

Canada-Russia '74: hockey obscured by politics, as usual

by Dave McCurdy

It's too bad that politics and nationalistic hysteria always have to intervene in international hockey. I've seen a lot of international series -- both amateur and professional -- screwed up by this unfortunate phenomenon, and the Team Canada '74 - USSR series which just concluded yesterday was no exception.

The fact that the Russians won the series four games to one with three ties is almost immaterial. What really matters is that once again politics came first, hockey second, and it's just a shame.

I watched all four of the Moscow games in the basement of Memorial Hall at UPEI after watching the four Canadian games in Halifax. I make no secret of the fact that I cheered for the Russians throughout the series, for reasons I'll explain momentarily. (Now that those of you who watched the games in Memorial Hall know who I am, I'll proceed.)

It's important to note here that I was cheering for the Russian team, not for the Russian system. As far as I'm concerned the whole business of the series being "our system against theirs" is so much nonsense.

There were so many areas of controversy in the series I'm going to get my two cents worth on them one by one.

The refereeing: As usual in international hockey, it was dismally incompetent. However I make no distinction among the four refs who worked the games -- they were all bad. And I don't think that on the whole they were biased one way or the other. In games two and five, for example (4 - 1 for Canada and 3 - 2 for Russia) The Canadians definitely got the break in officiating in my opinion. In game six, the Russians got away with blue murder. Throughout the series the most ridiculously obvious plays were botched -- penalties, goals, offside calls, and just about everything else you can name. Surely any amateur ref from any small town in Canada could have done a far better job, particularly in games five and six, which both got completely out of hand.

The "dirty" play of the Russians: It's a popular belief that the Russian players, while apparently cleaner than the Canadians, are secretly the filthiest

greasers alive. However, Team WHA coach Billy Harris, in an interview in the Sept. issue of MacLeans (I urge one and all to read it) gives the lie to this: he says the Russians can play dirty all right but he's never seen them instigate the dirty stuff. And he's seen them a lot -- he was coach of the Swedish national team for a while, remember. The recent series bears him out in my opinion: the first players to go individually headhunting were Paul Shmyr and Johnny McKenzie of the WHA in Canada, and then in Moscow, Team WHA put on a fine display of

the disgusting animal show put on by almost the entire Canadian team in game 5; and the same horribly inadequate refereeing that Team WHA had to cope with. They took no misconducts, the Canadians took four (or five, I can't remember); they put up with stick blades in the groin on at least two occasions without causing a fuss; and generally acted in a much more mature manner than the WHA crybabies. As for the Soviet Ice Hockey Federation, of course, their behavior was as usual outrageous; but that's another matter altogether.

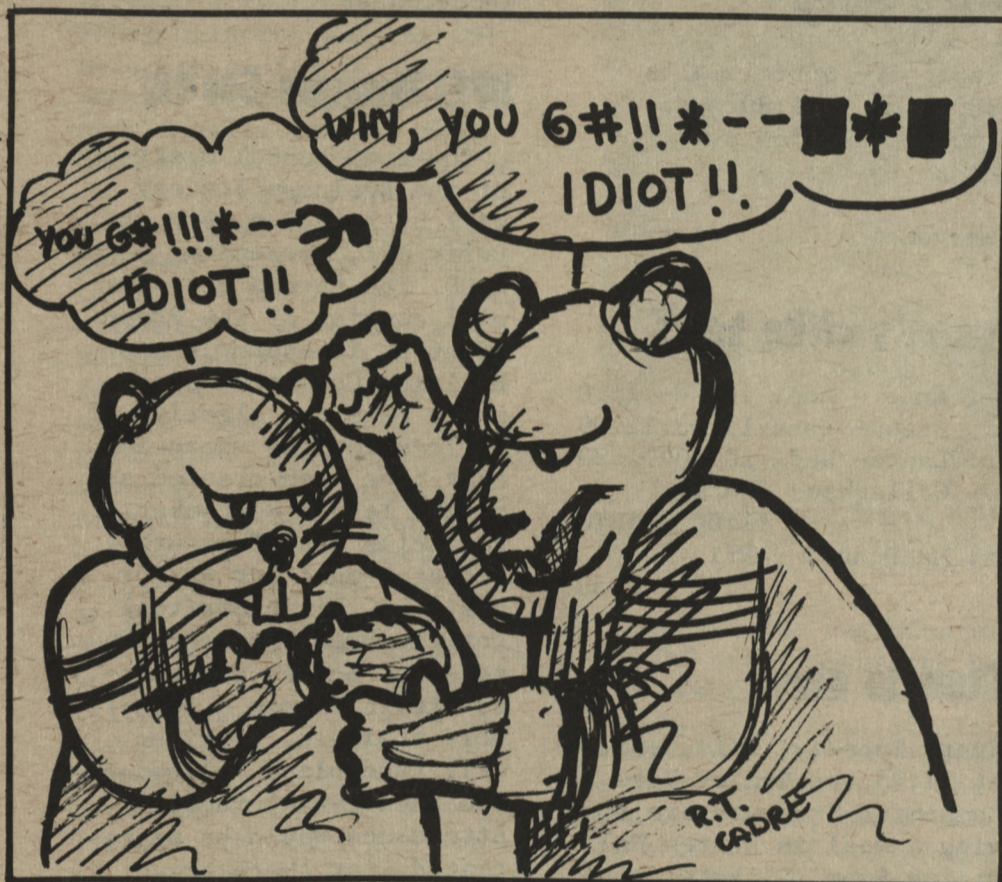
contemptuous of the attitude the people there displayed. It was all "Go Canada Go" without any regard for quality of play. Watching the first Russian game at U.P.E.I. encouraged me a little about Canadian fans: the lads seemed to be watching the play as much as the score, and there was even another guy there cheering for the Russians! Of course, the fact that the Canadians played a filthy game and got away with it must have had something to do with this "fairness", because it sure evaporated for game 6. The Russians played it pretty rough that game, and the comments from the guys in the T.V. room were just incredible: "Kill 'em!"

"I want to see at least two Russians carried off the ice this period." "Yeah-- not killed, just maimed!" "Next game the Canadians should just come out with razor blades in their sticks and hack the Russians to pieces." And the most idiotic grade-2-mentality political jokes you could

imagine: "I wonder how many of those fans are there by choice." "The refs are afraid they'll get shot if they call a penalty against the Russians." The hell of it is that the assemblage considered these gems hilarious!

To wrap up, I really wish people would get a few things straight about this type of series. I think the final result, considering all the ins and outs and ups and downs of the series, was a fair one. Russia did have the better team, and they won. So be it.

Just as a postscript, during the eighth game I told a guy in the T.V. room to go fuck himself after he had made a particularly stupid Cold-War-type remark (a Russian player offered to shake hands with a Canadian player after the Canadian had speared him in the groin, and this clown said "He was paid to do it.") In the great Canadian male macho tradition he dared me to repeat it to his face, which I did, although I was sitting down at the time and he was standing up. He then proceeded to pummel at me for a while. (I made little attempt to resist.) In doing so he very conveniently backed up just about every remark I had made during the series about Canadian grease. I hope he's proud of himself.



true collective grease in game five. Had I been a member of the Russian team, I would have played it dirty in the sixth game too -- for fear of getting my head knocked off if I did not protect myself. A discussion of dirty players on Team WHA would include many names: McKenzie, Shmyr, Rickey Ley, the vicious Jim Harrison, Gordie Howe, Gerry Cheevers, Brad Selwook and Serge Bernier. The Russians do have some rough players (eg. Valery Vasiliev, Valery Kharlamov, Vladimir Lutchenko, Vladimir Shadrin) but they are neither as numerous nor as malicious as their Canadian counterparts.

On Self-restraint: The Russians as a team exercised much more restraint than the WHA team during the series. They had to put up with that outrageous disallowed goal in game 2;

The Announcing on Canadian T.V.: Don Chevrier acquitted himself much more competently and with more fairness than I had expected (he's a football announcer, after all). However, Johnny Esaw acted like an imbecile as always, and Howie Meeker lost an awful lot of credibility with his always biased, often just plain silly antics. (Where I watched the games, those cheering for Russia and those cheering for Canada had one thing in common: they were all laughing at Meeker and Esaw.) Bob Cole, The radio announcer, is a great improvement on those two, and had there been a radio handy I would have tried to get the T.V. turned down.

The Fans in Canada: I watched two of the Canadian games in the SUB pub at St. Mary's University in Halifax, and was generally

"Board of Governors, Senate or Council it may be for you."