



Notre Dame Journal of International & Comparative Law

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 5

2-21-2018

Amateur vs. Professional in Cold War Hockey: A Consideration of Relative Skill Levels and Their Implications for Professional Hockey Today

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Recommended Citation

Soares, John (2018) "Amateur vs. Professional in Cold War Hockey: A Consideration of Relative Skill Levels and Their Implications for Professional Hockey Today," *Notre Dame Journal of International & Comparative Law*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndjicl/vol8/iss1/5>

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AMATEUR VS. PROFESSIONAL IN COLD WAR HOCKEY: CONSIDERATION OF RELATIVE SKILL LEVELS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY TODAY

JOHN SOARES*

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INTRODUCTION

In the United States today, amateur sports are widely viewed, in definitional terms, as inferior to their professional counterparts. Amateur athletes are typically either those, like the best college football and basketball players, who are perfecting their skills so that they can take their game to the “next level”—i.e., professional—or they are competitors who simply are not and never will be good enough to compete with the very best in their game.

As historians of sport know, this was not always the case. Prior to World War II, for example, professional football did not receive the kind of respect and media attention the college game did. Admittedly, from at least the time of Henry Beach Needham’s 1905 expose in *McClure’s Magazine* and the Carnegie Foundation’s 1929 report, and at periodic intervals thereafter, critics demonstrated that college football was far less respectable and less genuinely amateur than its defenders imagined.¹ Even today, sports like swimming and gymnastics lack professional circuits that can outshine top amateur competition.

Another significant exception to the perceived inferiority of amateur sports was found in international ice hockey, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. For historical reasons explained in more detail below, amateur and professional hockey developed in very different ways. To oversimplify, the professional

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¹ See JOHN SAYLE WATTERSON, COLLEGE FOOTBALL: HISTORY, SPECTACLE, CONTROVERSY 66–68, 164–176 (2000).

game, played in North America, placed more of a premium on body-checking and physical play, while the amateur variant, which developed largely in Europe, typically emphasized passing, stickhandling, and puck possession. While it was impossible for years to hold meaningful contests matching top professionals and amateurs, a series of rule changes and political developments between 1969 and 1972 broke down barriers between the amateur and professional versions of the game, and permitted unprecedented new competitions.² When the world's best amateurs started playing the world's top professionals, the amateurs held their own. In fact, this article will argue that in hockey, the amateur game was often the more skilled version. This reality has been obscured by Cold War politics and the ideological rivalry that overshadowed much international competition in the 1970s and 1980s, and sometimes made it difficult for observers to credit the accomplishments of their ideological rivals. This essay will consider the problematic nature of the term "amateur," the differences in rules between professional and amateur hockey, the changes that brought the rules of the amateur International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) closer to those of the professional National Hockey League (NHL), and the assessment of amateur and professional hockey made possible by historic competitions such as the 1972 Canada-USSR Summit Series, the 1974 Canada-USSR series, the 1975–76 Super Series, Canada Cup tournaments between 1976 and 1987, and the 1979 Challenge Cup. It will conclude with some observations about the comparative merits of skill and physicality in hockey, and professional rules that discourage skilled play.

I. AMATEURISM: A DEFINITIONAL PROBLEM

As competitors have long understood, the very definition of "amateur" poses problems. Historians Matthew Llewelyn and John Gleaves demonstrate in *The Rise and Fall of Olympic Amateurism* that the concept was difficult to define, inconsistent across sports and time periods, and promoted hypocrisy in almost any situation where competition was limited to amateurs.³ A case in point: for most of the Cold War, Olympic athletes and those competing in world championships run by international federations were required to be amateurs. To

² This essay builds on the author's earlier works on Cold War hockey, including: John Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice: International Ice Hockey, 1947-1980*, 34 J. SPORT HIST. 207 (2007) [hereinafter Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice*]; John Soares, *Difficult to Draw a Balance Sheet: Ottawa Views the 1974 Canada-USSR Hockey Series*, COLD WAR INT'L HIST. PROJECT WORKING PAPER SERIES, Feb. 2014, at 1 [hereinafter Soares, *Difficult to Draw*]; John Soares, *East Beats West: Ice Hockey and the Cold War*, in SPORT AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF MODERN EUROPE: STATES, MEDIA AND MARKETS, 1950-2010, at 35 (Alan Tomlinson et al. eds., 2011); John Soares, *Hockey Diplomacy and U.S.-Canadian Relations in the Early Trudeau Years*, 40 DIPLOMATIC HIST. 810 (2016) [hereinafter Soares, *Hockey Diplomacy*]; John Soares, "Our Way of Life Against Theirs": *Ice Hockey and the Cold War*, in DIPLOMATIC GAMES: SPORT, STATECRAFT, AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SINCE 1945, at 251 (Heather L. Dichter & Andrew L. Johns eds., 2014) [hereinafter Soares, *Our Way of Life*]; John Soares, 'Very Correct Adversaries': *The Cold War on Ice from 1947 to the Squaw Valley Olympics*, 30 INT'L J. HIST. SPORT 1536 (2013) [hereinafter Soares, *Very Correct Adversaries*].

³ MATTHEW P. LLEWELLYN & JOHN GLEAVES, *THE RISE AND FALL OF OLYMPIC AMATEURISM* (Randy Roberts et al. eds., 2016).

circumvent these requirements, athletes in Cold War-era Communist countries that practiced full-time, year-round, and received among the most generous compensation packages in those societies, claimed amateur status because they were nominally defined as army officers, graduate students, tradesmen, or practitioners of some other occupation.⁴ In hockey, the pursuit of some other vocation was crucial to Communist explanations of the differences between amateurs and professionals. The Soviets argued that “[m]ost of our players are in higher education institutes and colleges or in the military.”⁵ They claimed that Canadian players focused solely on hockey, while “Soviet ice hockey players ha[d] a rich spiritual life,” and opportunities for “higher education and [to] acquire useful professions.”⁶ In addition, the Soviets believed Canadian hockey professionals often embraced the shallowest form of physical exploitation: the Soviets thought Canadian hockey professionals would “deliberately initiate fights in order to entertain their spectators.”⁷

Despite Soviet claims, it was public knowledge, early on, inside the USSR and out, that Soviet athletes were in fact well compensated for full-time training—professionals by any honest reckoning. In 1954, *U.S. News & World Report* showed a cartoon from a Soviet satire magazine depicting an office where all employees had two titles on the name plate at their desk: a position in the firm and a position on the football (soccer) team. The panel also showed that only the chief bookkeeper was at work while the other employees could be seen through an office window, out practicing on the pitch.⁸ Nor was this approach limited to the Soviet Union. In 1954, the U.S. embassy in Prague reported that Czechoslovakia’s elite athletes were usually conscripted into the army, where “they live like race horses” and have “nothing to do but eat and train.”⁹

⁴ See YURI BROKHIN, *THE BIG RED MACHINE: THE RISE AND FALL OF SOVIET OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS* (1978); JAMES RIORDAN, *SPORT IN SOVIET SOCIETY: DEVELOPMENT OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN RUSSIA AND THE USSR* (1977); and ANATOLI TARASOV, *ROAD TO OLYMPUS* (1972), for more on the Soviet sports system. See also Robert F. Baumann, *The Central Army Sports Club (TsSKA): Forging a Military Tradition in Soviet Ice Hockey*, 15 J. SPORT HIST. 151 (1988) (discussing Soviet hockey specifically); Jenifer Parks, *Verbal Gymnastics: Sports, Bureaucracy, and the Soviet Union’s Entrance into the Olympic Games, 1946–1952*, in *EAST PLAYS WEST: SPORT AND THE COLD WAR* 27 (Stephen Wagg & David L. Andrews eds., 2007); Jim Riordan, *Playing to New Rules: Soviet Sport and Perestroika*, 42 SOVIET STUD. 133 (1990); James Riordan, *Soviet Sport and Soviet Foreign Policy*, 26 SOVIET STUD. 322 (1974); Jim Riordan, *The Rise and Fall of Soviet Olympic Champions*, 2 OLYMPIKA 25 (1993); Jim Riordan, *The Role of Sport in Soviet Foreign Policy*, 43 INT’L J. 569 (1988).

⁵ Don Ramsey, *Soviet Official Denies Players Pros as Finns Trowned*, *GLOBE & MAIL* (Toronto), Sept. 8, 1976, at S2 (quoting Soviet hockey official Viktor Kotoshkin).

⁶ Memorandum from Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Sec’y of State for External Affairs (Oct. 5, 1972) (on file with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, No. 626, RG25, vol. 10921) (including translation of newspaper article *Comments on Ice Hockey Matches Between U.S.S.R. and Canada*, dated Sept. 30, 1972, from Russian news agency TASS).

⁷ Telex Message from Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Sec’y of State for External Affairs (Jan. 30, 1970) (on file with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, No. 101, RG29, vol. 2176) (translating newspaper article *Разве это хоккей? Полемиические заметки* [Is This Hockey? Polemical Notes], from Soviet children’s newspaper КОМСОЛЬСКАЯ ПРАВДА [KOMSOMOLSKAYA PRAVDA]).

⁸ *Reds Hope to Rule Sports, Too: 12 Million Athletes in Training to Beat the Best*, *U.S. NEWS & WORLD REP.*, Aug. 20, 1954, at 36 (featuring a cartoon “Men at ‘Work,’” originally published in Soviet satirical magazine *Krokodil*); see also Avery Brundage Book – Russian Sports Book 1954, (on file with the University of Illinois Archives, Urbana, IL, in the Avery Brundage Collection) (noting the significance of the *Krokodil* cartoon found in Avery Brundage’s files).

⁹ Foreign Service Dispatch from HICOG Frankfurt to Dep’t of State (Jan. 28, 1954) (on file with United States National Archives, College Park, MD, No. 2009, at 860.453/1-2854, Box 5145A, RG59, State Department Central Decimal Files, 1950–54).

It was not just the Communist nations that found ways to keep their best players classified as amateurs. In Sweden and Finland, company teams were the favored device for doing this. Prior to the mid-1970s, when the top Swedes and Finns began coming to North America to play professionally in significant numbers, virtually all of the best Swedes and Finns played in their own countries, and were classified as amateurs.¹⁰

In fact, the only nations that were open about the professionalism of their best players were the United States and Canada.¹¹ And this mattered little for the United States: in the years before NHL expansion began in 1967, rosters of professional teams in the NHL and minor leagues were almost entirely Canadian. When American Tommy Williams broke into the NHL in early 1962, he was the only non-Canadian in the entire league.¹² With NHL expansion that began in 1967, even more Canadians turned professional, and became ineligible for the Olympics and world tournaments. According to Hockey Canada's president, in 1970, 639 (out of 654 total) professional hockey players were Canadians.¹³ The situation for Canadian amateur hockey would worsen further with the 1972 establishment of the World Hockey Association (WHA), a professional league with teams in Canada and the United States that intended to rival the NHL.

Canadians were unhappy about losing international competitions in their national game with such basic unfairness working against them. In dealing with this, Canadian diplomats and hockey officials worked hard to promote changes in international rules; the Canadians, in particular, wanted the IIHF to open its world championships to professionals. The efforts of these hockey and diplomatic officials gave rise to the unprecedented international competitions in the 1970s described below. In the short term, though, displeased by the unfairness of the amateurism issue, Canada withdrew from Olympic and world championship hockey from 1970 through 1976.¹⁴

One of those who recognized the unfairness in the IIHF's amateur rules was long-time International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Avery Brundage.¹⁵ Brundage was a proponent of the pure strain of amateurism he had exhibited in his own days as a competitive athlete, which culminated at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Brundage had long believed that hockey was too commercialized to ever comply with his strict vision of amateurism; trying to prove his point, in 1948 he triggered a showdown over the eligibility of U.S. hockey players that included rival teams showing up in St. Moritz claiming to represent the United States, a threatened boycott, and near cancellation of those Winter Games.¹⁶ In 1970, Brundage wrote that "it seem[ed] ridiculous to bar the Canadians from the

¹⁰ Soares, *Our Way of Life*, *supra* note 2, at 261.

¹¹ *Id.* at 260 & 287 n.40.

¹² *Williams Only U.S. Citizen in Ranks of NHL*, BOS. GLOBE, Jan. 28, 1962, at C56.

¹³ Charles Hay, President Hockey Can., address to the Calgary Chamber of Commerce (Mar. 4, 1970) (on file with the University of Illinois Archives, Urbana, IL, in the Avery Brundage Collection, Box 119).

¹⁴ Soares, *Our Way of Life*, *supra* note 2, at 261–64, 289 n.51.

¹⁵ See LLEWELYN & GLEAVES, *supra* note 3; see also ALLEN GUTTMANN, *THE GAMES MUST GO ON: AVERY BRUNDAGE AND THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT* (1984) for an excellent biography.

¹⁶ See Gordon MacDonald, *A Colossal Embroglio: Control of Amateur Ice Hockey in the United States and the 1948 Winter Games*, 7 OLYMPIKA 43 (1998); Soares, *Very Correct Adversaries*, *supra* note 2, at 1537–39.

World's Championships and permit" other world hockey powers to compete.¹⁷ In some ways, though, sports officials were consistent. Hockey officials in many countries did not complain if Canada was represented in international competitions by players with prior professional experience, as long as they had been "reamateurized" before the tournament. For example, at the 1958 World Hockey Championships, Canada was represented by a team that included *fifteen former professionals on its seventeen-man roster*!¹⁸ National hockey officials did not challenge each other's definition of who or what was amateur, and they were not about to challenge Canada if its Olympic or world tournament players had professional experience—as long as those players were identified as amateur in time for the competition.¹⁹

Amateurism, then, included a significant dose of arbitrariness and unfairness, if not downright hypocrisy; many of the purported amateurs should have been classified as professionals. However, despite their uniformly high level of play, there were substantial differences between the two schools of hockey: North American professionals and international amateurs developed different rules, and consequently very different styles of play.

II. DIFFERENCES IN PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR RULES

The single biggest factor shaping the different development of amateur and professional hockey was World War II. After 1939, there were no Olympic or world (or even European) championship tournaments until 1947, and Canada missed that event.²⁰ Thus, for close to a decade there was no meaningful contact among serious hockey players from North America and Europe.

Developments in professional hockey were significant even for North American amateurs because many amateur leagues there followed NHL rules.²¹ Even those who did not, like the American collegiate and high school circuits, still tended to play a more physical game, on a smaller ice surface, than the Europeans.²² Canadians, whose amateur rules closely followed the NHL, played a much more physical and sometimes combative game, even when they were amateurs competing under international rules.²³ The differences between the two games became so pronounced that by the early 1950s there were suggestions in

¹⁷ Letter from Avery Brundage to Severin Lovenskiold (Apr. 2, 1970) (on file with the University of Illinois Archives, Urbana, IL, in the Avery Brundage Collection, Box 216).

¹⁸ Telegram from STKHM to EXTER (Dec. 12, 1969) (on file with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, No. 812, RG29, vol. 2176).

¹⁹ See Soares, *Our Way of Life*, *supra* note 2, at 260–64.

²⁰ TOMASZ MALOLEPSZY, EUROPEAN ICE HOCKEY CHAMPIONSHIP RESULTS: SINCE 1910, at 54–55 (2013).

²¹ Soares, *Very Correct Adversaries*, *supra* note 2, at 1545.

²² *Id.*

²³ Soares, *Our Way of Life*, *supra* note 2, at 267.

Europe that local federations establish a “European school of hockey ‘even at the expense of severing relations with the U.S. and Canadian teams.’”²⁴

The differences in the European amateur and North American professional versions of the sport were attributable to rule differences that appear small at first glance, but had significant impact on play. The most important variation was the size of the ice surface—a difference which persists today, despite the convergence of the amateur and professional games in other respects.²⁵ Hockey rinks in Europe, at most Olympic sites, and even at some U.S. facilities, use Olympic-sized ice sheets that are 100 feet wide—15 feet wider than NHL-regulation ice.²⁶ This difference sounds small, but ice sheets are 200 feet long, so those 15 additional feet translate to 300 square feet of added ice surface. This in turn means much more space for stickhandling, making it difficult for teams to play any of the various “trap” or “lock” defensive systems designed to clog the neutral zone that have often been popular in professional hockey.²⁷ The added space also creates very different angles for passing, and more opportunities for players to either pass or keep possession of the puck, rather than dumping the puck up the ice and hoping a teammate can retrieve it. In fact, Soviet hockey teams tabulated the number of passes by each squad in a game—a practice that would have been unusual in North America.²⁸

Perhaps the most significant rules difference concerned body-checking, which was long limited to the defensive zone in international amateur hockey but unrestricted among North American professionals. In 1969, IIHF rules were changed to permit body-checking in all three zones.²⁹ All-zone body-checking in professional hockey has meant that a common strategy used by the team in possession of the puck is to shoot it into the offensive zone, giving away possession of the puck but hoping to “establish a forecheck” and reclaim it when in a better scoring position.³⁰ This approach is commonly called “dump and chase” because it promotes frequent collisions (Washington, D.C. lawyer Stuart Feldstein has referred to it as “NASCAR hockey.”)³¹

“Dump and chase” can be an effective strategy when body-checking in the offensive zone is permitted, but it makes little sense when it is prohibited. In that case, a forward dumping the puck into the offensive zone is merely racing the opposing team’s defensemen to the puck, often in cases where one of the defenseman has a head start. This, however, did not stop some North American teams from using this approach during the IIHF’s era of restricted body-

²⁴ Foreign Service Dispatch from Oslo to Dep’t of State (Apr. 29, 1953) (on file with the United States National Archives, College Park, MD, No. 962 at 857.4533/4-2953, Box 5116, RG59, State Department Central Decimal Files, 1950–54).

²⁵ Soares, *Very Correct Adversaries*, *supra* note 2, at 1545 & 1551 n.75.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ See TARASOV, *supra* note 4 (detailing the number of passes by the two teams in a number of Olympic and world championship games).

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *International Hockey Timeline*, INT’L ICE HOCKEY FED’N, <http://www.iihf.com/iihf-home/history/the-iihf/timeline/> (last visited Dec. 29, 2017).

³⁰ Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 5.

³¹ Mr. Feldstein used the phrase in a conversation with the author during years in which Mr. Feldstein was a senior partner, and the author was a legal assistant and law librarian at a firm then known as Fleischman and Walsh.

checking, which in turn tended to produce more body contact and physical play than a puck-possession approach.³²

A factor that compounded the differences between the professional and amateur games was the distinctive Soviet style which varied not only by the number of passes, but the extreme selectivity in taking shots.³³ Professional teams, and their imitators in North America, often liked to “get the puck to the net” in the hopes that a redirection or rebound would lead to a quality scoring chance, even against an excellent goaltender. By contrast, the Soviet amateurs shot the puck far less frequently.³⁴ In addition to tracking the number of passes each team made, the Soviets also calculated shooting percentage—a statistical category that would have seemed pointless to most professionals.³⁵ As a result of the “extra” passes Soviet amateurs made, the rhythm and flow of their offense was very different from that of professionals. This was particularly noticeable when a Canadian professional goaltender first played against Soviet amateurs; the goaltender would anticipate professional style passing, and position himself accordingly, only to be surprised by the amateurs’ extra passing.³⁶ After the additional pass or passes, the goaltender would be out of position and the amateurs could simply shoot the puck into an empty, undefended net.

In addition to the differences in body-checking and offensive styles, the amateur and professional games also had important differences in the rules concerning penalties. Most infractions are “minor penalties,” which gets a player sent to the penalty box for two minutes while the opposing team plays with a manpower advantage—on the “power play,” in hockey parlance.³⁷ Into the 1960s international rules required a player assessed with a minor penalty to serve the full two minutes in all circumstances, while a professional player charged with a minor penalty could return to the game as soon as the other team scored a goal on the power play. The NHL adopted this rule because the dominant Montreal Canadiens team was scoring so many power play goals when given the full two minutes, that just one or two power plays per game could enable them to build an insurmountable lead.³⁸ In addition, amateur hockey did not change the “icing” rule for a team short-handed because of a penalty, while professional hockey permitted short-handed teams to ice the puck.³⁹ These two rule differences made penalties significantly less punitive in professional hockey.

Consequently, professional hockey, and its amateur imitators in North America, developed a version of the sport that was more violent, more

³² Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 5.

³³ See Soares, *East Beats West*, *supra* note 2, at 38 (“[Soviet] teams emphasized passing, puck possession, and selectivity in taking shots only when there was a good chance of scoring.”).

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ See TARASOV, *supra* note 4, at 175, 192–93 (noting the tabulation of the number of passes, Tarasov mentions the percentage of shots scored in certain international contests); see also Frank Orr, *Canada Victim of Bad Manners When Prizes Given*, *TORONTO STAR*, Dec. 27, 1987, at D2 (showing how Canadian observers were sometimes bewildered by the number of statistical categories Soviet hockey officials tracked).

³⁶ See TARASOV, *supra* note 4, at 98–99.

³⁷ INT’L ICE HOCKEY FED’N, IIHF OFFICIAL RULE BOOK 2014–2018, at 69 (2d ed. 2015).

³⁸ JAMES DUPLACEY, *THE ANNOTATED RULES OF HOCKEY: AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE* 56–57, (Dan Diamond eds., 1996).

³⁹ INT’L ICE HOCKEY FED’N, *supra* note 37, at 47–48. “Icing” is an infraction that occurs when a team shoots the puck from its side of center ice, across the opposing team’s goal line. When a team is called for icing, play is halted and resumed after a faceoff in the offending team’s zone.

physical, and in important ways placed less value on skill than did the amateur version of the game common in Europe.⁴⁰ Differences in play persisted even after IIHF rules changes that brought the amateur and professional games closer together.

III. CHANGES TO THE IIHF RULES

International rule changes occurred at about the same time that Canadian hockey officials—with diplomatic support from the foreign ministry in Ottawa—finally began to have success in breaking down barriers to competition between the best Canadian professionals and the top European amateurs.⁴¹ In addition to the difference in rules between the amateur and professional games, the IOC, into the 1970s, opposed contests between amateurs and professionals in a stringent interpretation of amateurism which held that mere competition against professionals “contaminated” amateurs. This philosophy had its roots in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century amateurism, which prohibited amateurs from competing in events where professionals were welcome, admission fees were charged, or cash prizes were offered—even if they refused to accept any cash prizes themselves.⁴² Although amateur sports authorities had relaxed many of these strictures by the mid-twentieth century, the view that competition against professionals “contaminated” amateurs was promoted into the 1970s by IOC head Brundage.

These restrictions on amateurs caused frustration in Canada and the USSR. Not only were hundreds of the best Canadians excluded from Olympic and world championship tournaments, with such an interpretation of amateurism there was no way to arrange even exhibition games between NHL players and the best Soviets, which might have enabled Canada to reclaim international prestige.⁴³ This also frustrated the Soviets, who valued sports competitions—and victories—against the best of the capitalists. But they attached particular importance to the Olympics, and were unwilling to jeopardize their top players’ amateur status with exhibition contests, and thus were unable to play against the best Canadians.⁴⁴

An important convergence between the professional and amateur games occurred when the IIHF eliminated its zonal restrictions on body-checking in 1969.⁴⁵ Prior to that change, as part of his effort to encourage competitions between the best Russians and Canadians, Anatoli Tarasov, the architect of Soviet hockey power, had been dismissive of the different rules on body-checking. For years Tarasov was co-coach of the Soviet national team, along with Arkady Chernyashev; Tarasov also served as coach of Moscow’s Central

⁴⁰ Soares, *Very Correct Adversaries*, *supra* note 2, at 1545; *see also* Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 5.

⁴¹ Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 10–13.

⁴² RONALD A. SMITH, *SPORTS & FREEDOM: THE RISE OF BIG-TIME COLLEGE ATHLETICS* 165–72 (1988).

⁴³ *See* Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice*, *supra* note 2, at 217.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *International Hockey Timeline*, *supra* note 29.

Army club in the Russian elite league.⁴⁶ In his book about the building of the Soviet program, *Road to Olympus*, Tarasov gleefully described a 1962 exhibition game against the Hamilton Red Wings, one of Canada's major "junior amateur" clubs for top teenaged boys.⁴⁷ In Tarasov's telling, the Hamilton club had been "reinforced with nine professionals, whose game was obviously hard hitting and rough," and it attempted to intimidate the Soviets with rough play. Despite the Hamilton players' hooliganism, no penalties were called. After the first period, the Soviet coaches told their players to hit the Red Wings hard, but within the rules. The clean, hard Soviet hits injured several Red Wings. At the second intermission, the Hamilton coaches pleaded with the Soviets, offering to abandon the rough play if the Soviets agreed to end their punishing (but legal) body-checking, so that both teams could play a "clean and honest game." On those terms, the game was finished.⁴⁸ The moral of Tarasov's story was simple: the Canadians could not intimidate the Soviets with violence and pugnacity.

Tarasov made his dismissiveness of rough play explicit in a challenge to the Canadian professionals, which was reported by the *Toronto Daily Star*.⁴⁹ The *Star* explained that Tarasov said the Soviets were "not afraid of playing by the rougher professional rules," and it quoted Tarasov saying, "We . . . assure you that our boys will be able to knock the eagerness for rough-housing out of anybody who tries to play rough against a Soviet hockey team."⁵⁰

A one-time exhibition, though, was a different matter than the IIHF adopting professional rules. After playing against Canadians under the changed body-checking rules, Tarasov argued that "body-checking throughout the [ice] is harmful for amateur hockey" because it "constitute[d] a license for borrowing some elements from fencing, wrestling and boxing."⁵¹ A coach, Tarasov believed, should encourage his players to develop "chivalry and nobility," but the adoption of professional-style rules for amateurs instead promoted "open brutality" and the overwhelming of skilled play by "incessantly initiated . . . attacks and fights."⁵²

Tarasov's concerns about the brutality of professional hockey would be echoed frequently when hockey entered a new era of amateur vs. professional competition in the 1970s.

⁴⁶ Baumann, *supra* note 4, at 157; TARASOV, *supra* note 4, at 81.

⁴⁷ See TARASOV, *supra* note 4, at 160–63. The author has been unable to independently confirm some of these details provided by Tarasov in *Road to Olympus*. The presence of nine "professionals" would have been significant because with 20-man rosters, the majority of the Hamilton club would have remained amateur, thus enabling the Soviets to claim they had played against an amateur team and not forfeited their amateur status.

⁴⁸ *Id.*

⁴⁹ *Pride or Cowardice? Russians Challenge the Pros Once More*, TORONTO DAILY STAR, Jan. 11, 1969, at 62.

⁵⁰ *Id.*

⁵¹ Telex Message from Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Sec'y of State for External Affairs, *supra* note 7.

⁵² *Id.*

IV. AMATEURS VS. PROFESSIONALS IN THE 1970S AND 1980S

The IIHF's rule changes brought professional and amateur hockey closer together in their rules, but did not immediately alter the different playing styles—nor did they change the way referees called penalties.⁵³ European players emphasized puck possession and accurate passing, whereas Canadians (and Americans) still usually emphasized physical play, and referees' approaches were shaped by the system in which they had learned the game.⁵⁴ Many international competitions ended with coaches, players and journalists lamenting officiating: Canadian referees' tolerance of apparent rules violations drew European complaints, while Canadians protested that European referees called far too many penalties.⁵⁵ These arguments began under the old IIHF rules, and continued in the new era of professionals and amateurs playing head-to-head competitions.

These competitions began with the Summit Series in September 1972. Team Canada, a collection of NHL all-stars, played an eight-game series with the Soviet national team: four in Canada, followed by a two-week break during which the teams travelled to Europe and acclimated themselves to the time difference and the larger ice surface, then four games in Moscow's Luzhniki arena.⁵⁶

Although players who had jumped to the new WHA, like Bobby Hull and Gerry Cheevers, were excluded, Team Canada was loaded with top-drawer professional talent.⁵⁷ Matched up against the Soviet amateurs, their countrymen expected them to restore Canada's claim as the world's most powerful hockey nation. Pundits routinely predicted the professionals would win all eight games, and seldom would a Canadian prognosticator pick the amateurs to win more than one.⁵⁸

It is worth emphasizing how inferior the amateur game appeared. The Soviets' unprecedented run of dominance in Olympic and world championship hockey since 1963 took place against amateur competition that players, coaches, executives, journalists and fans of professional hockey considered, with good

⁵³ For some examples of continuity in playing style, see ROY MACSKIMMING, *COLD WAR: THE AMAZING CANADA-SOVIET HOCKEY SERIES OF 1972*, at 168 (2012); Michael A. Robidoux, *Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey*, 115 J. AM. FOLKLORE 209; and Soares, *East Beats West*, *supra* note 2, at 44–46, 47 n.8. For examples of national variations in refereeing, see Christie Blatchford, *Good To His Word, Cherry Gracious Loser*, GLOBE & MAIL (Toronto), Jan. 9, 1976, at 30; Robert Facht, *Détente Takes a Beating from Broad Street Bullies*, WASH. POST, Jan. 13, 1976, at D1; Martin Nolan, *The Nation: Capitalism Iced By Red Army*, Bos. GLOBE, Jan. 13, 1976, at 18; and Peter White, *Penalties Costly as Hawks Lose to Wings 4-2*, GLOBE & MAIL (Toronto), Jan. 8, 1976, at 44.

⁵⁴ Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 5–6.

⁵⁵ For some examples of complaints about variations in officiating by referee's nationality, see Facht, *supra* note 53; Nolan, *supra* note 53; Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 14; and White, *supra* note 53.

⁵⁶ Soares, *Hockey Diplomacy*, *supra* note 2, at 818.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ Jeff Z. Klein & Karl-Eric Reif, *Pushing the Boundaries: 1967-68 to 1978-79*, in TOTAL HOCKEY: THE OFFICIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE 131, 134 (Total Sports Publ'g 2d ed. 2000).

reason, vastly inferior to the professionals.⁵⁹ Not only were so many Canadians ineligible for Olympic and world championship hockey, there were few indications that the best European amateurs could successfully compete against the professionals. Swedes and Finns did not begin appearing in North American professional leagues in any numbers until later in the 1970s. Prior to 1972, only three Swedes had ever appeared in North American professional hockey, and only one had a career of any length.⁶⁰ When Czechoslovakia began permitting national team stars who had turned thirty to play professionally in North America, the first to do so was Jaroslav Jirik. Jirik was a legend of Czechoslovakian hockey who had led his national league with thirty-six goals in thirty-six regular season games in 1968–69.⁶¹ He signed with the St. Louis Blues for the 1969–70 season, but spent most of it in the minors. Jirik did not tally a single goal or assist in three games with the Blues, and returned to his Czechoslovakian club after the season.⁶² Therefore, it was understandable that expectations for the professionals going into the Summit Series were so high.

When the Summit Series opened in Montreal, it appeared to conform to those expectations: the professionals scored in the first thirty seconds.⁶³ Another goal about six minutes into the game gave the professionals a 2-0 lead. But the amateurs flipped the script and dominated the remainder of the contest, outscoring the professionals, 7-1, to claim a 7-3 victory.⁶⁴ While the amateurs were well-conditioned and well-prepared for the series' opening, the professionals were nowhere near mid-season form. In addition, the amateurs had been playing together whereas the professionals were a collection of all-stars, many of whom had no prior experience playing with their linemates or defense partners. On top of that, the professionals had difficulty adjusting to the Soviets' very different style of play.⁶⁵

After the shock of Game one, the professionals won Game two in Toronto. But the teams tied Game three in Winnipeg. Game four saw the professionals booed by fans in Vancouver when they were soundly outplayed and beaten by the amateurs. When the series resumed in Moscow, the amateurs won Game five, to take a commanding 3-1-1 lead in the series. Needing to win each of the three remaining games in Moscow, the professionals did so, each by one goal.⁶⁶ Paul Henderson became a national hero in Canada by notching each of the game-winning tallies, scoring on a dramatic individual play with about two minutes remaining in Game seven, and notching the series-clinching tally with just thirty-four seconds remaining in Game eight.⁶⁷

⁵⁹ Soares, *Hockey Diplomacy*, *supra* note 2, at 815.

⁶⁰ DAN DIAMOND, *TOTAL HOCKEY: THE OFFICIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE* 704, 814–815, 1752 (Total Sports Publ'g, 2d ed. 2000). Finnish-born Juha Widing regularly topped twenty-five goals in a season during an eight-year NHL career, mostly with the Los Angeles Kings; Gus Forslund played one season with the first iteration of the Ottawa Senators (1932–33); and Ulf Sterner played four games with the New York Rangers in 1964–65, *id.*

⁶¹ *Id.* at 1226.

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ Klein & Reif, *supra* note 58, at 134.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ PHIL ESPOSITO & GERALD ESKENAZI, *HOCKEY IS MY LIFE* 160–61, 170, 172 (1972); MACSKIMMING, *supra* note 53.

⁶⁶ Soares, *Hockey Diplomacy*, *supra* note 2, at 820.

⁶⁷ Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice*, *supra* note 2, at 214.

In Canada, the professionals' victory triggered celebrations. Canadian humorist Will Ferguson reflected some of the Canadian mentality—which was an important contributing factor to the professionals' victory—when he later recalled, “in '72, *we* were the assholes. We were the bullies. We were the loud-mouthed, winning-is-everything cretins. It was great.”⁶⁸

But the series was very, very close. The amateurs had played the professionals on even terms: Canada only won the series, 4-3-1. The Canadians had not clinched the series until the final minute of the last game and the Soviets actually outscored the Canadians over the course of the eight games. The world's top amateurs had demonstrated that their level of play was on par with the world's best professionals. Canadian novelist Mordecai Richler wrote, “After the series, nothing was ever the same again in Canada. Beer didn't taste as good. The Rockies seemed smaller, the northern lights dimmer. Our last-minute win came more in the nature of a relief than a triumph.”⁶⁹ Goaltender Ken Dryden—the one-time Cornell University all-American who took a law degree at McGill University while starring for the Montreal Canadiens and played goaltender for Team Canada in the series—later wrote, “Our birthright was suddenly at risk. It was like being shot at and missed. We couldn't forget how close it had been, and could only worry that the next time would be different.”⁷⁰

As humorist Ferguson's comments suggested, part of the Canadians' secret in the victory had been their willingness to be “bullies” and “cretins,” and embrace a “winning-is-everything” mentality.⁷¹ One of the turning points in the series was a Game six injury to Soviet star Valerii Kharlamov. Canada's Bobby Clarke—acting, it came out much later, at the suggestion of Canada's assistant coach—deliberately slashed the ankle of the Soviets' most impressive star.⁷² The injury dramatically reduced Kharlamov's effectiveness for the rest of the series. Of course, there were other contributing factors in Canada's rally: they adapted and adjusted to the Soviets' game tactics, and the professionals played their way into shape by the time the series got to Moscow. Still, the discomforting fact remained that without resort to naked thuggery, the professionals might not have won.

The strength of amateur hockey was on display again two years later when the Soviet national team played a sequel series against Canadian professionals. In 1974, the Soviets met the stars of the WHA. The WHA was able to lure some of the NHL's top players, including: long-time Chicago legend Bobby Hull; Frank Mahovlich, who had been an important member of six Stanley Cup championship teams in Toronto and Montreal; and Summit Series hero Paul Henderson. On balance, though, the professional team that represented Canada in 1974 was well below the quality of its predecessors from the '72 Series; few members of Team Canada '74 would have made the squad if it had included the best of all of Canada's pros.

⁶⁸ WILL FERGUSON, *WHY I HATE CANADIANS* 113 (2007).

⁶⁹ MORDECAI RICHLER, *The Fall of the Montreal Canadiens*, in *HOME SWEET HOME: MY CANADIAN ALBUM* 187–88 (1984).

⁷⁰ KEN DRYDEN, *THE GAME* 240 (20th anniversary ed. 2005).

⁷¹ FERGUSON, *supra* note 68.

⁷² Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice*, *supra* note 2, at 214.

The professionals in that '74 Series managed just one win while the amateurs won four games; three games ended in ties. The series was closer than that final result indicates: heading into Game seven the professionals had a chance to escape with a draw by winning the final two games.⁷³ Still, there was no escaping the fact that the '74 Canada-USSR series was a clear victory for the amateurs.

The amateurs again performed impressively when two teams from the Soviet elite league toured North America in 1975–76 in the so-called Super Series. Central Army and *Krylia Sovyetov* (“Wings of the Soviet”) each played four games against NHL teams: *Krylia* beat the New York Islanders, Pittsburgh Penguins and Chicago Black Hawks, and lost to the Buffalo Sabres. Army beat the New York Rangers and Boston Bruins, tied the Montreal Canadiens in a game sometimes considered the greatest ever played, and lost to the Philadelphia Flyers.⁷⁴ The loss to the Flyers was controversial: the Philadelphia club, known as the “Broad Street Bullies” for their pugnacity, had won two consecutive Stanley Cups. They played physically against the Soviets, and the North American referee gave the Flyers wide latitude for rough play without assessing penalties.⁷⁵ Venerable *New York Times* columnist Dave Anderson complained that “[t]he triumph of terror over style could not have been more one-sided if Al Capone’s mob had ambushed the Bolshoi Ballet dancers.”⁷⁶ At one point in the first period Army withdrew from the ice and threatened to quit, but was convinced to return. Army appeared unenthusiastic, though: this was the final game of the Super Series, the Soviets clubs had already clinched “victory” in the series, and the Soviet coach feared injuries to any of the players who would be the nucleus of the USSR’s team at the February 1976 Olympics in Innsbruck.⁷⁷

As that quick tally of results indicated, in the eight-series games, the amateur clubs won five and tied one; only two professional teams prevailed. A closer look reveals some important nuances: the two NHL teams that beat Soviet amateur clubs, Buffalo and Philadelphia, had met in the previous spring’s Stanley Cup Final, and both beat their Soviet opponents by a substantial margin. The Flyers’ 4-1 win over the Army can be explained in part by the circumstances, but Buffalo’s 12-6 win over Moscow’s Wings was a decisive thrashing. In addition, the NHL team that tied the amateurs, Montreal, would win its first of four straight Stanley Cups in spring 1976. In other words, the amateurs struggled against the very best professionals. Otherwise, though, they had considerable success.

Still, one should not overstate the significance of these wins: Army and *Krylia* were strengthened by the addition of other Soviet elite league club players, while the NHL teams that played the Soviets *did not* strengthen their rosters by adding players from other NHL clubs. The very best Soviet players—those who would represent the Soviets at Innsbruck—appeared in the Super

⁷³ Soares, *Difficult to Draw*, *supra* note 2, at 1–2.

⁷⁴ TODD DENAULT, *THE GREATEST GAME: THE MONTREAL CANADIENS, THE RED ARMY, AND THE NIGHT THAT SAVED HOCKEY* (2011).

⁷⁵ During the Super Series, the games were officiated using the NHL’s practice at the time: one referee called all penalties; two linesmen would call off-sides and icing.

⁷⁶ Dave Anderson, *A Hockey Lesson for Dr. Kissinger*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 12, 1976, at 47.

⁷⁷ DENAULT, *supra* note 74, at 268.

Series. Many of the very best Canadian professionals, though, played on NHL (or WHA) teams that did not even play against the Russians.

Bobby Clarke's slash of Valerii Kharlamov in the Summit Series, and the controversy surrounding the Flyers-Soviets game in the Super Series, demonstrate that there were times when the professionals resorted to what the Soviets derided as "rough play" or "animal hockey." This led to sometimes overwrought prose in the West complaining about Canadians "hacking and clubbing the Soviet players like seal pups."⁷⁸ But one should not conclude that the professionals had a monopoly on violence, rules violations, and lenient officiating. The Soviets were not mere innocents; they did, however, try to conceal their cheap shots. Flyers player "Battleship Bob" Kelly contrasted the Russian style with the open Canadian willingness to fight; after the Super Series meeting with the Russians, Kelly said of the Russians, "All they do is spear you, hook you, kick you."⁷⁹ During the Flyers-Army game, a Russian player's stick clipped Bobby Clarke on the head, sending blood flowing down the side of his face.⁸⁰ After the Boston-Army game in the Super Series, *Boston Globe* columnist Martin Nolan described a sequence in which Army captain "Boris Mikhailov shoved, kicked and mugged Bruin goaltender Gilles Gilbert, even knocking away his stick, in apparent violation of the Geneva Convention, the Marquis of Queensbury rules, and the United Nations Charter." Despite Mikhailov's behavior, the Soviet referee did *not* assess him a penalty. Nolan noted that the Soviets' discipline "did not preclude dirty play. The difference was—just as in the game of international diplomacy—they were seldom caught at it."⁸¹

The Canadian ambassador even reported home, with obvious frustration, about bad behavior by players in Soviet elite league hockey games. Shortly after the 1974 Canada-USSR series, during and after which the Soviets complained bitterly about Canadian players' conduct, the Canadian ambassador reported to Ottawa that in a league game a Soviet player had threatened an official with his stick, and the ambassador reported the official "did not consider the raised stick as simply a gesture, but as a real threat." Yet this event "received no publicity in the Soviet press," indicating the "hypocrisy of the Soviet attacks on Canada's dirty style of hockey."⁸²

While neither side could claim a monopoly on virtuous play, the initial competitions between professionals and amateurs indicated that the best amateurs could more than hold their own against the top professionals when it came to skill level and results. And amateur hockey received a further boost later in 1976. Amateurs and professionals from the six best hockey playing counties participated in the inaugural Canada Cup, the forerunner of today's World Cup of Hockey. The organizers of the Canada Cup imposed no restrictions on rosters: players could be professional or amateur, and it did not matter in what league

⁷⁸ Robidoux, *supra* note 53, at 221 (quoting Jeff Z. Klein & Karl-Eric Reif, *Our Tarnish Past*, 113 SATURDAY NIGHT MAG., 30, 30–33 (1998)).

⁷⁹ *The View from Philadelphia*, L.A. TIMES, Jan. 13, 1976, at D2.

⁸⁰ See *Battle Casualty*, L.A. TIMES, Jan. 12, 1976, at D1 which featured a picture of Clarke's bloody face above the caption "BATTLE CASUALTY".

⁸¹ Nolan, *supra* note 53.

⁸² Letter from Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Under-Sec'y of State, (Nov. 27, 1974) (on file with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, No. 835, RG25, vol. 10922).

they regularly played. Team Canada won the first Canada Cup, playing with a squad widely regarded as Canada's finest ever—its roster was studded with no fewer than twelve future Hall of Famers.⁸³ After their experience against the Flyers in the 1975–76 Super Series, the Soviets participated in that inaugural Canada Cup with an experimental team, trying to develop a more physical and robust group of players to match up with the professionals. That Soviet team finished third, but its disappointment opened the way for another amateur powerhouse: Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovakians were the reigning amateur world champions. They inflicted Canada's only loss in the Canada Cup tournament, a 1-0 shutout during the preliminary round. Even though the Canadian professionals subdued the Czechoslovakian amateurs in the finals to win the Cup, the world's amateur champions had managed to defeat the greatest professional team assembled in the history of hockey. And, significantly, because this was done by the Czechoslovakians, it demonstrated that the success of amateur hockey was *not* limited to the USSR.

The strength of amateur hockey became even more embarrassingly clear to the professionals in February 1979: the NHL abandoned its traditional all-star game format and instead played a three-game series matching the NHL all-stars against the Soviet national team. The NHL won Game one, and had a 4-2 lead in the second period of Game two, but the Soviets rallied to force a decisive Game three. In their series-clinching win, the Soviet amateurs embarrassed the NHL professionals, shutting them out 6-0—with the Soviets playing their backup goaltender!⁸⁴

It got worse for the professionals in the Canada Cup in 1981. The amateur Soviet team embarrassed the Canadian professionals, 8-1, while winning the second Canada Cup.⁸⁵ Canada rebounded and won the Canada Cup again in 1984, but the strength of Soviet amateurs was on display in 1987, even though Canada prevailed over them in the best-of-three final. Each of the three finals games ended in a 6-5 final score. Canada lost the first, in overtime, then needed two overtimes to win the second game, and clinched the Canada Cup in the final two minutes of the third game.⁸⁶ Canada was led to victory by all-time greats: Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, and Mark Messier. Some of the greatest professionals in history were *barely* able to escape with a victory over the world's top amateurs.⁸⁷

⁸³ See STEPHEN BRUNT, *SEARCHING FOR BOBBY ORR* 272 (2006). When Stephen Brunt published *Searching for Bobby Orr* in 2006, eleven 1976 Team Canada members had been enshrined in the Hall of Fame. Since then, goaltender Rogatien Vachon has joined them. See Curtis Rush, *Eric Lindros is Entering the Hall of Fame. His Legacy Isn't Just Hockey*, N.Y. TIMES (Nov. 14, 2016), <https://nyti.ms/2iaWExu>.

⁸⁴ See Soares, *Cold War, Hot Ice*, *supra* note 2, at 220–221; Gerald Eskenazi, *Soviet Six Routs N.H.L. Stars, 6-0*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 12, 1979, at C1 (showing a box score of 6 for the Soviet Union and 0 for Canada).

⁸⁵ JOE PELLETIER & PATRICK HOUDA, *THE WORLD CUP OF HOCKEY: A HISTORY OF HOCKEY'S GREATEST TOURNAMENT* 84–86 (2004); DIAMOND, *supra* note 60, at 506.

⁸⁶ PELLETIER & HOUDA, *supra* note 85, at 175–184; DIAMOND, *supra* note 60, at 506–07.

⁸⁷ DIAMOND, *supra* note 60, at 507.

CONCLUSION: THE SUPERIORITY OF SKILL OVER PUGNACITY

The 1987 Canada Cup was a fitting demonstration of the relative merits of amateur and professional hockey in the 1970s and 1980s: in the end, the best professionals could usually find a way to prevail over the top amateurs but it sometimes took a heroic effort by some of the very best professionals, playing at the top of their game. Moreover, as was demonstrated by the slash of Valerii Kharlamov's ankle in the 1972 Summit Series, sometimes a professional victory had less to do with superior skill and more with the professionals' willingness to go to extravagant lengths to win. As University of California historian Yuri Slezkine has observed, the Russian amateurs might have done even better had they been willing to break their opponents' ankles.⁸⁸

This points to a larger conclusion about amateur hockey: it could be more skilled than the professional version of the game. Significantly, the Soviet Union was not the only nation playing a creative, puck possession style of play. Fellow Communist nation Czechoslovakia, as well as European democracies like Sweden, Finland and West Germany, played styles much closer to the Soviets than to the Canadians. The 1980 U.S. Olympic team that won a stunning gold medal also played a style that Coach Herb Brooks described as throwing the Soviets' "game right back at them."⁸⁹ Significantly, that 1980 team is the only U.S. men's hockey squad since 1960 to win an Olympic gold medal. The professional all-stars who represented the United States at every Olympics from 1998 through 2014 could not match the performance of the amateurs Brooks coached at Lake Placid.

Because of the combative nature of North American professional hockey, and the success that intimidation and brutality can play in helping teams win, among North American hockey players, coaches, executives, and fans, the sport has long had a cult celebrating toughness and pugnacity as a reliable way of winning hockey. There are understandable historical reasons for this line of thinking: legendary figures and teams have won championships employing what Stephen Brunt called "toughness bordering on belligerence."⁹⁰ Conn Smythe, a veteran of both world wars and the long-time owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, was famous for his dictum, "If you can't beat them out in the alley"—i.e., in a street fight—"you can't beat them in here on the ice."⁹¹ After the Soviets won the first-ever USSR-Canada meeting at an IIHF world tournament, Smythe suggested he might take his Maple Leafs to Russia later that year to play the Soviets. Canadian diplomats considering the possibility noted New York Ranger's Coach Frank Boucher's comment, "If Canada wants to take responsibility for starting a third world war I can see no surer way than sending

⁸⁸ Yuri Slezkine, Professor of Russ. and Soviet History, UC Berkley, Comments at Spanning and Spinning the Globe: The Global History of Sport in the Cold War Conference, Moscow, Russia (May 23, 2015).

⁸⁹ DVD: *Do You Believe in Miracles?: The Story of the 1980 U.S. Hockey Team* (HBO Sports 2001).

⁹⁰ BRUNT, *supra* note 83, at 252.

⁹¹ Conn Smythe, 85, *Former Owner of Maple Leafs Team in Hockey*, N.Y. TIMES, Nov. 19, 1980, at A31.

Smythe to Moscow with a hockey team.”⁹² Under Smythe’s ownership, the Maple Leafs won seven Stanley Cups as the NHL’s playoff champions.

It was not just Smythe’s Maple Leafs. Boston’s Big Bad Bruins became a league power in the late 1960s and won Stanley Cups in 1970 and 1972 while they were “the league’s most feared intimidators, despised by opponents for their rough, dirty play, called out by sensitive sportswriters for despoiling the beautiful game of their youth.”⁹³ Heirs to the Bruins’ reputation as feared intimidators, the Philadelphia Flyers won back-to-back Stanley Cups in the mid-1970s while taking belligerence to remarkable new levels. During “the three seasons between 1969 and 1972 that would mark the peak of the Big Bad Bruins . . . the team’s individual penalty leaders totaled 125, 132, and 141 minutes respectively,”⁹⁴ but the Flyers were headlined by brawlers like Dave “The Hammer” Schultz, who tallied 348 and 472 penalty minutes during the Flyers’ 1974 and 1975 Stanley Cups victories.⁹⁵

As these teams demonstrated, toughness and pugnacity can help win games and championships. Toughness is obviously essential in a game with body-checking, where the law of the jungle often prevails around the goal, and where certain teams and players try to take advantage of the fact that referees will not call every infraction, either because it would kill the game’s flow or because they prefer to “let the boys play.” Despite this, a wealth of evidence demonstrates that skill matters more than pugnacity in determining hockey championships.

Start with the Summit Series: the injury to Kharlamov damaged the Soviets’ chances, but Canada prevailed in the end because of the great play of its stars—stars like Paul Henderson, who tallied seven goals in the eight-game series, or Phil Esposito, whose thirteen points led all scorers in the series. Entering the third period of the decisive Game eight, with Canada trailing 5-3, Esposito scored Canada’s fourth goal, then assisted on Yvon Cournoyer’s game-tying goal, and Henderson’s series-clincher. For all the controversy surrounding his slash on Kharlamov, Clarke’s six points were Canada’s third-highest total, trailing only Esposito and Henderson.

High skill was also a crucial component of the championships won by the Toronto Maple Leafs, Boston Bruins, and the Philadelphia Flyers. Toronto’s Cup wins were led by some of the game’s all-time greats, including Charlie Conacher, Teeder Kennedy, Red Kelly, Dave Keon, Johnny Bower, and Terry Sawchuk. Boston’s 1970 and 1972 Cup champions were led by Bobby Orr and Phil Esposito. Orr won eight—*eight*—straight Norris trophies as the NHL’s best defenseman. He also won three scoring titles and had single seasons with as many as forty-six goals or 102 assists, despite playing defense. Esposito was a five-time league scoring champion, who had four sixty-goal seasons, including one in which he scored seventy-six. Boston’s Johnny Bucyk and Ken Hodge were also fifty-goal scorers. The 1970–71 Bruins were so offensively dominant that they averaged more than five goals per game, and had the NHL’s top four

⁹² Letter from L.B. Pearson to John B.C. Watkins (Mar. 11, 1954) (on file with Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, RG25, vol. 8203).

⁹³ BRUNT, *supra* note 83, at 252–53.

⁹⁴ *Id.*

⁹⁵ DIAMOND, *supra* note 60, at 1610.

scorers, and six of the top eight. Similarly, Philadelphia's "Broad Street Bullies" won because of the efforts of stars like sixty-goal scorer Reggie Leach, fifty-goal scorers Rick MacLeish and Bill Barber, forty-goal scorer Bill Flett, one-hundred-point scorer and three-time NHL MVP Bobby Clarke, plus future Hall-of-Fame goaltender Bernie Parent. Even Dave Schultz and Bob Kelly, The Hammer and Battleship, hit the twenty-goal plateau that is recognized as the measure of legitimate scorers.⁹⁶

On top of all this, the success of combative teams also needs to be placed in context. In the years that the NHL was a six-team league (1942–43 to 1966–67), Toronto won nine Stanley Cups, plus a pair of Prince of Wales Trophies as regular season champions. In those same years, the Montreal Canadiens, sometimes dubbed the "Flying Frenchmen" because of their speed and skill, claimed ten Stanley Cups, plus another dozen Prince of Wales Trophies. (These were the Montreal Canadiens that were so dominant offensively the NHL changed its rules to limit the number of power play goals a team could score.) In other words, in those twenty-five seasons, the tough Toronto Maple Leafs won eleven championships, and the fast-and-skilled Canadiens won twenty-two. Not only that, the Canadiens continued their dominance into the era of expansion: from 1967–68 through 1978–79, Montreal won eight Cups—twice as many as the Bruins and Flyers combined. In those years, the Canadiens played the Bruins in four playoff series and Montreal won them all, including the series that eliminated Boston after the record-setting 1970–71 regular season. (This was part of a stretch in which Montreal won eighteen straight playoff series over Boston; in the most storied rivalry in NHL history, the Canadiens have defeated the Bruins in twenty-five of thirty-four postseason meetings.) Those Canadiens also took care of the "Broad Street Bullies" Flyers, sweeping them in the 1976 Stanley Cup Final, when Philadelphia was seeking its third straight Cup.⁹⁷ Fans of other teams could justifiably complain that these powerhouse Montreal squads benefited from rules that unfairly permitted them to horde the NHL's very best French-Canadian players, but that is the point: it was the skill that was most important in deciding championships.

Readers who prefer a more recent example of this should look to the 2016 World Cup of Hockey. U.S. officials left a number of America's top scoring stars home while building a "roster of hard-nosed players who were assigned to slow down Canada." The U.S. team went winless, losing to Canada 4-2, was eliminated from contention for the medal round after just two games, and scored just five goals total in the three games it played.⁹⁸ Team North America, which included young American and Canadian members, played a fast, skilled game, and gave a more impressive accounting of themselves in the tournament than the tough and experienced U.S. team.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 504–07 (showing statistics and award-winners found in this paragraph).

⁹⁷ See *id.*; Bill Meltzer, *A History of the Flyers in the Final*, NHL (May 27, 2010), <https://www.nhl.com/flyers/news/a-history-of-the-flyers-in-the-final/c-530287>; Dave Stubbs, *Bruins, Habs Were Destined to Meet Again*, OTTAWA CITIZEN, Apr. 28, 2014, at C3.

⁹⁸ Curtis Rush, *Roster Criticized, U.S. Meekly Exits World Cup of Hockey*, N.Y. TIMES (Sep. 21, 2016), <https://nyti.ms/2EiKgRk>. See also *2016 World Cup of Hockey: Team USA Schedule & Results*, TEAM USA HOCKEY, <http://teamusa.usahockey.com/page/show/2355829-2016-world-cup-of-hockey> (last visited Dec. 29, 2017), for more information on Team USA.

In considering North American professional hockey, one should pay attention to the ways in which the rules effectively encourage rough play and punish skill. This essay has already mentioned the NHL's practice of rewarding a team for taking a penalty by permitting it to ice the puck, and making penalties less punitive by permitting a player who receives a minor penalty to return to the game if his team surrenders a power play goal. Also fitting into this phenomenon is the trapezoid behind each NHL net, limiting the area where goaltenders may handle the puck. The trapezoid came about because of the frustrations less skilled teams had at the hands of goaltenders with exceptional puck-handling skills, especially long-time New Jersey Devils star Martin Brodeur.⁹⁹ These goaltenders could function like a third defenseman when an opposing team tried to play "dump and chase."¹⁰⁰ Such a goaltender could skate well away from the goal to retrieve the puck and pass it to a teammate to start the breakout play. The trapezoid limits the area in which NHL goaltenders can use their stickhandling abilities, effectively penalizing goaltenders for being skilled.¹⁰¹

This punishment of skill may be understandable given the tastes of North American hockey fans: an April 2017 article in the *Wall Street Journal* reported that minor league hockey in the United States has seen a significant decrease in fighting in recent decades—that it has grown less violent—and that it has seen an apparently corresponding decline in attendance. For example, in the East Coast Hockey League, compared to about twenty years ago, the number of major penalties for fighting is down by more than fifty percent and attendance is down by twenty percent.¹⁰² Whatever their motivation, and however wise their business model, for decades the men in charge of the NHL have embraced rules that hinder more skilled players and teams. The end of the Cold War, the removal of barriers to the best Russians and Czechoslovaks playing in the NHL, and the opening of the Olympics to professionals, have made the costs of this less obvious: no longer do North American professionals have to fear defeat and political embarrassment at the hands of amateurs.

Still, as the amateurs' strong showing against the best professionals demonstrated in the 1970s and 1980s, the professional game is not necessarily the most skilled approach. Fans, owners, players, coaches, and others involved with hockey may prefer the professional game as it is, but a brand of the game that places greater emphasis on skill could be cultivated if the hockey community wanted it.

⁹⁹ *A Look at the Rules Changes for 2005-06*, OTTAWA CITIZEN, July 23, 2005, at C3.

¹⁰⁰ See *supra* text at notes 29–31.

¹⁰¹ OTTAWA CITIZEN, *supra* note 99.

¹⁰² Rebecca Davis O'Brien, *Minor-League Hockey: Less Violent Hockey – Also Less Popular*, WALL ST. J., Apr. 6, 2017, at A16.