INTRODUCTION

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Needless to say, hockey is a tremendously popular sport in Canada. The "unlimited dramatic possibilities"[1] found in the game, as well as the "high level of emotional (and sometimes financial) investment"[2] imputed to it, all contribute in making the sport the Canadian pastime *par excellence*. More than the basic features of hockey, it is its 'Canadianness' that makes it so compelling: "Hockey is part of life in Canada."[3] According to many, hockey serves as a national symbol partly because Canada lacks the nationalistic icons that usually ignite a sense of community. As Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor wrote, Canada has never laid any emphasis in developing the "traditional instruments of community"[4]. Hockey, because it is believed we have invented it, has become a symbol of our nationality, of who we are as a people. Without hockey, it's safe to assume Canadians have a hard time defining themselves, besides being so darn nice a people or being a country that is simply NOT the United States.

The sacralisation of hockey is also due to the belief that in no other realm is Canada such a dominant power: "[…] politically, economically, and culturally [dominated] […] Canadians needed the symbol of our 'natural' hockey supremacy to affirm that uniqueness."[5] Will Ferguson, in *Why I Hate Canadians*, has summarized this very effectively in his 'EEH theory':

> *Canada has never been a world power, but this is only true as far as Everything Except Hockey (EEH) is concerned. EEH includes politics, economics, fashion, technology, military arsenal, the number of A-bombs dropped, the number of H-bombs built, the number of Third World governments toppled, the number of burgers consumed, the number of East European nations ingested – in short, all those trivial non-hockey things that daily crowd our attention and distract us from the real matter at hand: who plays the best hockey?*[6]

In other words, hockey is used both to define us as a nation but also to boost our international status as a country. The Canada-USSR Ice Hockey Series illustrates very vividly the crucial importance of hockey in Canadian life. It was the first ever Team Canada, a reason sufficient to allow the event a certain measure of respect. The standard interpretation of the story goes as follows: we thought we were the best, we went in unprepared, we almost lost, but against all odds we won the Series thanks to a goal by Paul Henderson.

This was September 28th 1972, in Moscow, where several thousand Canadian fans were cheering for a "middle power contending with the largest national land mass in the world, a nuclear armed super-power at the time, for hockey supremacy."[7] Canada won, and the Series remains one of the few glorious moments of its "polite past."[8]

The 1972 Hockey Series is one of those events prompting memories of where you were, who you were with, how you reacted. And this is what many of the contributors to this special commemorative edition of *Canadian Issues* are reflecting on.

Team Canada players Paul Henderson, Ron Ellis and Bill White graciously shared their personal memories of the Series, both off and on the ice, and offered some thoughts on the significance of the Series for Canada and Canadians. Two crucial points emerge from their candid interviews. First, the Series has represented for them a real clash of cultures: Paul Henderson recalls, for example, how out of place he felt with his trendy plaid pants in Russia. Second, and intimately linked to this personal experience of another culture, was the realization for the team members that Canada was a phenomenal place to live and that the Canadian spirit was embodied in stories of 'winning against all odds' as this ultimately transpired in 1972.

Journalist Gilles Terroux recalls his ten-day trip to Moscow and delights us with short anecdotes such as his paranoid search for microphones in his hotel room or an offer made to a member of the Canadian delegation by a few Russians that he undress himself and sell his suit. Terroux concludes that while the trip was memorable, the next time he will visit Russia will be as a 'real' tourist.

City Councillor James Pasternak, who put forward a motion in 2012 to ensure proper commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Canada's victory, also reflects on his personal memories of the Series. He had the chance to attend the first game in Montreal with his family and remembers this moment fondly. He asks, "I wonder of the 18,000 who were in the Montreal Forum that evening 40 years ago, how many are still around to tell the tale." And this is something we must all grapple with, the idea that this historical moment may soon only be available on DVDs, not re-told fervently by Canadians who were there.

Reflecting on the Series, professor of Communication Rick Gruneau is also drawn to personal memories. Acknowledging that the Series may have had some (sometimes exaggerated) importance in geopolitics, Canadian nationalism and hockey development, Gruneau chooses to recall this 1972 event as one which had much influence on the relationship between his father and his grandfather. Living in the United States, Gruneau did not experience the frenzy created by the Series in Canada, which explained his tepid interest in it, at least until he heard that his father and grandfather were travelling to Russia to cheer Team Canada in Moscow.

If Gruneau was unable to watch any of the games, that wasn't the case for most Canadians. Television was the most important element in creating this "enduring folkmemory", as it was, in effect, the "matrix"[9] for the event through which the entire nation saw, interpreted and remembered the Series. Russell Field, Assistant Professor in Kinesiology, examines the television coverage of Game 8 of the 1972 Summit Series and he notes how bad behaviour on the part of Canadian players was downplayed, ignored or explained by bad officiating. Field argues that the framing of the game sought to "construct and reinforce particular notions of Canadian identity."

Author Roy MacSkimming discusses Canadian identity and the general legacy of the Series. MacSkimming looks at how the Series was framed as a contest between two worlds, even at the beginning. This was placing tremendous pressure on the members of Team Canada. As he remembers, "At some primal, unreasoning level, we believed a Canadian victory would prove the superiority not only of our game but our way of life." And, in the end, MacSkimming argues that this contest contributed in the ensuing détente between these two clashing worlds, a significant legacy for how we've constructed our national identity.

Professor Don Morrow's piece is a fitting conclusion to this special edition, looking at the 'after-life' of the Series as a myth and mono-myth. He argues that the "Series encapsulated a whorl of deeply consecrated elements that coagulated into making the Series mythic in proportion," beginning with the scripting of the Series, the global context in which it took place, and the subsequent rewriting(s) of the story. For Morrow, the Series, in all its mythic and sub-mythic representations and interpretations, is narratively and imaginatively rich, just like Canadian culture and Canadian hockey.

NOTES

[1] Bruce Kidd and John Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey*, Toronto: New Press, 1972: 7.

[2] Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993: 142.

[3] Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor, *Home Game: Hockey and Life in Canada*, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989: 9.

[4] Ibid: 18.

[5] Roy MacSkimming, *Cold War: The Amazing Canada-Soviet Hockey Series of 1972*, Vancouver: Greystone Books, 1996: 17.

[6] Will Ferguson, *Why I Hate Canadians*, Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997: 73.

[7] Neil Earle, "Hockey as Canadian Popular Culture," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30(2) Summer 95: 118.

[8] Scott Morrison, *The Days Canada Stood Still: Canada vs USSR 1972*, Toronto: Warwick Publishing Group, 1992: 16.

[9] Neil Earle, "Hockey as Canadian Popular Culture": 108.