardness and weakness. Civic boosterism is the flamboyant advertisement of progress. Unfortunately, in many cases, communities are prepared to wager a portion of their future in order to create the illusion of affluence. And, as is the case in all forms of community boosterism, there is a very real danger that this strategy can backfire.

There may also be some implications with respect to national unity. Typically, sport has been noted for its potential for nurturing solidarity. However, sport may help fragment a country, region, or locality rather than “unite” it. It may well be, in addition, that the loss of sport teams, events, and facilities is just another indicator of the marginality of Atlantic Canada and other peripheral regions relative to Canadian metropolitan centers. Three Atlantic Canadian cities, Halifax, Charlottetown, and Moncton, have already lost their AHL professional hockey teams; the future of the St. John’s Maple Leafs remains precarious. It is just too difficult for hinterland areas to keep up with the economic heartlands, a realization that can contribute to regional resentment, embitterment, and even promote political fragmentation.

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Throughout this thesis, I have sought to trace the history of Newfoundland hockey through the various periods of its development. It is clear that numerous groups have employed the sport in the promotion of interests as diverse as morality, civility, discipline, civic-identity, boosterism, and the search for profit. However, it is important to recognize that when all these layers have been stripped away, a core still remains: the game of hockey itself, irreducible to every interest that seeks to use it.

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Neary, George (May 28, 1996). ASARCO Mine Manager, Buchans. Buchans, NF.

Scott, Bill (May 28, 1996). Former Player with Buchans Miners. Buchans, NF.

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Wadden, Hugh (May 28, 1996). Former 'Import' Player and Coach of Buchans Miners. Buchans, NF.

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