



'You dropped something.'

The Death And Its

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The myth of Canadian hockey died with the Russia-Team NHL series.

A game that Canadians once monopolized has shown this country exactly where the fans stood in relation to big business. It has shown the contempt of the NHL for the working class.

Since 1967, the number of professional teams in North America of supposed major league calibre has risen dramatically from six to 28, with two more scheduled for next year, and an additional six by 1980.

Each new franchise paying six million dollars to start, every expansion year adds approximately \$1,000,000 to established clubs' profit at no operating expense. But they've expanded too fast and now have too little to sell for too much. While the NHL has always been given to making money, their perverse dream has caught the public eye much more because of lack of tact on the part of the league owners. They let their greed get away from them.

On the heels of the NHL-Russia series, and the start of another "exciting" pro hockey season comes a book that studies, in depth, the selling of the Canadian game.

The Death of Hockey, by Bruce Kidd and John Macfarlane, presents a very good historical analysis of the game that most Canadian males have played for years. The book explains the rationale behind a lot of decisions that have led to the decline of the NHL since the birth of the league, especially since the post-war period.

Canadians Deceived

The recent NHL-Russia series would have sent NHL money barons reeling had the Canadian public still been their main source of funds. Although the NHL won four games to Russia's three, the Canadian public had been deceived into believing that the NHL had the only show in town. The damage had been done by the antics of some of the league's leaders in relation to the whole series.

The NHL exposed its true face during the encounter; we saw quite clearly that they no longer had the only show in town, and that their product was second-rate. The quality of the game is too low for Canadian fans, but the product is now being pushed at Americans in cities like Atlanta, where the fans' first contact with the game is their town's new NHL team, the Flames.

The question is, what happens to Canadian hockey. No longer needing Canada, the league is moving south. The three NHL and four World Hockey Association teams in Canada are pushing a product that would have been virtually unsaleable six years ago.

A game that was once played by and for the working class has become a product for the rich few, no longer employing or entertaining the average man on the street.

Big money for everyone in hockey has become fashionable only since expansion. It coincided with the launching of the NHL players association with Bobby Orr and Alan Eagleson.

With Orr the biggest hockey attraction since Maurice Richard, and Alan Eagleson a smooth talking exploiter, the salary of the average hockey player has created a new financial elite in Canada, the professional hockey player.

Now, not only do the owners exploit the fans, but so do the players. **The Death of Hockey** lays down what has come before, what hockey used to be, and provides an alternative but does not recognize it as such. The book looks at the development of pro

hockey, expansion in the NHL and its side effects, the NHL's building of a monopoly by the buying and selling of players from the age of ten, the business of hockey. The NHL is singled out for several areas of grossness, the corrupting of amateur hockey to develop NHL type players, the killing of the community leagues and the selling out of the National Team.

Almost All Guilty

The book implicates most everyone who's been involved with the game, the media not excluded. It also presents what the authors feel is the solution to the problem of the death of hockey as Canada's national game.

Too nationalistic to sell south of the border, the book is anti-American in that it is so pro-Canadian. It cried about the selling of the game south of the border and how the game has been watered down to stretch a good product very thin to gather all available money.

It deplores the fact that the game is entertaining rich American fans as opposed to working class

Canadians, and that the whiskey has had to be watered down so much that the taste hardly remains.

A lot of emphasis is put on the decline of "the fastest game on earth". It treats hockey as an art form and relies on nationalistic feelings to arouse Canadians to the plight of what was once our national game. "We must save the game and return it to Canada" says the book; "let's develop professional community leagues within the country and satisfy the players with \$25,000 a year as opposed to the \$100,000 he could be making in the NHL or the WHA. He'll have the satisfaction of playing for his country."

By establishing a national hockey institute we will be able to, once again, compete and rival the world's best by the resulting upgrading of our game."

The book presents no concrete solutions. The alternatives suggested by the authors follow a moderate socialist doctrine; they follow the concept of institutionalization as a solution. But the answers are in the problems and its sad that the authors couldn't pick them up.

In spite of this, the book is probably the best available because of its almost complete look at the situation. It puts things in a proper historical perspective.

Players Alienated

Rightly playing on people's sensibilities, the book points out the process of alienation which the hockey player faces from the time he reaches adolescence and throughout his search to play in the NHL. It shows how the players were (are) exploited and channelled into a one-way street. Young boys were shipped around the country to learn a game the way the pros want it played because it is more profitable to run a Junior league in southern Ontario than in other parts of the country. Junior A hockey is the highest development stage for pro material.

There are more hockey fans in that region because there are more people. There is little expensive travelling because all the teams are within a few hours bus time and it allows for quicker development of the few who show promise at the age of fifteen. It is making a profit off an unfinished product.

The athlete, on the other hand, is dragged from one part of the country, parachuted into a new locale at sixteen or younger, and told to fend for himself. He has money, is a local hero and plays a lot of hockey

He also faces a 62 game schedule with a lot of long bus rides and is quickly discouraged from continuing his education.

The average junior hockey player has but one choice, make the big leagues or sink, because if he's not NHL material by the time he's twenty, his hockey career is over. He can toil in the minor professional leagues for poor money, or get a job in a factory or at whatever manual labor he can find because he's halted his high school education and usually has little chance of getting back.

For the last few years of his teenage life, he's drank a lot of beer, chased a lot of women, and, for a good many, faced the prospect of an early marriage because of a lack of a known alternative. Any kid who has played in the junior ranks with the intention of making the pros, has been trained from the time he was thirteen, that his only purpose is to make the big time with the big money. He is, in short, a victim of the capitalist system.

There are many instances which point out the closed minded "profit at all costs" attitude of the owners.

Press Fosters Myth

One chapter deals with the manipulating of the media, how the established press has walked hand in hand with the league for so long. Each needs the other, and each relies on the working relationship between the two.

"In the early days of professional hockey, newspapermen were poorly paid and easily bribed. Self-righteousness did not feed a family or buy a drink. Many a sportswriter was grateful for the little brown envelope a club owner slipped him on Fridays. All he had to do was write what he was told... Times have changed. Journalists formed unions and today are well paid. They can afford respectability. A television set may occasionally change hands, but nobody picks up an envelope on Fridays... Years of payoffs have produced a climate in which the hockey press sees its interests and those of professional hockey as identical."

The implications are interesting, as seen through the book. Several writers are quoted as to how McLaren advertising, which owns "Hockey Night in Canada", the televised version of the game, controls all television production, and how any sports writer or personality who knocks the game is quickly eliminated as regular material.

Kidd and Macfarlane complain that the men who should have been public watchdogs have turned out to be bed partners with the thief who comes in the night.

But while they corner the problem, there is little in the way of a real alternative suggested as a solution.

Kids Like Cattle

This following proposal is in keeping with the alternatives suggested by the book:

"But a professional hockey league of our own is not enough. Hockey will not be ours as long as the NHL, or any other privately owned professional league, controls amateur hockey in Canada. Kids will never learn to play the game for fun, to pursue hockey to any level they want-amateur, professional, or whatever until we stop running minor hockey as if it were a farm system for the NHL and the WHA. The CAHA must be liberated from its financial dependence on the NHL. Only the

government, by providing... operate, can do it. LWe... and arenas, so that hockey... for the very young and

While some of the above steps should be taken, the... and Macfarlane suggest... hockey league consisting... teams. The teams would... opposed to the 78 in the... earn between \$25,000 and... advantage would be less

Their salaries, however... them in the top five per... them as removed as the... which, is their reward for... is suggested is that we... to stay in the country.

While the players want... shorter schedule, a clear... possibility of playing for... for paying high salaries... It'd still be you and me... new financial elite. \$30...

remove a person from... The idea of community... The idea of such teams... paying them such huge... proposed is that those... from hockey take a pay... still pays exorbitant rates

Boob Tube

It would still be necessary... gate prices to pay for the... amounts of revenue... expensive operation. By... are cutting back on... from which most of the... sport is realized.

What you need is a... purpose and goal. Explain... or Bobby Hull. Tell them... after having spent half... the man on the street... enjoy the sport in his... cost him.

The career of a hockey... who's spent his life in the... years at the big money... can make in those years... pretty good reasons to... was the same but which... care which side of the...

Socialist

The book's proposal... socialist perspective... nationalism, it still calls... system. If you expect... community, you'll have... reorientate more than...

It doesn't matter whether... Hockey Association remains... or the WHA. To wrestle... and using it as a starting... problem from the top down... youngsters play relies on... as much a part of the pro... the CAHA. How can we... hockey, or what we let... show them to do is what...