The Sport History Page

The Richard Riot

It began with a high stick; it ended in a riot.

For Maurice Richard, for the Montreal Canadiens, for the city that has raised hockey to a religion, those days in March, 1955, have forged a bitter memory which time has scarcely abated.

'Rocket' Richard was one of the most dominant hockey players in the history of the game. He was also fiercely proud, and would cower to no one. On March 13, 1955, in a game in Boston, Bruin defenceman Hal Laycoe cut Richard over the eye with his stick, and the 'Rocket' retaliated. He attacked Laycoe, and in a rage, also struck a linesman.

Three days later, NHL President Clarence Campbell shocked an anxious city by suspending their beloved star for the balance of the regular season and the entire playoffs. The news threatened the Canadiens' chances of winning the Stanley Cup. In Montreal, Campbell quickly became a marked man. Threats were made, reprisals promised. Yet Campbell, himself stubborn and proud, refused to accede to requests by city officials and attended the March 17 game between the Red Wings and the Canadiens — in Montreal.

Soon after taking his seat, Campbell was pelted with food, shouted at, slapped and kicked. Then a tear gas bomb was tossed and the riot inside the legendary Forum was on. Spectators rushed for the exits, and the game was forfeited to Detroit.

The angriest fans took to St. Catherine Street, looting stores and breaking windows for seven unruly hours. Dozens were arrested, and the equivalent of martial law was put in place for the next Canadiens home game. The mayhem was considered the worst the city had seen since the anti-conscription demonstrations during WWII.

The Canadiens went on to lose the Stanley Cup to Detroit, and the bitterness of that loss exists even today. For Richard, the suspension left a further wound. On the last day of the season, he had to watch his teammate, Bernie 'Boom Boom' Geoffrion, pass him to win the scoring race. It is the one treasured achievement the 'Rocket' would never realize in his otherwise brilliant career. ■

The 1972 Canada-Russia Hockey Series



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It is the event Canadians most easily associate with the question, "Where were you when ..." Paul Henderson's game winning goal with 34 seconds to play in the eighth and deciding match of the 1972 Summit Series evoked a wave of national pride in a country always searching for defining moments.

The confluence of victory, drama, and world supremacy in our true national sport, all set against the backdrop of a Cold War, retains to this day a place in the hearts of Canadians from coast to coast. Even among those too young to have been there.

But for the more than 2,500 Canadians who were there, in Moscow, that late September night, the memories are even richer.

> *Henderson's goal in the game on which international hockey prestige was balanced, completed an incredible comeback by Team Canada, and left the place of sports, Lenin Central Stadium, echoing to 'O Canada'. (Globe & Mail, September 29, 1972)*

But the spectacle of the Series transcended hockey; for Canada and perhaps also for the former Soviet Union.

> *In Moscow... a lot of Canadians discovered their nationality. Had any of them ever before stood up and loudly sung 'O Canada'... with tears running down their cheeks? They did it... because of Canada. (G&M)*

And for citizens of the Soviet Union, the '72 Series was a rare taste of the West on their own soil. To what degree this and other international sports events foreshadowed or perhaps even accelerated the arrival of glasnost and perestroika (the era of openness) is certainly debatable. Today, only one generation later, the best Russian and former Eastern-bloc players reside in the NHL. Many dominate, and their fan-base among Canadians and Americans is loyal and strong.

The borders that began to crack in 1972 have vanished. The Cold War may have lasted for another twenty years, but as author Roy Macskimming has written, hockey's own Cold War ended with an eight game series few will ever forget. ■