

Skating on the Border: Hockey, Class, and Commercialism in Interwar Britain

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This article considers the development of hockey in Britain from its emergence in the mid-nineteenth century to the commercial heyday of the 1930s. At the same time the article discusses the separation of Canada from existing scholarship on the “ludic” British Empire and the perception that North American sports were peripheral to British popular culture. The article posits a reconsideration of Canada’s place in that empire drawing on borderlands theory to demonstrate not only that Britons enthusiastically adopted hockey to their own interests but also that sport formed a clear part of an emerging, common culture in the North Atlantic.

Voici un article qui traite de l’évolution du hockey en Grande-Bretagne depuis son apparition au milieu du XIX^e siècle jusqu’aux beaux jours de son exploitation commerciale dans les années 1930. L’auteur se penche également sur le fait que le Canada soit mis à part dans les travaux savants existants sur l’Empire britannique « ludique » et sur l’impression que les sports nord-américains n’avaient qu’une importance mineure dans la culture populaire britannique. Il pose comme postulat qu’il faut réexaminer la place du Canada dans cet empire en s’appuyant sur la théorie des régions limitrophes pour montrer que les Britanniques ont adopté le hockey et l’ont inclus dans leurs propres intérêts et, en outre, que ce sport a manifestement fait partie d’une culture commune dans l’Atlantique Nord.

IN FEBRUARY 1936, during the Winter Olympic Games in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, the British media and general public were caught by a frenzy of interest in hockey sparked by the performance of the Great Britain team (they eventually won gold) and the BBC’s decision to cut off an over-running semi-final commentary featuring Britain and the United States. In what was the first Winter Olympic broadcast made by the BBC, Canadian broadcaster Bob

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Bowman, on contract with the corporation, relayed a sense of the final period to audiences back home. Scoreless at the end of regulation time, the game slipped into overtime as both sides struggled to break the deadlock. Unsure of what to do, the BBC continued with the commentary until eventually switching away. In an interview with the *Daily Express* a few days later, a croaky-voiced Bowman explained that he had been expecting to be on the air for just 30 minutes, enough time to cover the final period, but continued for a further hour, beginning the third overtime period as the corporation cut away.¹ Six hundred people wrote to complain that they had not been able to hear the final score, 0-0. The Cardiff-based *Western Mail*, which had never written about hockey before, decried, "It would appear as if anything that appeals to the high-brow must be right, according to the BBC, whereas those who enjoy such common-place things as ice hockey match descriptions must be sacrificed."² As it was, the news and a musical item scheduled to follow the commentary had both been shelved to make way for the extension. A year later, in January 1937, hockey made its first appearance on television. Few people even owned a television set when Wembley Lions stars Art Child and Jimmy Chappell appeared before the cameras to give a live, 20-minute exhibition of the game.³ Then, on October 29, 1938, the BBC became the first broadcaster in the world to televise a live hockey match, repeating the venture a week later, 14 years before *Hockey Night in Canada* and Foster Hewitt made the transition.⁴

Olympic victory focused attention on the concurrent expansion and commercialization of hockey; by the outbreak of the Second World War, the British leagues were among the finest in the world. The English National League, in particular, stood on the verge of open professionalism and was the most impressive and skilful outside North America. While the playing of hockey in Britain is much older than is commonly recognized, its early history, played in an ad-hoc fashion on frozen ponds by working-class enthusiasts, wealthy aristocrats, and expatriate students at Oxford, betrayed little of the commercialized framework of the 1930s. For those early, amateur enthusiasts, hockey was an enjoyable winter pastime taken up, depending on one's financial position, as something fun to do with a stick and ball on pond ice, something different to figure skating at the rinks, and a useful excuse for holidays to the continent during the winter season.⁵

What brought hockey from the margins of sporting life onto the flickering television screens of well-to-do houses in suburban London was nothing less than a commercial revolution driven by Canadian labour, British capital, and enthusiasm for new forms of entertainment (particularly those undertaken at speed).⁶ Such

1 *Daily Express* [London], February 20 and 29, 1936; Bob Bowman, *On the Ice* (London: Arthur Baker, 1937), pp. 1-2.

2 *Western Mail* [Cardiff], February 19, 1936.

3 *Radio Times: Television Supplement* [London], January 22, 1937.

4 *The Times* [London], October 29, 1938. The game featured the Harringay Racers, the league leaders, at home to Streatham and ended seven goals to three in the Racers' favour.

5 Carl Erhardt, *Ice Hockey* (London: Foulsham, 1937), pp. 9-10.

6 The concept of a commercial revolution in sport draws on the work of Wray Vamplew and Stephen G. Jones. See Wray Vamplew, *Pay Up and Play the Game: Professional Sport in Britain, 1875-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Stephen G. Jones, *Workers at Play: A Social and Economic History of Leisure, 1918-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

was the scale of this revolution that contemporary accounts record investment of anywhere between one and two million pounds.⁷ Sums of that kind are striking in an era when average wages for male industrial workers ranged between £100 and £150 a year and for female shop workers closer to £50.⁸ It is an irony that, along with other manifestations, has long vexed historians and writers including, most famously, George Orwell and A. J. P. Taylor.⁹ To borrow the latter's classic phrase: while millions of people languished without work, "most English people were enjoying a richer life than any previously known in the history of the world ... they had motor cars, cinemas, radio sets, electrical appliances."¹⁰ They had hockey, too. The Depression was experienced in several different ways, and it is perhaps not surprising that hockey's most impressive development took place in London, a hive of commercial and financial activity largely removed from the worst of the economic collapse that blighted areas of heavy industry in Wales and the north-east of England.¹¹

This study of hockey's development in Britain examines how that commercial revolution took place and the nature of its increasingly Canadian characteristics. Historians have long argued that sport represented a unifying force amongst the "family" of nations that formed the British Empire, with one exception: Canada.¹² As Tony Collins notes, "the playing of [British] games was a means of demonstrating their Britishness."¹³ The failure of the "imperial sports" of cricket and rugby union to take root as the national pastimes of Canada, in contrast to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, has typically been interpreted as symptomatic of Canada's uncertain relationship with Britishness, the failure of imperial imposition through sport, and the subsequent reorientation of Canadian popular culture towards the United States.¹⁴ In the words of Richard Holt,

7 Bowman, *On the Ice*, p. 55; *Daily Mail* [London], October 17, 1935; *The Argus* [Melbourne], May 8, 1937.

8 John Stevenson, *Social Conditions in Britain between the Wars* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 21-23.

9 George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937). For aspects of the debate, see Keith Laybourn, *Britain on the Breadline: A Social and Political History, 1918-1939* (Gloucester: Sutton, 1990); Chris Cook and John Stevenson, *The Slump: Britain in the Great Depression* (London: Longman, 2009 ed.).

10 A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 317.

11 Martin Johnes, *Soccer and Society: South Wales, 1900-1939* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002); Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Routledge, 2006); Richard Holt, ed., *Sport and the Working Class in Modern Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Jeff Hill and Jack Williams, eds., *Sport and Identity in the North of England* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996).

12 Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1988), pp. 649-673; Brian Stoddart and Keith P. Standiford, *The Imperial Game: Cricket, Culture and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Allen Guttmann, *Empire and Games: Modern Sports and Cultural Imperialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

13 Tony Collins, "The Tyranny of Deference: Anglo-Australian Relations and Rugby Union before World War II," *Sport in History*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2009), p. 453.

14 Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), pp. 129-131. For the presence of "imperial sports" in Canada, see, Daniel A. MacDonald, "Grid Iron and Coal: The Making of Rugby Football in Industrial Cape Breton, 1900-1960" (MA dissertation, Saint Mary's University, 2002); Peter Walker, "Shin Guards and Scrums: British Sport in Nova Scotia" (MA dissertation, Saint Mary's University, 2006); Daryl Shane Leeworthy, "'The One Great Pastime of the People': Rugby, Religion, and the Making of Working-Class Culture on the Industrial Frontier: Cape Breton and South Wales, 1850-1914" (MA dissertation, Saint Mary's University, 2008).

“American commercial interests and players moved into Canadian football and ice hockey so that sporting links with the United States became stronger than those with Britain.”¹⁵ Not unsurprisingly, therefore, British hockey has almost entirely escaped the attention of historians, both domestically and abroad. Aside from passing mention in Mike Huggins’ and Jack Williams’ *Sport and the English, 1918-1939* and in Stephen Jones’s surveys of the interwar years, the extent of hockey’s presence and popularity is largely unknown to academic scholarship.¹⁶

The British infatuation with hockey in the 1930s suggests that this isolation of Canada from the rest of the “ludic” British Empire merits reconsideration. Recent scholarship on the British world, guided from a Canadian perspective by Phillip Buckner, offers one possible means of analysing Canada’s continued sporting links with the empire and its multiple identities, namely “Greater Britishness.”¹⁷ As Buckner and R. Douglas Francis have argued (following Linda Colley), “if one could be Scottish—or even Irish—and British at the same time, why could one not be Australian or Canadian and British at the same time.”¹⁸ Thus the “old country” sports reports in the Canadian press may be read as guides to Canada’s continued engagement with the British world and popular aspects of the British way of life. This approach, however, is not adopted here. Instead, the focus is more particularly on the import of sporting labour from Canada, the development of a commercial sporting environment that adopted Canadian voices and ways of doing things, and the attempt by British spectators and rink owners to manipulate hockey to their own habits.¹⁹ In this way, commercial hockey in the 1930s may be read as symptomatic of a “borderland” between the increasingly continentalist Canada and the increasingly distant and separate British Isles.

Borderlands theory, which emerged as a framework for analysing the distinct cultures that developed along the American-Mexican border (and subsequently the American-Canadian border), has been intermittently adopted in recent years by scholars of sport seeking a way out of nation-building, metropolitan models of analysis that deny (albeit by assumption rather than deliberate manipulation) the cultural vitality and agency of the periphery.²⁰ If, as van Duinen rightly suggests,

15 Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 224.

16 Mike Huggins and Jack Williams, *Sport and the English, 1918-1939* (London: Routledge, 2005); Stephen G. Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class: Organised Labour and Sport in Interwar Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

17 J. G. A. Pocock, “British History: A Plea for a New Subject,” *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol. 8 (1974), pp. 3-21, and “The New British History in Atlantic Perspective: An Antipodean Commentary,” *American Historical Review*, vol. 104 (1999), pp. 490-500; Phillip Buckner, “Whatever Happened to the British Empire?” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 3 (1993), pp. 3-32; Paul Ward, *Britishness since 1870* (London: Routledge, 2004).

18 Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, “Introduction” in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), p. 13; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

19 Such an approach draws more overtly from themes present in more recent sports history scholarship, notably Matthew Taylor, “Global Players? Football, Migration and Globalization, c. 1930-2000,” *Historical Social Research*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2006), pp. 7-30; Matthew Taylor and Pierre Lanfranchi, *Moving with the Ball: The Migration of Professional Footballers* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

20 Colin D. Howell, “Baseball and Borders: The Diffusion of Baseball into Mexican and Canadian-American Borderland Regions, 1885-1911,” *Nine: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2003), pp. 16-26, and “Borderlands, Baselines, and Big Game: Conceptualizing the Northeast as a Sporting

the application of this model to the British world results in our reading “the colonies as the hinterland/borderlands” and “Britain as the centre/metropole,” what happens when the trajectories of cultural transfer are reversed?²¹ When, for instance, a valuable piece of cultural capital from the hinterland—in this case, Canadian hockey—is adopted by the metropole?

What follows seeks to provide an answer to that question. In doing so, it suggests that it is possible to reconcile Canada to the wider debate on the sporting aspects of the British world and to achieve greater understanding of the imposition of and resistance to imperial values through sport in the first half of the twentieth century. Canada was not wholly removed from the British world, as the emphasis on “imperial sports” in the existing literature would tend to suggest; rather its changing relationship with Britain rested on subtle nuances observable at the margins. Hockey provides a window into those nuances because it encouraged Canadian voices onto British radio and television and offered Canadian heroes to a willing public. What of the Canadians themselves? There were certainly tensions: regular institutional conflict between British and Canadian hockey authorities, notably over the migration of players, the vexed issue of expense payments, and the matter of Britain’s flirtation with professionalism. But there was also the personal experience of a group of young men, English-Canadian and French-Canadian, Maritimers and Westerners, who had to deal with the opportunities afforded by a migrant life abroad and the encounter with the unexpected mores of the “mother” country. These young men skated on the border.

The Origins of Hockey in Britain

In January 1895, Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII), and his second son, Prince George (later King George V), played a hockey game in the grounds of Buckingham Palace against the sons of Lord Stanley, recently returned from Canada.²² A few weeks later, the Palace challenged the House of Commons to a game, with both princes and Arthur Balfour, MP (Prime Minister, 1902-1905), taking part. In later years, these “royal games” were taken up by hockey journalists and writers as the beginning of “Canadian” hockey in Britain.²³ In the absence of widespread research into the development of ice-borne sporting activity in Victorian Britain, this chronology has been broadly accepted and hockey’s character thereby defined as an imported game that met the needs of an increasingly commercially-orientated audience in the 1930s, but which had no place in popular culture. There is no doubt that hockey was highly fashionable amongst the royal family, yet the popularity of hockey was not limited to social

Region” in Stephen J. Hornsby and John G. Reid, eds., *New England and the Maritimes: Connections and Comparisons* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), pp. 264-279; Colin D. Howell and Daryl Leeworthy, “Borderlands” in S. W. Pope and John Nauright, eds., *Routledge Companion to Sports History* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 71-84; Andrew C. Holman, “Playing the Neutral Zone: Meanings and Use of Ice Hockey in the Canada-US Borderlands, 1895-1915,” *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 34 (2004), pp. 33-57.

21 Jared van Duinen, “Playing to the ‘Imaginary Grandstand’: Sport, the ‘British World,’ and an Australian Colonial Identity,” *Journal of Global History*, vol. 8 (2013), pp. 342-364.

22 B. M. Patton, *Ice-Hockey* (London: George Routledge, 1936), p. 7.

23 Robert Giddens, *Ice Hockey: The International Game* (London: Foyle, 1950), p. 22.

elites and those who had the opportunity to travel back and forth to Canada.²⁴ As one newspaper put it, “we are becoming a nation of skaters ... [and] we also show some signs of becoming a nation of hockey players.”²⁵ Recovery of this popular enthusiasm therefore suggests an alternative chronology of development that encourages a shift away from importation and “down and outward” diffusion towards a dialectical negotiation of tradition and improvement.²⁶

Throughout the early nineteenth century, frequent cold spells brought Britons out onto makeshift skates to enjoy the thrills of gliding across the ice. “Evening after evening,” reported one newspaper, “scores of mining boys and colliers ... may be seen, each with his lamp or candle in his hand, gliding to and fro over the smooth glassy surface.”²⁷ Amidst it all, newspapers carried warnings of people falling into the chilly waters as the thin ice cracked (occasionally leading to death) or indulging without sufficient care that they fell and broke the bones of their limbs.²⁸ From around the late 1830s, however, there was a new game to play: “hockey on the ice” (or bandy, the names were interchangeable).²⁹ Involving a rubber ball and some sticks to push it around, bandy was a natural extension of similar stick and ball games played on grass. By the middle of the century, it had entered popular vocabulary, as an “agreeable amusement” in the wintertime alongside snowballing for “our juvenile friends.”³⁰ One correspondent of the *Derby Mercury* opined in similar fashion that “if the frozen-out ... will only make the best of his enforced absence from the pigskin, and join some half-dozen other frozen-out ones in a game of hockey on the ice, he will come to the conclusion that there is something worth living for in a frost after all.”³¹

By the 1890s, hockey was in the process of formalization with locally organized games and cup competitions advertised in the press, notably in London and its suburban villages, the West Country, and the northern counties of Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.³² New rules governing the game were introduced by middle-class enthusiasts.³³ There were international engagements with teams from Britain visiting neighbouring European countries such as the Netherlands, and Canadian teams (initially expatriate in nature) meeting challenges from their

24 Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, Journal of Queen Victoria, vol. 43 (January 1 – August 31, 1857), February 3, 1857, <http://www.queenvictoriasjournals.org/home.do>; *Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury*, January 9, 1864.

25 *Taunton Courier*, February 20, 1895.

26 The sort of model of development evident in Alan Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978); for an informative critique, see Colin D. Howell, “On Metcalfe, Marx, and Materialism: Reflections on the Writing of Sports History in the Postmodern Age,” *Sports History Review*, vol. 29, no. 1 (1998), pp. 96-102.

27 *Cardiff and Merthyr Guardian*, December 19, 1846.

28 *Cambridge Chronicle and Journal*, January 17, 1823; *Lancaster Gazette*, February 19, 1851; *London Standard*, February 23, 1855; *Freeman's Journal* [Dublin], February 19, 1855.

29 *Morning Post* [London], December 24, 1840; *London Standard*, February 13, 1838.

30 *Worcestershire Chronicle*, December 26, 1860.

31 *Derby Mercury*, December 25, 1878.

32 *Lincolnshire Echo*, January 10, 1893, February 7 and 12, 1895; *Stamford Mercury*, January 13, 1893; *Morning Post* [London], January 8, 1898; *Grantham Journal*, February 23, 1895; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, January 10, 1893; *Western Gazette* [Bristol], February 22, 1895; *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, February 20, 1895; *York Herald*, December 31, 1887.

33 *Pall Mall Gazette* [London], March 15 and 24, 1897.

British counterparts.³⁴ Yet popular enthusiasm declined in this period, and hockey consolidated upwards to become almost exclusively a sport played by the wealthy elite of London. Environmental change, in the form of the gradual ending of the “little ice age” and the warming up of British winters, meant a lack of widespread and long-lasting ice, with all of its consequences for ice-borne winter sports.³⁵ Popular appetite for them, demonstrable in the chilly winters of the early and mid-nineteenth century, gave way to the field games typically associated with winter—soccer and rugby—which were widespread and cheap to play. Hockey, by contrast, increasingly required expensive artificial methods to provide its playing surface, something working-class people could not afford to use.

Artificial ice made an early appearance in the mid-1870s, with the opening of an indoor rink at Chelsea by Professor John Gamgee.³⁶ Known as the Glaciarium, it prompted a number of imitations across the country, some owned by Gamgee himself, and a phenomenon known briefly in the press as “rinkomania.”³⁷ One of these, at Rusholme near Manchester, may be taken as typical. To borrow from the opening day press report in the *Manchester Evening News*:

On each side of the skating surface there is a platform for spectators and at either end of the rink a balcony. One of these balconies is intended for a band and for gentlemen who wish to smoke, and the other is exclusively for ladies and gentlemen who are non-smokers. The walls and roof are appropriately painted and decorated, and the general aspect of the building is remarkably in keeping with the description of the pastime it is intended for.³⁸

After two years, enthusiasm for artificial ice petered out, generally on the grounds of its cost, and the scientific processes were turned over to medical use, rather than for entertainment. By the mid-1880s there was just one artificial rink left, at Southport near Liverpool, and by 1890 none at all.³⁹ To revive the fashion for artificial ice required significant financial outlay, and the idea was hardly welcome in some quarters. When a proposal to build one was mooted in Cardiff in the early 1890s, for example, the *Western Mail* claimed that artificial ice was an “idiotic idea.”⁴⁰ Even in Southport, which maintained its rink until 1887, the notion of a revival in the early 1890s was questioned by the local press; with artificial ice priced at £9 a yard and a rink measuring 864 square yards, the *Liverpool Echo* pondered, “[P]opular as skating and ice pastimes are in this country, it is open to

³⁴ *York Herald*, January 7, 1891; *Hull Daily Mail*, February 7, 1896.

³⁵ Jean M. Grove, *The Little Ice Age* (London: Methuen, 1988); Brian M. Fagan, *The Little Ice Age: How Climate Made History, 1300-1850* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

³⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, September 14, 1896. For a brief overview of the development of artificial ice rinks, see David Whitson and Richard Gruneau, eds., *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture and Commerce* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2006), p. 1. Gamgee’s process was also introduced to California at the end of the decade (*Washington Post*, January 15, 1878).

³⁷ *Bury and Norwich Post*, April 11, 1876; *Dundee Courier*, March 18, 1879.

³⁸ *Manchester Evening News*, January 9, 1877.

³⁹ *Western Daily Press* [Bristol], December 29, 1884.

⁴⁰ *Western Mail* [Cardiff], February 6, 1892. No rink was built in Cardiff until 1986!

question whether a constant membership of 1,500 can be counted upon even in London.”⁴¹

When Niagara Hall (so called because of its panoramic painting of Niagara Falls) near St. James’ Park opened as a skating rink in January 1895, following several years of promotion and campaigning by would-be enthusiasts, the well-to-do of London were caught up in a renewed rinkomania.⁴² Visitors to the gallery on a Sunday afternoon could see members of the aristocracy and wealthy foreigners swishing around on the ice.⁴³ A couple of months later, the National Skating Palace opened in Argyll Street (now the London Palladium) to equal acclaim with such high-profile visitors as the King of the Belgians.⁴⁴ Promoted in its advertising as the “most fashionable lounge in Europe,” the latter venue provided hockey matches twice a week set against a lavish backdrop somewhat removed from the frozen ponds upon which it had been played earlier in the century.⁴⁵ A third venue, the Prince’s Ice Rink in Knightsbridge, opened in November 1896 and aimed at being even more exclusive, providing a members-only surface upon which to skate.⁴⁶

Given the exclusive nature of the skating rinks upon which hockey could be played, it is not surprising that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it had a reputation for being a game for the wealthy and fashionable. Patronage from the youthful Duke of Manchester and Princess Maud, later Queen of Norway, who considered it “one of the most delightful amusements under the sun,” as well as the presence of hockey on the sporting calendar of Oxford and Cambridge, entrenched that view.⁴⁷ Moreover, audiences at hockey matches were no less “respectable” than the teams engaged on the ice, with students, public school old boys, and wealthy professionals the typical attendees. The varsity match of 1900, for example, which took place at the Prince’s Skating Club in London, had a crowd consisting, among others, of several members of the aristocracy.⁴⁸ It was certainly a glitzy experience: spectators arrived at the rink in suits and ball gowns with pocket watches and pearls glistening under the lights, and the hockey players played in “white flannels, wearing a shirt which, in some cases and occasions, was rounded off with stiff collar and tie!”⁴⁹ Gustav Lanctot, who played on the Oxford team just before the Great War, wrote home of seeing “[t]he sight of the *a giorno* lighted small rink, with its champagne sipping attendance of white and black

41 *Liverpool Echo*, September 19, 1893.

42 *Morning Post* [London], January 8, 1895; *Evening Telegraph* [Dundee], January 9, 1895; James Drake Digby, *Skating and Curling. The Glaciarium: A Brief History of the Invention, and the Proposed Glaciarium Club* (London: Phipps and Connor, 1893).

43 *Liverpool Echo*, January 29, 1895.

44 *Sheffield Independent*, March 18, 1895; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, December 4, 1895.

45 *Morning Post*, February 4 and 11, 1896; *London Standard*, April 11, 1896.

46 *Freeman’s Journal*, November 9, 1896. A further rink was opened at Brighton a year later, while efforts to open one in Manchester came to nothing (*Morning Post*, October 16, 1897; *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, June 20, 1896).

47 *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, November 21, 1895; Ogier Rysden, *The Book of Blues: Being a record of all matches between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in every department of sport* (London: F. E. Robinson and Co., 1900).

48 *London Daily News*, March 17, 1900.

49 Giddens, *Ice Hockey*, p. 23.

dressed men in top hats and of low necked women wearing the latest creation of Paquin and the jewels of Tiffany.... [It] looked more like a society ball on ice than a hockey match.”⁵⁰

The early history of British hockey, then, may be characterized as a game played across the country, often in an ad-hoc fashion, with sticks and whatever projectile was available at the time, which became concentrated around the wealthy as environmental change forced the use of expensive artificial ice. Little of this development may be associated with Canada; the first international match between a British team and a visiting Canadian one did not take place until 1896. Using a puck rather than a ball, this game may also be seen as a moment of transition away from the earlier “folk” games and the moment at which British hockey began to move towards the style of play by then evident in Canada. Certainly the press were keen to promote Canadians as naturals and the game as naturally Canadian. They were, the *Penny Illustrated* newspaper opined, “reared ... half their lives on ice fields.” Not that such in-built prowess helped, as the Canadians lost four goals to two.⁵¹ The establishment of the Rhodes Scholarship seven years later, in 1903, and the arrival of larger numbers of Canadians and Newfoundlanders in Britain to study resulted in more substantial changes to the game and the quality of hockey being played, most notably the adoption of the longer stick, which was not then in regular use in Europe.⁵² In the years prior to the Great War, the Rhodes Scholars’ presence provided “an exhibition of Canadian methods not often seen in this country.”⁵³ They ensured the “aristocratic” game was also increasingly a Canadian one.

Playing Canada’s Game Abroad

From the early years of the twentieth century until the 1930s, students, in particular Rhodes Scholars, were the primary inhabitants of this particular sporting borderland between British aristocratic enthusiasm and Canadian habit. One Rhodes Scholar, the novelist Hugh MacLennan, provides a glimpse into the dynamics of expectation and reality. In his classic novel, *Two Solitudes*, published in 1945 but set between the wars, MacLennan describes the schoolboy British world of English Canada: “The boys never worried themselves about national problems of any sort; indeed, they did not know they existed. Their home was the English section of Montreal; as a result of what everyone told them, their country was not Canada but the British Empire.”⁵⁴ In sporting terms, boys learnt the imperial games and their “Britishness” was defined as much by sport as anything else. In the summer, for instance, they donned whites and played cricket in the sunshine, breaking for tea as was done at Lords. In the winter it was rugby.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Edmonton Bulletin*, January 30, 1913.

⁵¹ *Penny Illustrated* [London], February 22, 1896.

⁵² *The Times*, January 30, 1909

⁵³ *The Times*, January 26, 1910.

⁵⁴ Hugh MacLennan, *Two Solitudes* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008 ed.), pp. 287-288.

⁵⁵ For a sense of this atmosphere, see Jean Barman, *Growing Up British in British Columbia: Boys in Private School* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984); J. A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology*

However, sport also formed an essential part of the encounter between idealized Britishness, expected Canadianness, and a wider continentalism leaving the boys with a dual, even triple identity. When, for instance, they sloped off to play baseball or hockey out of the disapproving gaze of their teachers, the limits of the British world were set.⁵⁶

At Oxford, as Lester B. Pearson recalled of the early 1920s, “we had to call it ice hockey,” immediately sounding a note of difference from the game he understood as played on ice and that which his English contemporaries perceived, in the main, as being played on grass.⁵⁷ On a scholarship from the Massey Foundation and an all-round athlete, Pearson took full advantage of the sporting opportunities afforded him at Oxford: a deliberate continuation of the culture and ethics he had imbibed at school and a ready means of making friends in and out of college.⁵⁸ “I tried out for almost everything except rowing, the most famous of all major sports at Oxford,” he wrote. “I played rugger and hockey and lacrosse. The first sport was new to me, but I got to love its speed and spontaneity.”⁵⁹ Many Canadians who came up to Oxford in the interwar years enjoyed the rich variety of college sport as much as Pearson, taking up basketball, tennis, soccer, rugby, and others. Hugh MacLennan wrote home of his rugby games at Oriel College that: “It is delightful to bury one’s face in the cold wet turf, while the feet of both sides are scrimmaging on top of you; to get really soaked and muddied and into a close personal fellowship with the earth. And, after that, a rare old English tea and a quiet pipe. Such is the masculine tranquillity of Oxford at Michaelmas.”⁶⁰

What of “ice hockey,” then, in this environment of rugby and cricket? The sport, along with lacrosse, was at the core of many Canadian students’ habits, not the least because it was easy to get onto the university team. However, that ease aside, hockey and lacrosse provided a welcome reminder of home and a means of overcoming the distinctive sense of isolation that Oxford college life can often evoke. Indeed, accounts by former students are particularly indicative of the latter. MacLennan wrote of Oxford being “so overwhelming that when I first encountered it I was lonely and unhappy for months.”⁶¹ Hugh Whitney Morrison, on a Rhodes Scholarship to Merton College, complained in his correspondence home of the disheartening impact of the “young, young Englishmen, all ignoring everyone else.”⁶² Escott Reid, too, reflected that “one knows no-one. There

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

56 MacLennan, *Two Solitudes*, p. 283. For apposite comments on the nature of hockey and nationalism in MacLennan’s novel, see Michael Buma, *Refereeing Identity: The Cultural Work of Canadian Hockey Novels* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 120-122.

57 Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Lester B. Pearson, Volume I, 1897-1948* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), p. 48. For a wider sense of Pearson’s experiences at Oxford, see C. P. Champion, “Mike Pearson at Oxford: War, Varsity, and Canadianism,” *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 88, no. 2 (2007), pp. 263-290.

58 John English, *Shadow of Heaven: The Life of Lester Pearson, Volume I: 1897-1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), pp. 82-83.

59 Pearson, *Mike*, p. 47.

60 Letter from Hugh MacLennan to Katherine MacLennan, November 30, 1930, quoted in Elspeth Cameron, *Hugh MacLennan: A Writer’s Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), p. 55.

61 Hugh MacLennan, *Scotchman’s Return and Other Essays* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), p. 193.

62 Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], Hugh Whitney Morrison Fonds, MG30 E408, Container 8,

seems no possibility of knowing anyone. Many ... give up the struggle and say the Englishman is not worth knowing and from then on consort only with their own nationals.”⁶³ For these young men and others, hockey became a unifier, an expression of Canadianness and a means of bringing together unsettled expatriates by sharing something they had in common. Little wonder, then, that Morrison told his parents, “I’ve learned more hockey since I came to Europe than I did in the last ten years in Canada.”⁶⁴

This collective sense of comforting Canadianness took on a different purpose altogether during winter tours to the continent, where newspapers greeted the Oxford University Ice Hockey Club as a Canadian team. In Switzerland, particularly, the club was known simply as the Oxford-Canadians.⁶⁵ Such presentations had the effect of the university team, and the Canadian members of it, being seen as a surrogate national side, rather than representatives of England’s oldest university. The students seem to have taken this in their stride and enjoyed the prominence they gained in Europe in contrast to the marginalized position of their sport in Britain, readily participating in the European circuit. As a result, the Oxford University team was involved in the development of hockey across much of Western and Central Europe. Games were played against national sides, other university teams, and local clubs, in well-attended exhibition matches or gala evenings that showcased hockey to European audiences. Pearson recalled, “By European standards, which were modest, we were magnificent and indeed unbeatable. Swiss and other European teams were eager, but not very skilful as yet.... So we thought, naturally, that we were better than we actually were by Canadian standards.” It was, above all, “a dazzling experience for us.”⁶⁶

For those involved in hockey outside the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, life was rather different and defined more concretely by social class. To ensure the commercial viability of the hockey teams that developed, rink owners needed the best players they could afford. From their point of view that meant hiring Canadians, both as a matter of course—Canadians were seen as “natural” exponents of the game—but also as a matter of necessity since, by the interwar years, there were few Britons who could skate well enough to play the game. “There are practically no British ice hockey players,” complained one Canadian, “because there is rarely any ice in this country.”⁶⁷ Even if they could skate, the typical costs of a player’s kit, comprising imported stick, skates, jersey, and pads, cost around £6 in the early 1930s, at a time when manual industrial workers took home around £3 a week, if, of course, they had a job at all.⁶⁸ Not unsurprisingly, the most eager to take up the offer to play in Britain—even on a shamateur basis, as was the case throughout

File 10, “Take the Ear Strangely.”

63 Escott Reid, *Radical Mandarin: The Memoirs of Escott Reid* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 49.

64 LAC, Hugh Whitney Morrison Fonds, Container 1, File 10, Letter to Patricia Morrison, March 15, 1931.

65 *Sport* [Berlin], December 13, 1929 (my translation; the original German reads, “Kanadische Studenten-Mannschaftsaus Oxford”); *Tribune de Lausanne*, January 5, 1922; January 13, 1923; January 13 and December 20, 1926.

66 Pearson, *Mike*, p. 48.

67 *Daily Mirror* [London], March 9, 1927.

68 *Glasgow Herald*, September 29, 1931.

the interwar years—were young, working-class Canadians who struggled to find jobs at home, whether that was Halifax, Toronto, Montreal, or Winnipeg, but who enjoyed playing sports. Writes Colin Howell, “[F]or those who had athletic skills with market value, but who worked and struggled just to make a living, the price of maintaining one’s amateur status was often too high.”⁶⁹

Establishing the exact geographical distribution of all Canadian players who travelled to Britain in the 1930s is complicated and based on partial evidence, but a general pattern may be observed. The more affected an area by the Depression, the more likely it was that amateur players were willing to leave. Prominent among the provinces that sent large numbers of young men to play in the British hockey leagues was Manitoba, though Saskatchewan, Quebec, and the Maritimes were also strong exporters of working-class talent. To take a singular, telling example: when war was declared in 1939, there were nearly 150 players registered for transfers from the amateur leagues in Canada to England and Scotland; a third were from Winnipeg.⁷⁰ The BBC’s main hockey commentator from the late 1930s, Winnipeg-born Stewart MacPherson, takes up the story in his autobiography *The Mike and I*. “In 1930, times were difficult in western Canada. The incomes of westerners were largely related, directly or indirectly to the wheat crop and their financial future was vague.” On the advice of Alex Archer, one of the gold-medal-winning Olympic team of 1936, MacPherson turned his gaze towards Britain with Archer’s words ringing in his ears: “probably you’ll make yourself £10 a week.”⁷¹ MacPherson found work as a rink announcer at the Empire Pool in London where he mingled with numerous other Canadians, whether players, coaching staff, referees, or journalists, earning similar sums out of the game.⁷²

British newspapers provide clear insight into the prominence of Manitobans and Maritimers in the recruitment patterns of hockey clubs. In 1937, for instance, it was reported that the Harringay Greyhounds had sent agents to scour Manitoba for tall, athletic Icelanders to bolster their ranks and give the team an advantage similar to that of the Winnipeg Falcons, the Icelandic-Canadian amateur team that won the Olympic gold in 1920.⁷³ Harringay’s most significant player in the late 1930s was Joe Beaton, who arrived in England from Stellarton, Nova Scotia, in 1934 and was joined in Britain by his brother Robert in 1938.⁷⁴ When preparations for two new north London teams were announced in January 1937, the players were to be actively recruited “from the far eastern provinces of Canada”: the Maritimes.⁷⁵

There were limits, however. For French Canadians, Britain was not the automatic choice of country in which to escape the slump; that, of course, was France (and to a lesser extent Belgium), where players could settle into a less

69 Howell, *Blood, Sweat and Cheers*, p. 65.

70 *Winnipeg Free Press*, September 4 and November 6, 1939; *Daily Mirror*, January 31, 1936; *The Scotsman*, September 11, 1936.

71 Stewart MacPherson, *The Mike and I* (London: Van Thal, 1948), pp. 9-10.

72 *Daily Mail*, October 2, 1935; March 19, 1937.

73 *Daily Mail*, November 2, 1937.

74 *Daily Mail*, September 27, 1938.

75 *Daily Mirror*, January 31, 1936.

alien culture. Typically, French-speaking Canadians made the journey to Paris, where they played as amateurs in university teams or as semi-professionals in the Parisian league with the clubs *Français Volants*, *Stade Français*, and *Rapide de Paris*.⁷⁶ Similarly, while Britain provided undoubted opportunities for working-class Canadians, it also provided opportunities for those whose careers were frustrated and those who simply enjoyed the thrill of adventure. In October 1936, for example, the Earl's Court Royals gave an opportunity of a first-team place to their new Canadian goalkeeper, G. Hutchinson. Fed up of being reserve in Canada, he had travelled to Britain hoping to play more regularly. As he explained to the *Daily Mail's* correspondent, Tom Stenner, "in sheer desperation I came to England, and now my dream has come true."⁷⁷

Mass import of labour provided the attractive hockey that rink owners and spectators desired, but it raised a number of concerns from different quarters through the 1930s, not least from Canadian administrators of the game. Initially, commercial expansion had been lamented by those involved in the amateur era. Carl Erhardt, for example, complained of the "financial interests" that had "endeavoured to obtain control" of the game, taking it out of the hands of those who had built it up since the Great War.⁷⁸ There were those who considered the expense of operating hockey—around £5,500 per rink, per year—as a potential liability if the talent pool dried up and urged the development of a "nursery" system to develop domestic hockey players to fill the ranks of the teams instead.⁷⁹ The secretary of the British Ice Hockey Association, Bunny Ahearne, drew up plans for the a nursery system at the end of the 1930s with a view to a professional league grounded in British players by the early 1940s, a process interrupted by the Second World War.⁸⁰

Most concerned of all, of course, was the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA). Fearful of being squeezed further by a professional English league operated alongside the National Hockey League (NHL), which felt, in any case, that British hockey was "a professional organisation akin to itself," the CAHA issued warnings and proclamations to players and insisted on a strict registration and transfer regime to limit the impact of British hockey on the Canadian amateur leagues.⁸¹ For its part, the British Ice Hockey Association employed the method of checking birth certificates and passports to establish whether a player was British by birth and therefore freely eligible to play in either the English or Scottish leagues.⁸² In 1935, it also responded to pressure from the CAHA to come out against professionalism and pressure teams to take fewer Canadian amateurs.⁸³

76 *L'Humanité* [Paris], December 27, 1938; *Sports de Neige et de Glace* [Paris], December 15, 1926, and January 31, 1927; Marc Branchu, *Histoire de Hockey sur Glace en France* (Paris: Editions Alan Sutton, 2007).

77 *Daily Mail*, October 15, 1936.

78 Erhardt, *Ice Hockey*, p. 10.

79 *Daily Mail*, February 15, 1939.

80 *Glasgow Herald*, February 22, 1938; *The Scotsman* [Edinburgh], April 26, 1938; *Daily Express*, November 2, 1938.

81 *Vancouver Sun*, December 23, 1937; *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 24, 1938.

82 *Daily Mail*, November 15, 1935.

83 *Daily Express*, September 18, October 2, and October 3, 1935; *Daily Mirror*, October 12, 1935; *Skating*

Three years later, however, the British Ice Hockey Association altered its legal remit to represent the interests of both amateurs and professionals, flouting the arrangements made with the CAHA, “because the game had advanced to such an extent that the possibility of its becoming professional was very great.”⁸⁴

Towards a Commercial Revolution

The prospect, in the early 1940s, of hockey turning professional was symptomatic of the commercial success of the sport in the 1930s. The game’s success saw the development of new rinks and the growth of relatively broad support around the country, both in areas where hockey was played and in areas where it relied on a media presence. Reasons for the rapid expansion, however, are not immediately apparent and differ, at least initially, in England and Scotland, with nationalism present in the latter and largely absent in the former, where commercial enthusiasm dominated. Yet it was in Scotland that the first signs of hockey’s revival were noticed, when a group of Glasgow curlers set up the Scottish Ice Rink Company in 1928 and financed the building of a new rink in the city.⁸⁵ Opened by the Duke of Montrose, founding member of the National Party of Scotland, on January 14, 1929, at a cost of £40,000, the Crossmyloof Ice Rink was intended to provide better access to curling. “It seemed a scandal,” declared the Duke in his opening address, “that people had to go to Switzerland to indulge in the old Scottish sport of curling.”⁸⁶ Where there was ice, however, there was also the opportunity for hockey, and in March 1929 a group of representatives from twelve clubs, including Glasgow University, alongside a number of expatriate Canadians resident in Glasgow, gathered at the Crossmyloof rink to form the Scottish Ice Hockey Association and to establish a Scottish Ice Hockey League.⁸⁷

Ten years later, a visitor to the Scottish resort of Ayr, just a few miles from the birthplace of the poet Robert Burns, who happened to wander along Beresford Terrace towards the poet’s statue, would have seen the unmistakable blue and red neon lights of the town’s new ice rink. Designed by J. and J. A. Carrick and opened in March 1939, the building was intended to compete successfully with other night-time forms of entertainment from the fish-and-chip shop to the dance hall and the cinema.⁸⁸ Ayr’s rink was not the only neon-lit temple of ice opened in that decade: new rinks, accompanied by new teams, were built at Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Falkirk, Glasgow, Kirkcaldy, and Paisley, with a total investment of nearly £500,000. Paisley’s rink, for example, was designed for 5,000 spectators, of whom 4,000 could sit down, and offered facilities for an all-in-one evening’s

Times, October 1935, pp. 48-50.

84 *Glasgow Herald*, February 22, 1938. The information here is drawn from the records contained in microfilmed registration files for the BIHA held by Companies House, Cardiff, a copy of which is in the author’s possession (Cardiff, Companies House, Company Records, Company No. 306186, British Ice Hockey Association Ltd.).

85 Patton, *Ice Hockey*, p. 22.

86 *Glasgow Herald*, January 15, 1929; *The Scotsman*, January 12, 1929.

87 *The Scotsman*, March 25, October 2 and 9, 1929; Patton, *Ice Hockey*, p. 25.

88 John Walton, *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870-1940* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Richards, *The Age of the Dream Palace: Cinema and Society in 1930s Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

visit such as a milk bar and a dining room. With an annual wage bill of over £55,000, hockey inspired such great commercial confidence that investors were keen to be involved, despite the impact of the Depression on Scotland's economy. As William Brown, a Glasgow-based investor and McGill graduate explained, "[I]t is our plan to put ice hockey on a national basis in Scotland."⁸⁹ They no doubt saw that, in the words of one Edinburgh councillor, hockey "makes money."⁹⁰

In England there was a similar desire to cash in, and few parts of the country were without a rink by the end of the decade. Bournemouth, on the south coast, gained its rink in 1930, nearby Southampton in July 1931. In Bristol, to the west, the city's Coliseum Theatre was converted for use as a skating rink and cinema in 1932, gaining a permanent hockey club, the Bristol Bears, in 1937. In the Midlands, there was Birmingham Ice Rink, home of Warwickshire and later the Birmingham Maple Leafs, which opened in 1931, and Nottingham Ice Stadium, built in 1938, which became home of the Nottingham Panthers after the Second World War. In the North West, the Liverpool Ice Palace opened in a converted roller rink and dance hall in 1935, and the Blackpool Ice Drome opened in 1937. Finally, in the North East, Durham Ice Rink, a former ice factory converted after refrigerators became more common domestic appliances, opened in 1940. Most impressive of all were the Oxford Ice Rink, which opened on November 7, 1930, and at 20,000 square feet was by far the largest in Britain for the next two years, and Brighton Sports Stadium, which became an ice rink in 1935 having initially been a sea-water swimming pool.⁹¹ The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society also invested more than £60,000 in a rink in south Belfast, which opened in 1934, and plans were made for new facilities (and professional franchises) in Dublin and Cardiff, although these were never realized.⁹²

If these rinks seemed impressive, they compared little with the most overt statements of hockey's new-found status, which were found in London. Prompted by the opening of the Empire Pool and Sports Arena at Wembley in 1934, a wave of new facilities for ice sport swept the mid-1930s, each designed not to evoke the frozen landscapes of Canada (as had been the case with Niagara Hall a generation before) but to compete with the great stadia found in Toronto and New York, as well as with each other.⁹³ Harringay Arena, for example, the last of interwar London's major rinks, opened in 1936, had an architectural design, a starkly modernist octagon, which took several cues from Maple Leaf Gardens. The National Sporting Club's remodelled Empress Hall at Earl's Court had opened the previous year with a 12,000-seat ice arena at its core. Its design consciously

⁸⁹ *Daily Mail*, December 27, 1937.

⁹⁰ *The Scotsman*, February 6, 1937; February 18, October 1, and December 24, 1938; November 15, 1939; *Glasgow Herald*, February 4, 1938; March 1, April 20, and July 12, 1939.

⁹¹ *Western Daily Press*, October 10, 1934; *Glasgow Herald*, March 19, 1938; *Western Gazette*, December 16, 1932, and October 12, 1934; *Manchester Guardian*, November 13 and 25, 1930; Patton, *Ice Hockey*, pp. 22-30.

⁹² *Daily Mail*, March 3, 1936, and November 28, 1939; *Windsor Daily Star*, April 7, 1939; David Hassan, "From Kings to Giants: A History of Ice Hockey in Belfast, 1930-2002," *Sport in History*, vol. 24, no. 1 (2004), pp. 77-93.

⁹³ Bowman, *On the Ice*, p. 38.

evoked Madison Square Garden.⁹⁴ One Canadian Prairie newspaper even went so far as to claim, much to the delight of Sir Arthur Elvin, that “Wembley is unquestionably in a class all of its own. Madison Square Garden can’t hold a candle.”⁹⁵

Few domestic sports, with the exception of soccer, boxing, and darts, enjoyed such a concentrated period of success.⁹⁶ For any sort of parallel, therefore, historians must turn their attention to the other imported commercial sports that appeared in Britain between the wars: greyhound racing and speedway (and it is no surprise that hockey should have had a strong relationship with both). As scholars have shown, the rise of greyhound racing was rapid and based on significant financial outlay, all with the prospect of major return for investors.⁹⁷ Confidence developed alongside consumer appetite for speed and danger, of which there was ample in both hockey and speedway, and the introduction of technology such as floodlights and loud-speaker public address systems into the arenas. Mass-Observers, writing in 1937, captured the essence of this modernism:

Wembley Stadium has all the stage effects at its finger-tips. Floodlights dominate the arena; the lighting is always spectacular and whenever the opportunity arises sentimental.... If the audience gets excited the loudspeaker makes some crack and keeps them in good humour; if someone yells a comment it will immediately pick it up with ready repartee. The controlling staff can so fully measure the feelings of the spectators that it knows just how far it can go.⁹⁸

Courting of audiences went much further than provision of charismatic public-address operators. By the end of the 1930s, there were cigarette cards to collect, special posters for the London Underground, adventure stories in magazines and annuals for young boys to read, dedicated newspapers including *Ice Hockey World*, films such as *I See Ice* (1938) starring George Formby for working-class enthusiasts to watch at the cinema alongside newsreel reports on matches, and BBC commentaries giving a flavour of matches to people across the country, whether they had ever had the chance to go to a league game or not.

⁹⁴ *The Scotsman*, November 6, 1931.

⁹⁵ Erhardt, *Ice Hockey*, p. 13; Mike Cronin, “Arthur Elvin and the Dogs of Wembley,” *The Sports Historian*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2002), pp. 100-114; *Leader-Post* [Regina], February 12, 1935.

⁹⁶ Jones, *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*, p. 45; Matthew Taylor, “Round the London Ring: Boxing, Class and Community in Interwar London,” *The London Journal*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2009), pp. 139-162; Patrick Chaplin, *Darts in England 1900-1939: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 1.

⁹⁷ Mark Clapson, *A Bit of a Flutter: Popular Gambling and English Society, c. 1823-1961* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 138-161; Mike Huggins, “Everybody’s Going to the Dogs? The Middle Classes and Greyhound Racing in Britain between the Wars,” *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2007), pp. 401-444; Daryl Leeworthy, “A Diversion from the New Leisure: Greyhound Racing, Working-Class Culture, and the Politics of Unemployment in Inter-War South Wales,” *Sport in History*, vol. 32, no. 1 (2012), pp. 53-73; David Toms, “The Electric Hare: Greyhound Racing’s Development in Ireland, 1927-1958,” *Irish Economic and Social History*, vol. 40 (2013), pp. 69-85.

⁹⁸ Mass-Observation Archive [hereafter M-OA], Sussex University Special Collections, TC 82, Box 2: Sport, 1937-1947: 82/2/G – Ice Hockey, B. W. W. and H. H., “Description of Ice Hockey Match,” February 27, 1937.

One such fan was Les Tebbutt from Northampton. Born into a working-class family in 1920, Les kept a diary that offers keen insight into the presence of hockey in both his, and his family's, wider entertainment habits and the range of engagements that it was possible to have with the sport in the later part of the 1930s. In March 1936, for example, he writes of having "heard a commentary on the England v America ice hockey match," which England lost 5-3. Several months later, on a trip to the cinema with friends, he watched *King of the Ice Rink* (known in North America as *King of Hockey*) starring Dick Purcell. Lastly, at the end of October 1937, his family travelled to Wembley "to see the ice hockey match, Wembley Lions v Harringay Greyhounds."⁹⁹ The Tebbutts likely travelled to London by coach, and their visit to the ice rink was an undoubted event in their calendar that year. It was a relatively common occurrence for hockey enthusiasts resident in towns such as Northampton, Reading, and Oxford that were not too far from London for such a journey to be made. Reg Ricketts, who worked for Oxford University Press in the typesetting department, recalled that:

I took to ice skating ... and I progressed quite well in this line and it got very popular with supporting Oxford University Ice Hockey team and I was soon engrossed in organising trips from University Press to all the away games.... [W]e visited most of the rinks and it got very, very popular indeed. And I finally found that I had to run two coaches when the university played Wembley Lions.¹⁰⁰

The atmosphere at the rinks added to its appeal. As Mass-Observation discerned:

For the audience this seems a substitute for Saturday night film-shows where the rink is a movie screen and the players stars. Whole families, old women as well as young youths with fiancées, were as frequent as men. In that respect it differed from a football match tho the crowd-reactions to "incidents," delays and the referee were similar. During the intervals the boys and girls behave as ... they would at a dancehall, drinking, laughing and making leading sex-jokes. For them the ice rink combines the dancehall, the cinema and the football match.¹⁰¹

Despite the evident snobbery, it is clear that spectators enjoyed a spectacle unlike that found at other sports arenas. A few years later, Mass-Observation undertook another report on hockey, drawing this time on the experiences of Harold Nicholson: "It was a marvellous sight. The excitement was terrific.... The cheering and shouting was deafening. Encouragement, cries, roars, barking, electrified the Pool's atmosphere."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Les Tebbutt Diary, entries for March 9, 1936; August 21 and October 28, 1937. I am grateful to Dr. Melanie Tebbutt of Manchester Metropolitan University for access to her father's diary and for permission to reproduce these entries here. For a wider sense of Les's activities in the 1930s, alongside trenchant analysis, see Melanie Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁰ Oxfordshire History Centre, MT1924c, "Reg Ricketts Interview with Dennis Payne," *Linger Awhile*, BBC Radio Oxford, January 18, 1981.

¹⁰¹ M-OA, "Description of Ice Hockey Match."

¹⁰² M-OA, TC 82, Box 2: Sport, 1937-1947: 82/2/G – Ice Hockey HJN, "Ice Hockey and the War, Wembley Pool," November 4, 1939.

What startled commentators who rarely ventured to the ice rink (and attracted those who regularly went) was the rough character of the sport, something perceived as having been “imported” to Britain by the Canadian players.¹⁰³ Then, as now, the Canadian style of hockey was understood as an aggressive, often violent form of play, principally because that is the form of hockey marketed by the National Hockey League and those who had a considerable financial stake in the commercial game.¹⁰⁴ As cultural critic Brian Kennedy writes, “Canadians ... have hockey to teach them how to take a beating. The game frequently got rough, with violence not only confined to the players but also occurring between them and spectators. The hockey stick, a weapon to this day, was used as a club on occasion.”¹⁰⁵ It is a depiction of hockey echoed many times by scholars of the game. Michael Robidoux, for example, has argued that “hockey’s violent and aggressive style separated itself from other bourgeois (European) pastimes, including the increasingly popular game of baseball that was entering Canada from the United States.”¹⁰⁶ Interwar British hockey was no stranger to violence: match reports contain frequent references to “flying fists” and free-for-all fights. Nevertheless, there was clear debate over its place in the game: body checking, fighting, and lack of respect for referees all jarred with prevailing perceptions of what was and was not good sportsmanship, what was and was not “British” in sporting terms.¹⁰⁷ Its presence focused attention on the considerable Canadian presence in the game and led commentators to perceive clear differences between the manner in which sport was played in Britain and how it was played in North America, where money governed conscience. The *Skating Times*, for example, remarked in 1934 that “we ask the many Canadians playing this season in England to remember that the game is sport rather than civil war.”¹⁰⁸ While the Canadian players protested that “this is how we do it back home,” rink owners such as Sir Arthur Elvin championed the idea that the cleaner the sport, the more popular it was.¹⁰⁹

Although couched in language that focused on “national” characteristics, the debate over violence in hockey was merely a reiteration of a long-standing debate in sport about the shift from “gentlemanly” amateur pastimes to rowdy professional engagements. As Colin Howell has observed of this debate in baseball, “the commercialization and professionalization of team sport, they [the promoters of clean sport] argued, attracted less dignified members of the working class who put financial reward above the values of self-discipline, self-sacrifice and teamwork.”¹¹⁰ Would-be middle-class spectators, it was believed, were put off by reports of violence, not the least when police officers had to escort referees

¹⁰³ Erhardt, *Ice Hockey*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Jason Blake, *Canadian Hockey Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 82.

¹⁰⁵ Brian Kennedy, *My Country is Hockey* (Edmonton: Argenta Press, 2010), p. 28.

¹⁰⁶ Michael A. Robidoux, “Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey,” *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 115, no. 456 (2002), p. 219.

¹⁰⁷ *Daily Express*, March 23, 1936; March 1, 1937.

¹⁰⁸ *Skating Times*, December 1934, p. 25.

¹⁰⁹ Giddens, *Ice Hockey*, pp. 78-79.

¹¹⁰ Colin D. Howell, “Baseball, Class and Community in the Maritime Provinces, 1870-1910,” *Histoire sociale/ Social History*, vol. 22, no. 44 (November 1989), pp. 275-276.

from the rinks for their own protection, and audiences would therefore suffer.¹¹¹ To draw on Mass-Observation once again: “Fights on the rink are very frequent and it can easily be understood how ready the poorer and less mechanically controlled audience at Harringay in the Hackney Marshes were to take part.”¹¹² The explicitly class-based language of Mass-Observation betrays little of its actual perception of hockey as a middle-class spectator sport, at least in terms of those who attended the London rinks.¹¹³ To ensure the game was able to contain (even counter) the hyper-masculine, aggressive tendencies of its Canadian players, officials set about altering the rules to prevent body-checking and fighting and to better reflect earlier attitudes towards aggression and instil the sort of respect for referees that had prevailed during the middle-class, amateur era. The game was to be made “British” rather than left in its “Canadian” form.

Away from the ice, in the homes of those thousands of hockey fans who could not get to a rink, perception of the sport’s character was necessarily different, but fans were no less aware of its Canadianness. Canadian commentating staff were used by the BBC after a failed attempt in January 1932 to employ the corporation’s pioneering soccer broadcaster, George Allison.¹¹⁴ Allison was the corporation’s frequent go-to whenever broadcasting experimented with a new sport; he did the BBC’s first American Football commentary, for example. However, his reading of hockey failed because of his unfamiliarity with the sport and the speed with which it was played. “I found my master when it came to ice hockey,” he later admitted. Because it left his speech “semi-articulate owing to the great pace,” he refused to do any more.¹¹⁵ The corporation realized it needed someone more familiar with hockey, who could read the plays on the ice and keep up with its rapid-fire pace; in other words, they needed a Canadian. It was not, therefore, until the BBC hired Bob Bowman from the *Ottawa Citizen* in the mid-1930s that hockey broadcasting really came into its own with a more “American” style of delivery capturing the essence of the “fastest game in the world.”

Bowman came to the fore during the 1936 Winter Olympics and became the sport’s first media personality. Although he left the BBC in March 1936, just a fortnight after his Olympic broadcast, and spent the next nine months writing a column for the *Daily Express* and broadcasting a Sunday lunchtime sports show on Radio Luxembourg, Bowman defined the sound of hockey for radio listeners.¹¹⁶ The remarkable survival of Bowman’s broadcast from the 1936 Winter Olympics enables us to appreciate its modern character, as the following transcript demonstrates:

Foster’s down on the ice—the English goalkeeper is down on the ice—there’s the pass right in front, Spain shoots and misses. Spain had an open goal. Foster was

¹¹¹ *Daily Mail*, December 17, 1937.

¹¹² M-OA, “Description of Ice Hockey Match.”

¹¹³ M-OA, “Ice Hockey and the War, Wembley Pool.”

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, January 18, 1932; British Broadcasting Corporation, *Sixth Annual Report, 1932*, Cmd 4277 (London: HMSO, 1933), p. 6.

¹¹⁵ George Allison, *Allison Calling* (London: Staples Press, 1948), p. 54.

¹¹⁶ *Daily Express*, February 27 and March 2, 1936; *Montreal Gazette*, December 29, 1936.

helpless, Foster hasn't picked up his stick yet! ... Hey! Oh there's a left and a right, a right upper cut, a right cross, a right cross to the jaw, a left upper cut to the ribs, and err the referee steps in between 'em. No, no ladies and gentlemen, this is not a re-broadcast of the Petersen-Neusel fight, this is just an ice hockey match between England and the United States and err boy they certainly got het up down there.¹¹⁷

The rhythm of Bowman's commentary was unusual on the BBC, given its clearly North American style, but it was popular and laid the groundwork for an experiment during the Second World War when the corporation broadcast *Hockey Night in Canada* for Canadian service personnel stationed in Britain. Ordinary Britons, too, could tune in and listen to the National Hockey League (albeit on Sunday evenings, rather than Saturday nights), absorbing the North American style of play and commentary delivered by Foster Hewitt.¹¹⁸ Yet, for all of Hewitt's "authenticity," the hockey commentaries from Toronto were not all that different from those offered by Bowman and Stewart MacPherson from Wembley or Harringay Arena.¹¹⁹ Hockey was, after all, a shared culture, developed among Canadian players and British spectators, and had common features on both sides of the Atlantic.

Conclusion

Writing at the beginning of the 1990s, Richard Gruneau and David Whitson argued that "one effect of European expansion would almost certainly be to make hockey seem less Canadian."¹²⁰ Although not a historical conclusion but a prediction for the future of hockey in that decade, their remark has useful applications for the interwar years. The growth of British ice hockey certainly challenges the widely held perception that North American sports made no obvious inroads at all into British culture, even if their presence and popularity was slighter than that of film, music, or literature. Shared enthusiasm for hockey demonstrates the need to reconsider the sporting divisions between Britain and Canada introduced artificially by historians, with the conclusion that, while there was evidently a "British world" of shared sporting experience, there was also a "North Atlantic world" in which Britons shared, to varying extents, common forms of entertainment with their Canadian and American cousins. Clearly, as has been shown above, the uptake of one of the most prominent North American sports was not a fad, a momentary engagement with something that otherwise did not belong.

In the final analysis, the potential, commercial or otherwise, of hockey in Britain in the interwar years was enormous. Although its impact on Canadian administrators was to amplify the fear of professionalism that had first emerged

117 British Library Sound Archive, BBC Catalogue Number: 870 264, Bob Bowman, "Commentary on Great Britain v United States Ice Hockey Match, 15 February 1936."

118 BBC Written Archive Centre, Caversham Park, Reading (hereafter BBC WAC), Microfilmed Scripts, Bob Bowman, "Ice Hockey," unpublished script for *Searchlight on Sport*, February 24, 1940.

119 BBC WAC, Broadcasts for the Fighting Forces, 1940-1941: Dominion Troops, R34/270/1, Memo from R. A. Randall to Assistant Controller (Overseas Broadcasts), February 1, 1940; Letter to Bob Bowman from R. A. Randall, February 3, 1940.

120 Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sports, Identities, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 268.

with the development of the National Hockey League, for Britons, hockey refocused attention on the Canadian way of doing things and ensured a greater engagement with the sights and sounds of Canada's game. Whether in the form of Canadian players, rink announcers, journalists, or radio commentators, hockey typified the manner in which new sports were able to expand and embed themselves quickly into the British way of life in the interwar years. Tens of thousands of people watched games in person each year, and many more listened on the radio. At a time when British newspapers regularly carried advertisements promoting emigration to Canada as a way of escaping the effects of the Depression at home, hockey gave a window into the world would-be emigrants could expect. It gave opportunities, also, for young Canadians to earn their way in Britain by skating on the border between the old world and the new.

