"HOW WE THINK ABOUT HOCKEY, AND OURSELVES": TELEVISION, THE 1972 SUMMIT SERIES, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A PAN-CANADIAN IDENTITY

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On 28 September 1972, Moscow's Luzhniki Sports Palace played host to the eighth and final game of the "Summit Series." This ice hockey series was little known—both at the time as well as now—outside of Canada, the Soviet Union, and parts of the U.S. Nevertheless, this particular game produced a watershed moment in the history of Canadian sport and popular culture. Indeed, the entire series of eight matches overshadowed other important sporting moments for Canadians, including the tragic events at the Munich Olympics, which were concurrent with the Summit Series (and yet the two are rarely mentioned together in Canadian recollections of September 1972).

Hockey fans, players, and journalists had expected the series, played between the Soviet national team and an all star squad of Canadian born National Hockey League (NHL) players, to be the moment when Canada would reassert its international hockey dominance. For nearly twenty years the best Canadian hockey players, professionals in the NHL, had been denied the opportunity to play state funded Soviet teams, while those same Soviet teams had come to dominate weaker Canadian amateur teams in Olympic and world championship competitions. But, after seven games each team had won three times, with one tie, as the Soviets turned out to be much more competitive than had been expected by Canadian players and media. The focus of this article—Game Eight, as it has become colloquially known—was the deciding game in the series.

This analysis of Game Eight comprises the on-ice action and the television broadcast, as well as the ways in which these elements worked to construct and reinforce particular notions of Canadian identity. The broadcast was a technological feat: the satellite feed went from Moscow to Helsinki to London (where it was converted into a standard North American signal) to Nova Scotia before being beamed nationwide into Canadian homes. Both national networks (CBC and CTV) broadcasted the game and as many as 12.5 million Canadians stopped what they were doing to watch and listen as Foster Hewitt and colour commentator Brian Conacher described the action from Moscow.[1]

PAN-CANADIANISM AND TELEVISION'S "WIDE-ANGLE" LENS

Given the popularity of this television event among Canadians, the Summit Series has received surprisingly little attention from sport scholars (Canadian or otherwise).[2] Nevertheless, if some artifacts of Canadian popular culture are lenses through which to view certain aspects of Canadian culture, Game Eight turns this notion on its head, operating as a "wide angle" lens, not highlighting a particular aspect of Canadian culture but presenting that culture as a homogeneous whole. This pan-Canadianism—the image of a unified Canada—is evident as we shall see in three discourses that run throughout Game Eight: contest, unity, and individualism.

In Game Eight this wide-angle lens works on two levels.[3] There is the game being played on the ice, featuring players, coaches, fans, etc. In addition, viewers watched the game as presented by the broadcast. Cameras and microphones provided images and sounds of a small group of raucous Canadian fans juxtaposed against images of hundreds of quiet, well-mannered Muscovites captured in a single shot. Most often though the broadcast featured above-ice views that followed the movement of the puck – no doubt due to the camera positions available at Luzhniki arena. Similarly, it is not clear how much control Canadian producers had over the video feed of the Game Eight broadcast. The captions are in Russian and after the second Soviet goal, at 13:10 of the first period, viewers see the hand of someone inserting a new caption card in front of the live image. As a result, assumptions that ascribe the selection of video images to the Canadian broadcasters are difficult to support.

What the Canadian production team did control was the running commentary the audience received throughout the telecast from Hewitt and Conacher, as well as studio personnel such as Bill Good, Jr., and Howie Meeker. Appreciating Hewitt's participation in this broadcast – he had come out of retirement for the series – is crucial to understanding the power that this game had in reinforcing an image of one Canada. Fiske and Hartley have noted, in evaluating English football television analyst Jimmy Hill, that:

> *Television does not merely bring raw sport into our home, it uses sport as a code to converse with us about aspects of our individual/cultural values. But we do not only participate by proxy, for the evaluative comments of Jimmy Hill require us to make a crucial shift of viewpoint to evaluator [...] Our shift from participant to judge is crucial in the cultural role of the programme (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 144).*

Nowhere is the importance of the mediator more evident than in a sport, for example, such as figure skating where casual viewers may be (or at least believe themselves to be) unable to evaluate the performances they view. But even with hockey broadcasts in Canada, where the game is presumed to be well understood by the audience, television personalities play a role.

In Game Eight, viewers needed Hewitt and Conacher to do more than identify Soviet players who were, quite literally, foreign to them. They needed assistance establishing the binaries that they had come to expect in sporting contests and that would play such a pivotal role in defining what Game Eight would come to mean: good versus bad, right versus wrong, justice versus injustice, West versus East, us versus them.

DISCOURSE OF CONTEST

From the beginning, Game Eight, indeed the entire series, was about contest and rivalry—the quality and style of our hockey against theirs. As journalist Jack Ludwig noted in his account of the pre-series hype (in Canada, at any rate), "here, finally, were the two greatest fighters in the world, each at his best fighting age and weight, come together to settle it all" (Ludwig, 1972, p. 30). The importance of this "fight" was not lost on the players either. Ken Dryden, Team Canada's goaltender in Game Eight, recalls the players' perspective on the series: "as far as the vast majority of Canadians are concerned, this series was not conceived in brotherhood and understanding, but as a means of putting down the Russians and asserting our claim to hockey supremacy" (Dryden and Mulvoy, 1973, p. 65).

This element of contest, even conflict, has often been linked in sports to symbols of nationalism and patriotism.[4] Indeed, Gruneau and Whitson argue that "sports have provided highly compelling dramatizations of mythical national qualities and occasions for the public assertion of 'us' against 'them'" (Gruneau and Whitson, 1993, p. 267). Yet sports television broadcasts often claim to play a neutral role and highlight achievement, rather than conflict. Fiske and Hartley though are quick to point out: "The programme's emphasis on achievement must not blind us to the fact that the achievement results from conflict" (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 145). And so it was in Game Eight, as the drama and tension of the moment quickly stripped away any pretension that the broadcast would focus solely on achievements on the ice.

The pre-game portion of Game Eight, both the on-ice ceremonies and commentary from the television experts, established the discourse of contest. The broadcast begins with Bill Good, Jr., announcing, "Team Canada versus the Soviet Union. The series of a lifetime and this is the final and deciding game."[5] Theme music, including a few bars of both national anthems, then heralds the beginning of the telecast. This us versus them binary is played out again when the two teams line up on the blue lines facing one another and the anthems are played in full. The message here is clear. This is a battle, a struggle, but not an individual or personal struggle between teams of twenty men: the anthems raise this to a battle between nations.

The us versus them mentality is exposed early in the first period, both by broadcasters and by Canadian players, as penalties are called against Team Canada. When the first penalty is called, Hewitt announces, "That was a real dive there [...] The Soviet player took quite a spill there, even though Bill White hardly touched him." Hewitt recounts Team Canada's fears about the quality of the officiating, giving sanction to us versus them. Thirty-six seconds later, Hewitt's incredulous voice announces another penalty, this time to Peter Mahovlich. On screen,

viewers watch Mahovlich slam the penalty box door and scream at the officials. Hewitt and Conacher remain silent on this behaviour.

Commentators choosing not to remark on what might be deemed the negative behaviour of Canadians occurring on-screen for all to see is a device used throughout the broadcast that informs the discourse of contest. Three incidents—a penalty to Canadian player Jean-Paul Parise in the first period, an off-ice incident involving Canadian hockey official Alan Eagleson in the third period, and the game-winning goal—illustrate this point.

The penalty call on Parise is one of the defining moments of the broadcast. The Canadian forward reacts by charging at the referee and swinging his stick at the official's head, missing intentionally. Conacher, in a moment of absurd understatement, observes that Parise "is somewhat incensed" and that "he has no respect for the referees." Conacher's tone of voice suggests that this is exactly the right attitude to have, especially when the referee's decisions are jeopardizing Canada's chances to win the game. This is the overriding theme as order is restored on the ice and Hewitt notes: "I'm afraid this kind of officiating is going to cause more than one incident before this game is over." Back home Canadians can rest easy; apparently the referee is to blame for Parise's behaviour.

In the third period, Eagleson is dragged across the ice—after an off-ice incident not seen by television viewers—to the Canadian bench. This moment has subsequently become an important element of the mythology surrounding Game Eight in Canadian popular culture: as Eagleson stormed towards the goal judge to protest a decision, he was intercepted by Soviet police, which prompted the intervention of Canadian player Peter Mahovlich, who dragged Eagleson over the rink boards and on to the ice. On their way across the ice back to the Canadian bench, Eagleson and two other Canadian officials make obscene gestures to the crowd. Ludwig leaps upon the nationalist appeal of Team Canada rescuing their leader: "In two seconds twenty other Team Canada players were out there showing Canada too had forms of solidarity" (Ludwig, 1972, p. 174).

Even in the aftermath of Canada's moment of glory—Paul Henderson's winning goal with 34 seconds remaining in the third period—a player on the Canadian bench can clearly be seen turning his head towards the crowd and yelling "fuck you" (along with accompanying physical gestures) to whomever could hear and understand him. (The player was Bill Goldsworthy who was not in the lineup for Game Eight, but sat on the bench in street clothes.) None of these actions merited comment from the announcers, thereby labeling them as acceptable and necessary if Canada were to prevail.

DISCOURSE OF UNITY

To succeed in this us versus them contest, Canada (us) had to be united. Elements of Canadian diversity could be celebrated, provided that unity was preserved, and preserving unity meant sustaining our national identity. Ice hockey was, after all, Canada's game. Rutherford calls this "the special mystique of hockey. Hockey liked to present itself as a rough, tough game of speed and skill. It was *the* Canadian game because we had created it, our players dominated the sport, and we remained 'the world's best'" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 248). While Ludwig at the time sounded the nationalist alarm – "The Ukraine and some of the USA's farm states and perhaps Argentina can grow wheat as good as ours, but one thing we believed they'd never grow—even with the help of our own seeding—was hockey players good enough to play in the NHL" (Ludwig, 1972, p. 15) – a discourse of unity is repeated throughout Game Eight.

Less than two years removed from the FLQ-inspired "October Crisis" and in an era of heightened Quebec nationalism, no mention is made during Game Eight of the varied ethnic roots of the Canadian players. These differences are partially obscured by the self-effacing uniform of Team Canada. As Earle remarks: "The team's name—'Team Canada'—was rife with meaning, cast in a form that would be easily translatable into both French and English, thus fitting the bilingual ethos of the times" (Earle, 1995, p. 114). Indeed the 1970s in Canada began with national debates about bilingualism and biculturalism—in acknowledgement of the country's two "founding" European "races," French and English—and ended with expanded attempts to promote a multicultural society in recognition of the impact that immigration was having on Canadian society. So it is ironic, but not unexpected, that no comment is made by the broadcasters (or has subsequently been made) that an English-Canadian (Henderson) scores the game-winning goal with assists from a French-Canadian (Cournoyer) and an Italian-Canadian (Esposito). In this instance, television's wide-angle lens obscures such diversity in the interests of unity.

The discourse of unity is established at the outset of the telecast—both on the ice and in the broadcast booth. For Hewitt, it was important that Canadians realize the significance of this game for national pride. His first words are: "Tonight we are making hockey history." The success of the Soviet team to this point in the series had come as a surprise to most observers. If this really had shaken the nation's faith in what it meant to be Canadian, there had to be a way to find victory in the event of defeat (which was still a realistic possibility before Game Eight). Conacher did this ably during his pre-game comments: "Team Canada in the past few games has neutralized any conditioning

advantage the Soviet team may have had in the earlier games through a close checking, physical style of play." In one sentence he reaffirms the value of the Canadian style of play (close checking, physical) and downplays a strength of the Soviet team (conditioning).[6] Additional efforts are made throughout the telecast to rehabilitate the value of the "Canadian" game. In the second period intermission, Syl Apps (a famous former player and commentator during this series) tells viewers at home that "everybody in Canada can be really proud of these fellas. They've worked exceptionally hard."

On the ice, the discourse of unity is established through a demonstration of Canada's inclusive diversity. After the playing of the national anthems, players exchange artifacts representative of their nations. This is standard practice before all international ice hockey matches. First, Charlie Hay, president of Hockey Canada, presents a totem pole to a Soviet hockey official. Then the Canadians present Soviet players with white "cowboy" hats. These ceremonies communicate important messages. Canadians are shown symbols of the First Nations and Western Canadian cultures that the rest of the world is given to believe are part of an inclusive pan Canadian culture – ignoring the fact that no aboriginal Canadians nor Western Canadians (with the exception of Flin Flon's Bobby Clarke) were in uniform for Team Canada. The role of the broadcast in these ceremonies is equally important. The average regular-season "Hockey Night in Canada" broadcast (CBC's weekly Saturday night telecasts, begun in 1952) would rarely air pre game ceremonies, since these are typically directed towards the live audience. But on 28 September 1972, all possible symbols of what it meant to be Canadian were broadcast into Canadian homes.

The discourse of unity is also evident in the frequent shots of the 3,000 Canadian fans watching the game live at the Luzhniki Sports Palace. Dryden remembers them chanting "Da Da Ca-na-da. Nyet, Nyet, Sov-i-et" and the *Globe and Mail* newspaper reported the day after Game Eight that it was "[t]he fans who discovered their own nationality in Moscow." (Dryden and MacGregor, 1989, p. 211; cited in Earle, 1995, p. 120.) Earle notes the importance of the Canadian fans present at the game and their impact, thanks to the broadcast, at home: "Crucially the spectators are very much part of the action […] they are close to the ice surface. This serves to heighten the intensity of crowd reactions, reactions which the cameras and microphones—in that relatively small space—can easily amplify" (Earle, 1995, p. 110).

The opening footage of the game shows the small, but audible Canadian contingent chanting "go, Canada, go" before it pans to a wider shot of calmer, almost motionless, Muscovites. This impression of impassioned Canadian fans united in support of their team is confirmed throughout the broadcast. Hewitt notes early on that the Canadian fans were "whooping it up," while during the Parise incident in the first period, English-speaking spectators (presumably Canadian fans) can clearly be heard chanting, "Let's go home!" The second period intermission included a tribute to the Canadians from Apps: "And the fans, you've never seen anything like the fans. You've got really, truly Canadian fans over here." Ludwig noted afterwards that "this, after all, was the test of national loyalty" (Ludwig, 1972, p. 171). Another second intermission feature, on Conacher's memories of Moscow, uses a crowd shot panning from calm Soviets to exuberant Canadians as Conacher remarks on "hearing 3,000 Canadians sing 'O Canada' like it's never been sung before. Suddenly to be Canadian was a great feeling."

The conclusion of the broadcast, as a relieved nation remained tuned in after Henderson's winning goal, reinforced that unity had been preserved. Hewitt announced, over the strains of Canadian fans chanting "we're number one," that the Canadian players had "showed their spirit, their ability, and everything else." Henderson proclaimed that "we always felt we were the best hockey players and we still do," and fellow Canadian player Brad Park confirmed that "we think that Canada is the greatest country in the world."

DISCOURSE OF INDIVIDUALISM

Hockey might unify Canada, but Canadian society still privileged diversity and individualism, especially when contrasted with images of a state-controlled foe. This Cold War mentality pervaded television coverage of the series. The two teams' styles of play emphasized the differences between the Soviet Union and Canada, East versus West, and highlighted the distinctions between these two societies. As Brian Kennedy observes:

> *The Canadian players were resorting on the ice to the Western way of thinking, which prized the efforts of the individual exercising his freedom, whereas the Soviets were dramatizing their collectivist mentality, the same one that drove their economy and politics (Kennedy, 2009, p. 53).*

Hockey superiority and individual skill served as a metaphor for all that made Canada unique. According to Gruneau and Whitson, hockey represents "the triumph of 'Canadian virtues'—individualism, flair, and most of all, character" aided by the fact that, as Raymond Williams notes, television emphasizes the individual in team sports (Gruneau and Whitson, 1993, p. 263; Williams, 1989). The camera's focus on the puck carrier helped to place Western

notions of individualism above team play. It also granted the announcers permission during the series to ignore the rough, physical play that Canadian players had hit upon as the way to slow down the faster, better-conditioned Soviet team. Back home, the Canadian media was criticizing this style of play. But as long as it happened away from the puck, where the camera would never catch it, all was fine.[7]

From the moment that viewers first see the Canadian and Soviet teams, the physical differences between the two clubs are readily apparent. The Soviets look identical, with the helmets that every player is wearing only heightening the homogeneity. In contrast, the Canadians are not wearing helmets and, thanks to the lengthy hair and sideburns fashionable in 1972, most of them are unique and recognizable to the viewers at home—many of whom would have also seen the players on television playing for their NHL clubs—who have followed the series. (Ironically, Henderson is the only Canadian player wearing a helmet.)

The focus on individual achievement continues throughout the broadcast. Despite references to a Canadian style of hockey, the commentators regularly highlight the play of individuals. After Esposito's first period goal, Hewitt points out that the Canadian centre is now tied with Henderson and Aleksandr Yakushev for the series scoring lead; in a second intermission interview, Apps highlights out the play of Esposito and Henderson, and reserves special mention for Ron Ellis and Bobby Clarke; and analyst Howie Meeker praises the efforts of goaltender Ken Dryden. This style of broadcasting was also applied to the Russian players. Hewitt, well aware that the Soviet players looked the same to many Canadian viewers, singles out Yakushev as the best Soviet player on more than one occasion.

The discourse of individualism is also evident in on-air comments about the Soviet style of play. From the beginning of the series, the Soviets had surprised the Canadian players with their skating speed, passing ability, and practice of entering the opposition zone by passing, rather than the "dump-and-chase" style familiar to Canadians. Clearly this style was partly responsible for the unexpected Soviet success and was praised by Apps during the second intermission. But more often than not, commentators such as Hewitt and Meeker sought to denigrate this style—noting that the Soviets pass the puck too much—to reinforce the dominance of the Canadian style of play where individual excellence resulted in team success.

THE LEGACY OF GAME EIGHT

Game Eight provided Canadians with the hockey victory they had expected at the outset of the series. But, as Ludwig observes, "much more important is the opportunity the series [...] offers us to reconsider how we think about hockey, and ourselves" (Ludwig, 1972, p. 27). This game encouraged Canadians to think of themselves as a unified, homogeneous force, heroically turning back the Soviet challenge. While William Kilbourn has noted (not unproblematically) that hockey "unites Canadians of all ages and classes, from coast to coast," it is the active participation of a mediating agent such as television that helps to construct this pan-Canadianism (Kilbourn, 1976, p. 237). On no day was this more true than 28 September 1972. As one out of every two Canadians stopped what they were doing to tune in to Game Eight, they were treated to what they would later be told was Canada's defining (sporting) moment. Victory in an international contest had demonstrated the domestic strength of a unified Canada through individual excellence.

While, as Kennedy notes, "a series of hockey games has the power to create a cultural identity," the importance of the broadcast in constructing the meanings of Game Eight should not be ignored (Kennedy, 2009, p. 47). Television "magnified the significance of hockey as an expression of Canada's way of life" (Rutherford, 1990, p. 254). In connecting hockey to Canadian pride, the broadcasters of Game Eight were speaking to one Canada. The cultural significance of Game Eight is that it consciously obscures Canada's diversity and internal divisions. As Earle suggests, "disparate notions of class, ethnicity and gender were welded into a rare Canadian moment" (Earle, 1995, p. 108). To watch the game and appreciate the telecast's messages meant that you were truly pan-Canadian.

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NOTES

[1] Audience estimates for this game vary from 7.5 million out of 21.8 million Canadians (Dryden and MacGregor, 1989: 212) to 12.5 million (Pevere and Dymond, 1996: 90). As Dryden and MacGregor observe: "The game was broadcast on both CBC and CTV. All other programming came to a stop. Canada's population in 1972 was 21.8 million. On this Thursday afternoon, a work day, 7.5 million watched. When the game was repeated a few hours later, 5 million watched" (Dryden and MacGregor, 1989: 212).

[2] For scholarly examinations of the cultural impact of the Summit Series, see Dick, 2002; Earle, 1995; Gruneau and Whitson, 1993; and Kennedy, 2009. The most common intellectual approach to the series has been to view it within the rubric of foreign policy (e.g., Franks, Hawes, Macintosh, 1988, and Macintosh and Greenhorn, 1993). Memoirs and popular histories of the series are far more common. For the former, see Dryden and Mulvoy, 1973, and Sinden, 1973. For the latter, see Ludwg, 1972, and Morrison, 1989. "September 1972" is only one of a number of Canadian-produced documentaries about the series.

[3] Earle (1995: 108) makes a similar observation, noting that "it is the Canada-Soviet Series of September 1972 that offers an especially useful paradigm for a study of 'our game' on two levels: first, the series occasions reflection on the cultural nexus of the great national pastime; and second, electronic technology was sufficiently developed by 1972 to allow a fairly sustained probe into some of the its codes and structures."

[4] See Williams, 1989: 21-24.

[5] This and all subsequent quotations from the audio portion of the Game Eight broadcast are taken from "September 1972: Game 8," Polygram Video, 1998.

[6] On the issue of a national "style of play," see Critcher, 1991.

[7] Beyond an extensive consideration of social class and gender, it is worth noting that John Fiske and John Hartley put forward a compelling argument about the role that television and commentary play in translating violence into glory and achievement, and turning sport "into an attempted transformation of oral (working-class) modes into literate (bourgeois) ones" (Fiske and Hartley, 1978: 145). Furthermore, Rutherford ties ice hockey's physical and masculine nature to nationalism, noting that "the game fitted an image of Canadian manhood" (Rutherford, 1990: 248).