

unMitigated A dact Y

Black Eyes or Major Surgery? Is Fighting Really a Danger to Hockey?

(okay, I'm back from my one week hero-worship hiatus. Back to the attitude pieces...)

Last weekend I was a bit burned out from academia and I figured I needed a break. Combining this with wanting to show a little school spirit, I decide to take in the Panthers-Acadia game at the Civic Centre. We all know what happened that Saturday night, don't we? About 400 minutes in penalties called, five Panthers suspended for fighting after the game. All in all, a pretty ugly night for the home team; despite actually winning the game (and winning the following one), all anyone is going to remember is the game-ending brawl.

I'm a life-long hockey fanatic -- I scour newspapers and the internet for any scrap of info about my heroes, I have favourite teams in practically every league (anyone know how my Calgary Hitmen are doing?). Putting it simply, I love the game, for all of its details -- the speed, the skill, the brute force, and even the fighting. Yes, the fighting. I admit it: I get a barbaric thrill from watching Mike Peluso and Tie Domi pound the crap out of one another. It isn't pretty, but it *is* part of the game.

Something I've noticed by attending Panthers games is the amount of dirty stickwork that goes on in the average game. Due to the league-mandated absence of fighting, players aren't allowed to drop the gloves when their tempers get the best of them -- if you fight, you're suspended. So instead of duking it out, players are forced to resort to using their sticks against the object of their disaffection.

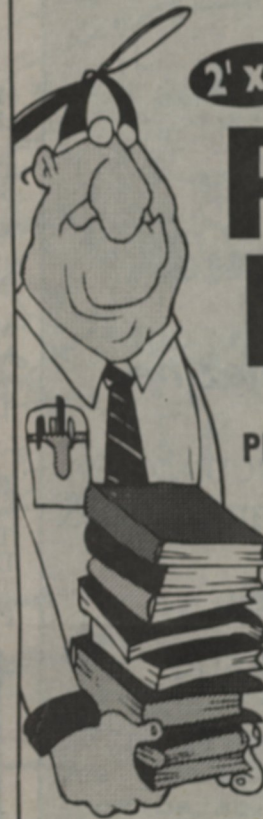
While having the ice as a fist-free zone makes the Fair Play commission happy, it creates a more dangerous situation for the players. Feel free to correct me, but from all the injuries that hockey players get, it seems pretty rare for those wounds to be as a result of fighting (Nick Kypreos notwithstanding). Most serious damage, ranging from broken bones to internal injuries (a former coach of mine would tell us of a player who had to have his spleen removed as a result of being speared) are caused by swinging the ol' Sherwood Darth Vader-style. Does keeping the players from dropping the gloves encourages this sort of action? Looks like it to me.

Although not quite to the same extent that someone in the CIAU would have, I do have firsthand knowledge of dirty stickwork. Having played intramural hockey here at UPEI and rec-league back in Alberta -- both places also have prohibited fighting -- I've taken enough cross-checks in the neck, butt-ends and spears to see the danger of stickwork. Seeing it happen from the safety of the stands is disturbing, too. The scary thing is that the on-ice officials are aware of this stuff and do nothing about it. "Sticks are swung? Send 'em to the box. Punches thrown? Better file a report." Unfortunately, it seems that someone's going to have to be hurt *real* bad before the CIAU - and others - address this issue. Is it better for someone to lose a kidney because of a butt-end than skin their knuckles against someone's helmet? The anti-violence coalitions in hockey should ask themselves this question.

Despite the controversy about fighting in hockey, it's obvious that the majority of fans approve of it, and see it as a part of the game. I'm not taking the position that fighting should be allowed because it'll help sell hockey. I'm saying that it should be allowed for safety's sake. Evidence: no one appeared hurt after the Panthers-Axemen brawl. No, that isn't entirely true. The guys who had to repair the damage Acadia did to their dressing room had to put in some overtime...

- Ross Williams, president of the Sandy McCarthy Fan Club

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