

***“FIRE ON ICE:  
A Sociological Perspective on Fighting in Hockey”***

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## **Abstract**

There are countless contact sports today that feature a significant amount of violence and aggression. Hockey, however, differs from every other team sport in the fact that it not only condones fist fights, but encourages them as a normal and acceptable part of the game. Why is there fighting in the sport of hockey and what dynamics exist within the game and surrounding the game that account for these fights and make them not only accepted, but encouraged behavior? This study seeks to answer these questions by identifying and examining three possible factors that could account for the presence and prevalence of fist fights in hockey:

Historical Factors looks at the history of hockey itself, and the history of fighting and violence within the sport. Research shows that gratuitous violence and fights have been a large part of hockey since it was first played in an organized manner.

Situational Factors examines the specific relationships and dynamics that develop in the course of a game, that influence the behavior of players as a result. Interviews with elite hockey players confirmed that there exists an aggressive instinct and character required of hockey players during the game. Fights, particularly in male hockey, are a constructive outlet for this aggression, and further provide a team with momentum and protection.

Environmental Factors discusses the two influential settings or “climates” hockey players face. The “Arena Climate” is the physical setting of the game itself: the hockey rink. Research and personal experience indicate that the physical characteristics of the arena itself play a role in the aggression that is bred on the ice, and may account for some of the inherent violence that exists in the game. The “Social Climate” is society and human nature as a whole. Social and cultural norms are significant contributors to player behavior on and off the ice. After all, professional hockey is, more than anything else, in the entertainment business, generating its revenue by giving the public what it wants.

Personal, cultural, historical and sociological research, indicate that fights and violence are embedded in the history and culture of hockey, and fueled by public popularity and acceptance.

There are compelling arguments for and against the presence of fights in hockey. This thesis is not an attempt to advocate one mentality over another. Rather, it is to shed light on (and hopefully make some sense of) this unique and intriguing facet that differentiates hockey from every other sport on earth. And hopefully, with this “insider’s view” into the world of hockey, the reader will gain a greater appreciation for the “coolest game on earth!!”

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Preamble

Growing up in Toronto, as hockey-crazy as it gets, I lived and breathed the game of hockey. Winters consisted of my parents driving me all over the province, from rink to rink, as I suited up for two, sometimes three different teams. When I wasn't playing games or practicing, I was in my basement, shooting pucks, or at hockey schools, fine-tuning my skills. In the summer, I spent the warm months inside the frigid arenas, at hockey camps, 6 hours a day, 5 days a week. I lived, breathed, and bled hockey, and never, during my career, did I ever question the logic or ethics of the game. Never did I second-guess the practices or events of the game. To me, the game was what it was, and that was that.

This all changed, however, when attending a Leaf game last winter, I was struck by a realization. Though the game was a fairly exciting one, with some pretty plays and great goals, none of these could incite a more impassioned response than a lowly scuffle at the end of the second period, that consisted of nothing more than players tugging at each other's jerseys and dancing around the ice. There was something about that display of aggression that made even the most even-keeled person, jump up in heated rage, and cry for bloody murder!

Back at school, a few weeks later a friend of mine on the swim team asked me what the purpose of the fight was in hockey games. Try as I might, I could not think of an adequate response. He was extremely skeptical of the entire practice, and felt it was stupid, and completely unnecessary. All I could muster, in defense of his verbal assault on the sport I loved, was "it just is!" Growing up in the game, I never questioned any

aspect of it. I always saw things as merely “part of the game.” However, when I started to think about it, I wondered – how exactly did fighting come about in the game of hockey, and why is it so prevalent today? And why is it that it just exists in hockey? Why aren’t fist fights normalized in other contact sports, such as football, lacrosse, soccer or rugby?

### My Goal

The purpose of this thesis is to address several issues. First, why is there fighting in the sport of hockey? Why is it that in hockey, the play can be stopped to accommodate two players as they square off and engage in a fist-fight, only to receive afterwards, merely a minor penalty? Why is such behavior not only condoned, but encouraged, as an essential part of the game? As fighting is a unique phenomenon to hockey, there must be some sort of culture embedded in the sport itself, based on the interaction between players, coaches, officials and fans. What dynamic exists, and how does this affect the game as a whole? And what are the implications of all this, and possible means of addressing these implications?

It is worthy of note, however, that in the women’s game, fighting is not allowed, nor tolerated, and the same goes for collegiate men’s and women’s hockey. Furthermore, the European game is also less violent than the North American game. So, while there is certainly a sport-specific culture within the game, particularly regarding the aggression required for a player to be successful and effective, there are also various means, other than fist fights, of expressing that aggression. If European, Collegiate and female hockey

players aren't fighting, are they engaging in some other unique form of aggression to replace the fights?

I plan on exploring three main factors relevant to the sport of hockey that make it more susceptible to violent and aggressive behavior. These are Historical factors, Situational factors and Environmental factors. Research on Historical factors will seek to determine whether violence and fighting in hockey is a completely new, modern phenomenon, or something that has always existed in the game. Through researching the history of the game I hope to determine when exactly it became more violent, and when and why fighting became acceptable. Situational factors are those that deal with the on-ice relationships players have with each other, officials and coaches. This research will determine what elements inherent to the game exist, through the eyes of a hockey player. The Environmental portion will seek to study both the Social Climate and the Arena Climate, to determine what pressures and norms are being imposed upon the players by outside sources, that may best account for their violent behavior.

### The Teams

Assuming that the reader does not have an intimate knowledge of the game of hockey, below is a brief summary of the primary parties to be discussed. This information is based on common "hockey knowledge" and was confirmed by my interviews with the various elite hockey players.

*NHL Players:* hereinafter referred to as "NHLers" are professional hockey players, in the National Hockey League, who, because of their involvement in the league, are consequently among the elite hockey players in the world

*NHL Coaches:* hereinafter referred to as “NHL Coaches” are professional hockey coaches in the National Hockey League, among the elite coaches in the world, due to their membership in the league

*NHL Scouts:* hereinafter referred to as “NHL Scouts” are recruiters or scouts for the NHL teams, watching college, junior and minor hockey games, for young talent, and trying to get them to play in the NHL.

*Major Junior Hockey Leagues:* hereinafter referred to as “junior leagues” are semi-professional leagues where players are paid to play. These leagues are the primary feeder leagues for NHL teams, and players in this league generally are drafted higher than players in other leagues. Junior leagues are violent, physical leagues with a lot of fights.

*Collegiate Players:* hereinafter referred to as “College Players” are elite hockey players recruited to play hockey at a Division I American college. Players opt out of playing Major Junior leagues, where they are paid, to attend school and play instead. It is generally well-known that college players are less highly recruited by NHL teams than Major Junior players, however many still make it to the NHL, nonetheless.

*Collegiate Coaches:* Hereinafter referred to as “College Coaches,” are the paid coaches of Division I American colleges, who serve as recruiters and coaches for

their programs, scouting talent of high school programs and trying to convince them to elect to go to college over playing in Major Junior Leagues

*European Players:* hereinafter referred to as “European Players” are elite hockey players who play professional hockey in Europe. Generally seen as a step below the NHL, European leagues are still extremely competitive and many of the top international players elect to stay there, rather than play in North America. European leagues are seen as more skill-based, and feature less outright violence and fighting than North American leagues. Its players play on a larger ice surface, and the game is one of speed, skill, agility and finesse, rather than strength, brawn and toughness. A “European Style Player” is one who is more highly skilled, and less likely to fight or play aggressively. This style of play is often disdained in North America, particularly Canada

## Chapter 2: The Warmup

### Social Theory Literature Review

There are many theories about aggression brought up by sociologists and psychologists that are relevant to this topic. This chapter seeks to outline the most prevalent of these and look into how they may enhance and improve upon my research.

There are many theories regarding the origin and nature of human aggression. Sigmund Freud (1950) and Konrad Lorenz (1966) suggest that aggression is natural, and expressing it in the context of a controlled environment such as a sport is completely normal and acceptable. Freud (1950) believes that aggression is as natural to humans as sex or hunger, and is crucial to our existence, needing to be either discharged or fulfilled to be regulated. Lorenz, (1966) stated that humans, like animals, have aggressive instincts and incline us to be protective of our safety and possessions. Consequently, if we are given certain controlled outlets to discharge aggression, in a manner that is looked on positively by society, we are able to avoid suppressing these natural aggressive urges of ours. Theorists such as Dollard, Dobb, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939) believe aggression is a universal reaction humans have to frustration and not simply the result of our physiological make-up, but other stimuli as well.

Emile Durkheim's theories, as quoted by Maguire & Young (2002) deal primarily with the environment and society that one is working in. Durkheim proposes a structural-functionalism paradigm, whereby,

*"The great movements of enthusiasm, indignation and pity in a crowd do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousness. They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves. Of course, it may happen that, in abandoning myself to them unreservedly, I do not feel the*

*pressure they exert upon me. But it is revealed as soon as I try to resist them. Let an individual attempt to oppose one of these collective manifestations and the emotions that he denies will turn against him. Now, if this power of external coercion asserts itself so clearly in cases of resistance, it must exist also in the first-mentioned cases although we are unconscious of it.” (Emile Durkheim, as quoted in Maguire & Young 2002: 45)*

Essentially, an interaction exists where social structures are emphasized over human agents. An underlying social order precedes individual actions. Generally, it is based on an individual's obligations to act in accordance with certain expectations of the environment. These are “social facts he did not create and to which he must conform or suffer the consequences of social disapproval and punishment.” (Durkheim as quoted in Maguire & Young 2002: 45)

Durkheim's theories help us understand why individuals act in a manner that may not necessarily be consistent with their overall character. Players who are not necessarily violent or aggressive, might get “caught up in the moment” feeding off of the energy and adrenaline provided by their teammates, opponents and coaches, as well as fans and officials. They can also feel pressured to play in a certain manner to avoid being seen as “weak” or afraid to fight. Not conforming to the ideal of a hockey player, which is seen as tough, violent and aggressive, can result in a player being ostracized, or not being picked for a team. As such, they conform to this norm, even if it is not necessarily their intended style of play. (Durkheim in Maguire & Young 2002)

Max Weber, as quoted in Maguire & Young (2002) discusses Social Action, identifying four ideal types. The first three, Instrumentally Rational, Value Rational and Traditional are not as pertinent to this topic, however the fourth, Affectual or Emotional Actions, which actually served as a “residual dumping ground” for those behaviors that

don't fit in the first three, is the most pertinent to fighting in hockey. While Affectual or Emotional behavior stands on the borderline of what is meaningful, it however is seen as an unrestrained reaction to extraordinary circumstances. Thus, while most of the time, affectual behavior may be seen as a completely rational tactic, meant to throw someone off their game, this is not always the case. As a result, a "climate of tolerance" is created, leaving open the possibility of future violent acts of an even greater seriousness. Weber also discusses parallel administration structures and "technological compatibility" with a particular social action, where updated technology associated with the game is compatible with and encourages certain actions. This is seen in hockey equipment manufacturers designing their products specifically for fighting, such as straps on jerseys. (Weber in Maguire & Young 2002)

Weber is also cited in Maguire & Young (2002) as noting that there also exists a power differential. This means that essentially, a few powerful or influential individuals within an organization, league or team, can assert authority on the actions of the rest of the members, either directly or indirectly, resulting in certain individuals acting somewhat against their will, in order to be consistent with a certain norm or prevailing order. As Weber notes,

*"Even without any formal power of command, an 'empire state' or more correctly, those individuals who are the decisive ones within it, either through authority or through the market, can exercise a far reaching and occasionally even a despotic hegemony." (Max Weber as quoted in Maguire & Young 2002: 70)*

Weber sees this as a Bureaucracy, or a hierarchical structure of dominance, that imposes a standard of habits and norms on the people it regulates.

Wilbert Leonard (1988) in his book, *A Sociological Perspective of Sport*, proposes two types of aggression in sport. There is instrumental aggression, which is non-emotional and task-orientated, and reactive aggression which has an underlying emotional component with harm as its goal. Leonard believes sport violence emanates from reactive aggression. He explains that, violence is most prevalent in team contact sports, and is influenced greatly by the media. Leonard identifies two main causes of aggression. First, frustration, which is when one's efforts to attain a goal have been blocked. The second, more prevalent cause is social learning, where one learns aggressive behavior from the norms and standards of the society they exist in. These norms are reinforced when an individual either complies to the norm and is rewarded, or defies the norm and is subsequently punished. This is extremely relevant in the case of fighting in hockey. As something that has existed in the game since its inception, it is an accepted part of the game. However, this behavior is allowed to continue because of the fact that it has not been banned outright, or severely punished. This is a sign of encouragement to the players, who thus continue to do whatever actions will yield a positive response. (Leonard 1988)

Valerie Debendotte (1988) in an article on spectator violence, raises the question as to whether fans incite or reflect violence. She had inconclusive evidence, as spectators take cues from players, coaches, cheerleaders and each other, and it is difficult to discern as to which party has the greatest influence and on whom. She does note that spectators derive a sense of social identity and self-esteem from their team, which would account for the more impassioned reactions and responses. This is also evidenced in the

emulation of favorite players by these fans, both on and off the ice, as a means of identification. (Debendotte 1988)

George Herbert Mead, as quoted in Maguire & Young (2002) studied the Interpretive Society of sport, seeing games as a “homologue.” (Mead in Maguire & Young 2002: 86) Influenced by Adam Smith’s ‘looking glass self’ Mead believed that during interactions, one takes on the role of the individual whome they are interacting with. This is through the use of symbols. Mead’s premise behind the importance of symbolic interaction is that human lack the natural instincts to determine their own behavior. As such, they must operate on symbols and signs that are mutually understood. This is done through ‘role taking’ where one places themselves in the role or position of the person they are interacting with. Thus, one’s concept of self derives not from their own innate nature, but rather their interaction and socialization with the people around them. This is part of Mead’s role theory, which essentially determines that one develops themselves through their interaction with others. (Mead in Maguire & Young 2002)

Mead’s theories help to explain why the normally mild-mannered individual, once on the ice, becomes a lethal enforcer. It is his ‘role’ and an expectation that everyone has of him. There are certain prevailing expectations of actions, based on one’s interactions with other players, and certain acceptable responses or reactions that one is expected to display. Players consequently identify with these expectations as part of their own personal character, and it becomes a part of their style of play, and essentially, their on-ice identity.

## Chapter 3: Pep Talk

### Hockey Theory Literature Review

There has been a diverse range of prior work on the topic of fighting and violence in the sport of hockey, particularly in legal, historical, sociological and psychological realms. Below are some of the more significant ones.

A study conducted by Steven McCaw and John Walker (1999) in the April 1999 issue of *Texas Medicine* proposed that winning the Stanley Cup final series is related to incurring fewer penalties for violent behavior, and thus, important hockey games are won with less violent play. In their research, McCaw and Walker (1999) looked at 1,462 recorded penalties from all 18 Stanley Cup Championship Final Series from 1980 to 1997. They found that the teams that played with less violence, incurring less penalties, not only were more likely to win but also averaged 7 shots on goal per game more than more penalized and thus, more violent teams. The researchers found that losing teams demonstrated more violent behavior earlier in the game suggesting that violence was due not to the frustration of losing but rather, an intentional strategy possibly based on the mistaken belief that violent behavior contributes to winning. (McCaw & Walker 1999)

Richard B. Horrow (1980), in his book *Sports Violence: The Interaction Between Private Lawmaking and the Criminal Law* studies criminal violence in professional sports, from a legal perspective, examining actions that violate criminal law, during a sports event, and how these are regulated and litigated within the respective leagues. He believes that there exist strong pressures within the various professional leagues, to prevent people from challenging generally accepted norms and practices outside of the league. In other words, commissioners and league disciplinarians are wholly responsible

for the punishing of violators, and there exists a strong pressure from both players, coaches, officials and owners, to keep issues in the league, and not bring violations into outside courts. Despite these efforts, Horrow notes that there are an increasing number of cases reaching the courts, however not yet enough to be significant. (Horrow 1980)

Horrow's views, while primarily from a legal and regulatory perspective, are relevant to a sociological perspective because they confirm certain attitudes and mentalities of professional athletes, and professional hockey players in particular. He touches on the various interactions or circumstances players experience, and how they make them more susceptible to responding in violent manners. He notes the concept of "brawlers" or "goons" in the sport of hockey, where their sole purpose is to fight one another. Most relevant in his study are his findings that through his interviews and surveys of professional athletes, coaches, officials, owners and executives, the violence, particularly in hockey, is accepted as a fact of hockey life and consequently, nothing is done to curb this phenomenon, which is also wildly popular among fans. He also notes that "enforcers, it seems, are cultivated from the youngest age" and that "big kids who can handle heavy going are selected over smaller, less aggressive, though sometimes more skilled performers." (Horrow 1980: 22) He further points out evidence that the acceptance of the bully attitude is prevalent in youth hockey and quite unique. (Horrow 1980)

In his article, "Cultivating Todd Bertuzzi" James Fitzpatrick (2004) addresses a recent incident in the sport of hockey that took place in February 2004, where Vancouver Canucks forward, Todd Bertuzzi, attacked Colorado Avalanche forward Steve Moore from behind, knocking him unconscious in the process, and resulting in two broken vertebrae

in Moore's neck. The incident, which was in retaliation to a hit Moore delivered to Bertuzzi's teammate and team leading scorer Markus Naslund several weeks earlier, sent the hockey and sports world into an uproar, as many decried Bertuzzi's actions, and demanded harsh punishment for his actions. Fitzpatrick, while agreeing that "Todd Bertuzzi is stupid and dangerous," believes that "hockey itself must also be held culpable." (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 1) He notes that

*"it is generally agreed that the NHL does little to deter headhunting. Penalties for dangerous fouls are light, fighting is encouraged, and scant application of the rules lets plenty of abuse go unpunished." (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 1)*

By turning a "blind eye" to vendetta and retributions talks, Fitzpatrick believe the NHL consequently approves such violent behavior, allowing it to thrive. He states that "deviant streaks and violent urges are nurtured and the stage is set for something ugly." (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 1) Fitzpatrick looks at various reasons for why the hockey culture is what it is today. He notes an "instigator rule" which penalizes someone for instigating a fight with a misconduct, or the entire culture of the game, including its "blood and guts traditions" as "brawling and mauling are constants through the sport's history." For better or worse, Fitzpatrick believes violence is an essential element to the game of hockey, and something that has always existed in the game. "Physical, bloody hockey is dear to the hearts of fans and players" as everyone loves those games with a "touch of hate" in the air. Though most fights are merely two players tugging at each others shirts, while clumsily dancing on the ice, they ignite something in the crowd and in the players, "stroking the passions of everyone in the building" (Fitzpatrick, 2004: 2) causing the plot to thicken, the intensity to rise, the blood to boil and the game to pick up. All the while, people expect players to know where to "draw the line" as fuzzy as this line may be at

times. Fitzpatrick believes that while more could certainly be done to decrease the amount of blatant violence in hockey, one “can’t ban stupidity or eradicate sociopaths.”

(Fitzpatrick 2002: 2)

## Chapter 4: The Game Plan

### Methods of Research

My method of research was three-fold, so as to encompass three possible aspects of or reasons for the presence and dominance of fighting in the sport of hockey. As noted earlier, these aspects are: Historical, Situational and Environmental. I believe these to be the three main contributors to the amount of violence and aggression in the sport. Consequently, the purpose of my research is to outline these and their significance, and look into how they relate to one another and the issue of fighting as a whole.

For the first portion, Historical, I did a historical overview of the sport, and specifically, fighting and gratuitous violence in the sport. The second portion, studying Situational reasons for fighting, involved interviews with numerous collegiate hockey players and coaches, to gain a sense of the mentalities and practices that are specific to the sport. The third portion, Environmental, looked at the external pressures imposed upon players in the game. This involved me interviewing collegiate football and lacrosse players, as well as an ethnographic observance of both the “Arena Climate” and “Social Climate” hockey players operated in.

#### 1) Historical

In researching the sport of hockey itself, I will trace the game to its roots, and map out how it started, when the league became professionalized, when the first instances of violence and fist fights occurred, and how the game has evolved or arrived at its present state. The information came from numerous sources, including books, magazines, videos and websites on the internet. I traced the game back to its roots, studied its evolution, and

noted at which point in its history it became more violent and why this was so. The purpose of this section is to determine whether fighting in hockey is a modern phenomenon, or something that has existed for a long period of time. Whether it is a product of today's culture or something embedded in the game itself. Determining whether the game has been violent since its earliest stages, or a product of modern society, shows that internal factors within the actual game, play just as much if not more of a part of the existence of fighting, as external factors, such as fan interest.

## 2) Interviews

The interviews were one-on-one discussions with male and female hockey players at Harvard. The purpose of this was to obtain the firsthand experience of hockey players, to understand exactly what takes place on the ice in their eyes. Having achieved a Division I collegiate level, they can arguably be considered as elite competitors in their sport, and thus, are qualified to speak on behalf of their sport.

By interviewing members of the men's and women's hockey teams at Harvard, I looked to gain the perspective of a player who has grown up with the game, is now competing at an extremely high level, and in some cases, is looking to pursue a career in their sport beyond college. It should be noted that both the men's and women's hockey programs at Harvard are nationally-ranked teams, with several NHL and Olympic prospects.

I contacted all members of both the varsity men's and women's hockey teams at Harvard, requesting an interview, knowing that not all would participate. While this resulted in my data being somewhat dependant on who was available, I was able to

ensure that there was a diverse range of both classes and positions, resulting in what I believe to be a fair sample. I interviewed one goaltender from each team, three male defenders and two female defenders, and five male and female forwards. With regards to class, I interviewed one freshman male and female, two sophomore males and three sophomore females, three junior males and two junior females, and three senior males and two senior females. This, however, was only possible because I am familiar with the game, the team, and the individuals on the team through watching numerous practices and games.

I also interviewed the coaches of the men's and women's hockey teams at Harvard, to determine recruiting standards, and means of evaluating players. This is to gain a better idea of the attitudes and characteristics valued in this sport at high levels.

### 3) Environmental

The final phase of my research, involved me analyzing two primary external factors that potentially influenced hockey players. The first is the "Arena Climate" or the physical characteristics of the arenas hockey games are played in. This involves not only physical elements of the game, but the actions of fans, coaches and spectators, and how they potentially affect the behavior and actions of the players. The second, "Social Climate" used a variety of mediums to observe the media and public reactions to actions of hockey players in an attempt to gain an understanding of the social circumstances and dynamics that the players are operating under. This will allow me to understand exactly how much of hockey's uniqueness in condoning and encouraging the fist fight is precipitated by external pressures, and to what extent this is so.

This did not simply involve me watching sports on TV, or in person, however, but also collecting and reading newspaper and magazine articles, surfing the internet watching TV shows, studying case law related to the issues, and taking into account any other data that might possibly shed light on the general societal consensus on violence and aggression in sports as a whole, and more specifically, fighting in the sport of hockey.

I also engaged sent questionnaires to Harvard male lacrosse and football players, as these are both two extremely physical and aggressive sports, that do not feature fighting in the same capacity as hockey. While there are many parallels between hockey and these sports on the surface, I hope that their responses will yield a more intimate knowledge of their sport, so as to pinpoint how they differ from hockey, and why.

These were done much more randomly than the hockey player interviews. E-mails were sent to the captains of the respective teams, and they forwarded the questionnaires on to their teammates. I was pleased with the response rate, as nine football players and twelve lacrosse players responded. As I did not feel that there were specific demographics to be covered, I am unsure of the position and class breakdown, however do not feel that this makes their responses any less significant.

## Chapter 5: First Period

### Historical Overview of Hockey

There are many theories about the origins of hockey. It is thought to have been traced back to the British Isles and France. Field Hockey was played during the spring and summer months, and these games were moved to the ice in the cold months. Colonial Settlers brought the game over to North America, and the Canadian cities of Kingston, Halifax and Montreal were all sites of early hockey games.

The date of the first game of hockey is debatable. According to renown hockey historian Stan Fischler (1993), there were claims that British soldiers were playing hockey in Halifax as early as 1870. In 1875, on Victoria Skating Rink, McGill played a game of hockey, with nine players on each side. Fischler states that according to Neil Issacs of the University of Maryland, the first set of codified hockey rules, a product of McGill players W.F. Robertson and R. F. Smith were created in 1879. (Fischler 1993)

As the game began to grow and develop, so did the equipment the players used. The game evolved from being played in heavy boots, to players strapping steel blades to the bottom of those boots to help them glide on the ice better. (Fischler 1993)

The first hockey league was created in 1885, in Ontario. The four-team league included the Athletics, the Kingstons, Royal Military College and Queens University. By this time, blades were being clamped to the player's boot using a 'spring' which allowed for higher speed games. (Fischler 1993: 12) The nine players per side dropped to seven in 1886, because one team was short two players. This soon became the norm. (Fischler 1993)

Other modifications to the game soon followed. The rubber ball was replaced by a flat disc soon named a puck, due to its ability to slide along the ice much faster, and more controlled. The field hockey stick, which was originally used, was refined so that both sides could be used and players could stick-handle allowing for better puck control and harder shots. The game moved from outdoors to indoors, and snowbanks were replaced by boards. Organized club teams began sprouting up everywhere, and inter-urban games were played, as rivalries between such cities as Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa developed. (Fishler 1993)

In 1892, Lord Stanley of Preston watched his son who played for the “Rideau Rebels” play the powerful “Ottawa City Club.” He was intrigued by the game that took his sons and peers by storm, and when his aide Lord Kilcoursie, a member of the Rebels, suggested he sponsor a trophy for the best team in the Dominion, he agreed, paying 10 guineas for a silver bowl with a gold interior finish. The Stanley Cup was first awarded to the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association Team, otherwise known as the “Winged Wheelers.” (Fischler 1993)

By 1895 hockey had spread across the Dominion of Canada, and the Winnipeg Victorias of Manitoba defeated Montreal, shocking the easterners who considered themselves masters of the game. The game became more refined as goalies were given cricket pads, and the wrist shot, then known as the “scoop” was developed. (Fischler 1993)

Hockey soon spread to the United States, and George Brown helped build the Boston Arena in 1910, also organizing the Boston Athletic Association, thus creating the base for hockey in Boston. Americans had played a similar version of hockey, what they

called “ice polo” which had five players and a ball. They also used a cage as a net, rather than two pegs in the ice, which was soon adopted by Canadians. Americans also created the first sheet of artificial ice due to climate differences. The popularity of hockey was growing, but it really took off when the Montreal Wanderers played the Ottawa Senators for a two game series in Manhattan. (Fischler 1993)

This popularity allowed teams to charge fans to come to games, and soon allowed them to pay their players, either with monetary compensation, or job or housing offers in the nearby areas. Players began being lured to play for certain teams with these incentives, giving way for the professionalization of hockey. As Fischler states, “more than anything, the introduction of professionals on to the hitherto all-amateur scene would dramatically and forever alter hockey’s fabric.” (Fischler, 1993: 17)

Though the best player developed in Canada, the first pro hockey league was organized in the United States by a dentist, Dr. J. L. Gibson in Houghton, Michigan. The International Pro Hockey League incepted in 1904, featuring Canadian stars dispersed among teams in the Michigan area. The National Hockey Association (NHA) emerged in 1910, and in 1911, the NHA dropped the number of skaters to five per side. Problems with teams staying in the league, and competition with a west-coast league called the Pacific Hockey League created some problems for the NHA, and as such, on November 26, 1917 in a Windsor hotel in downtown Montreal, the National Hockey League (NHL) was officially created. (Fischler 1993)

## History of Fighting and Violence in Hockey

There is no documentation about the “first fight” in hockey, or the event that triggered the continual acts of violence that transpire during the game, however, as early as 1907, hockey was being “denounced and hailed – depending on your metabolism – as the bloodiest of modern games.” (Fischler, 1993: 4) Garth Vaughan (1996), in his book, *The Puck Starts Here*, notes that “the game got a little rougher as the boys developed more speed and skill on the ice. It seemed to take on a character of its own before long, different somewhat from the game as it was played on a field.” (Vaughan 1996: 17) This was because skates facilitate “sudden and speedy changes of direction” whereas boots make it difficult to stop and shift or turn as quickly. (Vaughan 1996: 19)

Generally, most literature on hockey accepts and welcomes violence in the sport, acknowledging and accepting it as something that has always been a part of the game, continues to be a part of the game, and always will be a part of the game. Keith Magnuson as quoted by Neil Issacs (1977) describes it as a “gutsy, brutal brawling world” and “the roughest and least forgiving sport.” (Issacs 1977: 19) This “blood lust on the ice” however, is no new phenomenon. As Stan Fischler (1991) states in his book, *Bad Boys*, “violence has been a part of the woof and warp of hockey since the first game was played in Montreal on March 3, 1875” (Fischler, 1991: 3) and players “expect and accept it as part of their working day.” (Fischler 1991: 8) Players embedded in the “hockey culture” grew up with this violent, physical, intensive game and never questioned it because they did not know how to play the game any other way.

The game of hockey is truly unique and special in its own right, having a mentality that is starkly different from all other sports. Lawrence Scanlan (2002) quotes Inge Hammarstrom, one of the first Swedes to play in the NHL as saying,

*“[Hockey] is the most demanding sport in the world. It demands speed, stamina, toughness and a lot of other physical and mental qualities. It also demands tolerance of pain...Hockey reporters in North America are always concentrating on concepts such as courage, when ninety-nine percent of the time it is not the moral quality of courage that is at issue but only the physical fact of tolerance to pain. Am I exhibiting any special kind of courage if they knock me unconscious to the ice and carry me off on a stretcher and later I return to the game? No, I am a hockey player. I am like the businessman who goes back to work after he has had the heart operation. He goes back because that is his job and that is what he has chosen to do. Courage has nothing to do with it.” (Scanlan 2002: 28)*

Such “toughness” and resilience are expected traits of a hockey player. Hockey players assume that they will get hurt, and expect it every time they step on the ice. “For as long as men have made a living chasing a rubber disc over frozen water, that ice has been reddened with the blood of players” (Scanlan, 2002: 29) and this is an accepted, welcome and even celebrated part of the game among its players, coaches and most avid spectators.

Some historians of the sport believe that one reason for the violence in hockey is the country of its origin. Stan Fischler (1991) states that “hockey was invented by Canadians, developed by Canadians and until recently, had been virtually monopolized by Canadians.” (Fischler 1991: 5) This has an effect on the amount of violence in the game, because “despite rumors to the contrary, Canadians have been a hell-for-leather people whose passion for raucousness and the grape was a legend of two world wars.”

(Fischler 1991: 5) Fischler believes that this “exposure to bloodshed and death are part of hockey’s machismo which is somehow related to the Canadian Psyche.” (Fischler 1991: 5) Scott Young, another author on the sport states that the “combination of blood, sweat and beauty” hold perhaps “extra meaning for a nation that is still engaged in pushing back its fierce and beautiful frontiers.” (Young, as quoted in Fischler 1991: 5) While this theory does seem far-fetched it is not completely false either. There is something about the cultures of hockey and Canada that are very compatible with each other, and that feed off of one another.

In his book, *The Game*, Ken Dryden, one of the best goalies of the game, and a history major from Cornell University, described how certain themes in hockey, including hockey as a business and the increase in fighting and brawling in the game, remain constant, central themes, irregardless of the time. Scanlan states this is because “every new generation, largely unaware of the history, is convinced that this is all new.” (Scanlan 2002: 32) People automatically assume that the issues and problems with the sport of hockey are new, that the game is continually getting worse, and that much of this has to do with “modern culture.” Dryden, on the other hand, paints a different picture, believing that “a link between present and past might tell us why we play as we do” and that “like tribal history” with “one voice, one mind” the game is passed on through generations, as it is, with no one challenging the continuum. “There was simply no other way to play.” (Dryden as quoted in Scanlan, 2002: 32)

Scanlan believes this “tribal history” described by Dryden, “seems rooted in defiance.” (Scanlan 2002: 33) In the late 1800’s, colonial aristocrats attempted to make cricket Canada’s national game, and failed. It was rejected because so-called “upper

class” people were imposing it on them. “Canadians wanted a sport that reflected their own pioneer identity.” (Scanlan 2002: 33) Lacrosse, a vicious game itself, was first seen as Canada’s sport, and not long after, hockey took over, seen, according to Scanlan “as the perfect metaphor for life in the hinterland.” (Scanlan 2002: 34) Thus, when hockey was embraced in the late 1800’s, violence was not gratuitous, but “revolutionary and subversive” and “at heart, political.” (Scanlan 2002: 34) While the British played “gentlemanly cricket in their summer whites, the Canadians would play primal hockey in the biting winter wind.” (Scanlan 2002: 34) Small towns would form teams and play each other, creating heated rivalries, especially when they lured players “from away” with job deals and bloated salaries to play for them. This created community pride which, Scanlan describes, marked the beginning of hockey wars between rival teams. He cites an example in 1905,

*“the Fredericton Trojans vied with the Marysville Crescents to decide the York County championship in New Brunswick. But when the Crescents didn’t get a promised \$25 guarantee, they refused to come out for the second period and the game was called. Outraged fans broke windows, ripped out light fixtures, and tossed seats onto the ice. Only at midnight did police convince the mob to go home.” (Scanlan 2002: 34)*

This devotion to one’s home team, “became deeply ingrained in the Canadian psyche” as on-ice rivalries, were magnified by the fans off the ice, who in turn, deeply intensified the bitterness and hatred between the teams as a result. It was a vicious cycle with all parties feeding off of one another.

This sense of “tribalism,” mentioned earlier, was also a prominent feature of the game’s first players. One of the most long-standing rivalries in the NHL today, is between the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadians. This dates back to the

early 1900's, when it was about a battle between the English-speaking Maple Leafs, and French-speaking Canadians, settling religious, language and political differences on the ice. According to Scanlan, "on-ice battles were often overshadowed by skirmishes in the stands" and "emotions became so feverish that a missed goal or an 'undeserved' penalty would trigger a rash of pushes and punches, with police and ushers rushing in to keep English and French fans apart." (Scanlan 2002: 36)

Professor Lynn Jamieson (2002) of Indiana University believes that "sport tends to reflect society and we live in a violent era. We have a violent society where people use violence to solve problems instead of using other means." (Jamieson 2002: 1) Violence in hockey, however, is not a new phenomenon that has spawned as a result of modern culture, the media, or recent terrorist attacks. It is something that has been engrained in the culture of hockey, something that has existed in the game when it was first incepted. And while there are many factors that might be responsible for the presence of fighting in hockey, the fact remains that it has always been a part of the game, and as such, likely always will be a part of the game.

## Chapter 6: Second Period

The prior chapter established that fighting has always been a part of hockey. As something seemingly inherent in the game, the question becomes, what function does it serve that makes it so integral? To answer this question, I sought the opinions and perspectives of hockey players themselves, through in-person interviews. My interviews looked to serve several functions; however the primary one was to obtain a first-hand perspective, from the eyes of the hockey player, the role and function of fighting in the sport of hockey. In talking to various elite hockey players I seek to provide various perspectives on playing such a highly aggressive contact sport and determine the notion and need for fist fights. This, hopefully, will provide insight into the mind and eyes of a hockey player, allowing for an outsider to experience the game on the level top players do.

The advantage of my interviews is that I have the perspective of collegiate male and female hockey players. All levels of women's hockey and collegiate men's hockey don't allow fist fights at all. Thus, they have the perspective of players who play a game of hockey that does not feature fist fights. Nonetheless, many of the men's hockey players have played in junior leagues that did promote fist fights, so they have experienced that particular atmosphere. Thus, they provide a variety of insights through their diverse experiences, making their opinion even more useful.

## En Garde!

To understand why players fight, it helps to understand the dynamics and fundamentals of the fist fight first. And although women's hockey does have some fights, this section will focus on the standards and etiquette of fist fights in men's hockey.

The NHL rulebook consists of more than 150 pages, however it is the “unwritten code” that regulates fist fights. There are certain implied expectations players are supposed to follow. According to one male hockey player, there are,

*Two ways to do it. You can be spontaneous, like scrum by the net, defenseman/forward, forward/forward – gloves come off and you're going. Or it could be at a faceoff, guys talking, jawing, slashing. Right off the draw, back away, toss em, helmets off and ready to go. You can set it up, or it can be spontaneous. Bertuzzi from behind that's not the way to do it. If you're gonna fight it has to be mutual. I don't consider a fight one guy beating on another.*

Some of the most important “rules” of the fist fight, are that “both players should be ready to go,” players are expected to “Take off his helmet” giving your opponent time to do the same, and most importantly, “no hitting them when they're down on the ice.” Fights are between two players only – everyone else must steer clear, unless its to prevent someone from interfering. A male player notes,

*“In the national team we had a boxing coach. In junior hockey you take off your helmet. You take off your helmet, square off and fight. Generally, most guys don't hit you when you're down. Rob Ray used to sew his elbow pads to his jersey so he could wiggle out and they couldn't grab onto him. No tape on hands. On wrists but not hands.”*

There are also expectations regarding *who* fights, and just how far to go. As a member of the men's team explains,

*Like in the NHL, there are rules as to who you fight, and unspoken rules about the so-call designated fighters fighting other designated fighters. You won't see Wayne Gretzky fight Tie Domi,*

*but Domi fight McSorley. Skill guys fight skill guys. At times, experienced fighters know when to stop, and even in the heat of a fight, they can stop when they know they've beaten a guy. They know it's a hockey fight and not a street fight. But the fact that there is fighting leaves the possibility that someone really injures someone else.*

Generally, fist fights are not impassioned battles between two men who detest one another. Rather, its part of the business, and just as impersonal as making a pass or taking a shot. This does not mean, however that it cannot be easily escalated into something greater, and that it does not frequently do so. However, as one men's player describes, many fights are not spur of the moment impulses. "Usually a fight is arranged before it happens, like a couple of shifts before. The people fighting square off and go at it." Many times, a player knows before he goes out onto the ice that he will engage in a fight. One player, who played in a particularly rough Junior league, described a process that involved him taking off his elbow pads right before that particular shift, lining up next to the player he wanted to fight at the face-off, and turned to him asking "you wanna go?" before engaging in a fist fight with him. This is generally the norm. Players will ask each other, if they 'wanna go' or 'wanna dance' or some other phrase along the same lines. This generally is a rhetorical question, however as once a player is confronted by another to fight, it is very difficult for him to simply skate away. Turning away from a fight results in that player being seen as a coward or in rare occasions, hit from behind, resulting in a worse injury than if they had just fought. As noted by one player,

*"Both should be ready to go, Steve Moore was sucker punched from behind. That obviously was a rare occurrence, but exemplified the severity of the situation where one wants to fight and the other doesn't. Look and ask if 'you wanna go' and guys drop their gloves and their sticks."*

It is generally accepted that fighting is the “safest” means of resolving conflict in hockey. A player attests that “Rarely do people get seriously injured in a hockey fight. Once a guys falls or starts to get the better hand, its broken up by refs or players. Never severe. Worst is a concussion.” Another agrees, noting that “Usually if one drops to his knees, you usually hold up and stop.” The aim of the fight is not to permanently injure a player physically. Rather, it is to send a psychological message of intimidation. It could almost be seen as a “warning” to the opposing team, or a “first notice” that certain actions will not be tolerated.

As a result of the standards and expectations surrounding the fist fight in hockey, for the most part, it is arguably one of the less violent acts to go on in the game. What exactly is its purpose, and why has it been around for so long?

### The Beginning of the End

Based on my interview results and personal experience, full body contact in men’s hockey starts during the “Peewee” level, which is when the players are 12-13 years of age. This means players can actively “line up” or size up another player and deliberately knock them down. Rules prevent a player from using their elbows, sticks, or hands, but the shoulder itself can do quite a bit of damage. Generally, most young males at this age are excited to start hitting, and eager to add this physical and aggressive aspect to the game. It was seen as “something that was built up,” as noted by one player, and “something fun to look forward to.” A male player describes that he was so excited, “The first shift I had playing contact, I sprinted across the ice and hit someone.” Not all players, however were as enthusiastic. One of the smaller players on the men’s team

notes, "I was a little nervous, just because of my size. But, after playing contact for a bit, it was fine." And others simply went along with it, as something that was part of the game. According to one male player, "I accepted it and didn't really question it. It wasn't part of my game so I didn't think of it. Instead, I thought of how it might hinder my game as opposed to how I was excited to be involved with it."

This inclusion of full-contact was a fork in the road for many players, as it essentially determined who was able to continue playing at a high level, and who was unable to properly handle it. Many of the members of the women's hockey team at Harvard started out playing with the boys, however, were forced to switch to female teams, due to the inclusion of body contact in the boys game. As one player describes, "If I kept playing guys I would have been scared. And I know girls who did and they'd always go after them." Another states she was "Very nervous," and that her "parents were worried because I was playing with boys who were bigger than me." She was also worried "because I was the only girl and felt like boys would come after me and hit me on purpose because the rules allowed contact." Yet another player notes that she felt "A little apprehensive because already I was somewhat victimized by members of other teams because I was a girl playing in an all boys league." For many players, playing the game they loved became much more complicated, as they became forced to deal with this completely new, and sometimes scary aspect of the game.

A female player, describes her feelings as follows,

*"I am a smaller player, so before every game I got this pit in my stomach thinking of the worst things that could happen to me. All fear went aside once I stepped on the ice though. I learned that as a girl playing boys high school hockey you will either not get hit at all, or get hit the most. There's really no in between. Luckily, the*

*guys on my team protected me extremely well and a hit on me would never go unanswered.”*

But not all females had this “protection” from her teammates to fall back on, which made playing in an all-male league even more alienating. As one women’s player describes,

*“I was the only girl on my Peewee team, and also one of the more skilled players. The first year of full body-contact was really tough. While I was always pretty strong, I was still a good 30 pounds lighter than some of the guys. And while I was fast, and could usually avoid the hits, there would always be that one time during the game where I got caught not looking and would just get killed. That one time, when I would not be able to get up. That happened to me at least once every game. And the worst part was, no one stood up for me. So I was not only dealing with guys taking runs at me, but I was also dealing with teammates who didn’t want to help me. It was the worst time of my hockey career.”*

Of course, males did not have the problem of being “targeted” because of their gender, however they too experienced this crossroads of determining whether they could play high level hockey with full-contact or not. Aggression and intimidation becomes a huge factor when hitting is introduced. As such, coaches begin to opt more for the bigger, less skilled but more physically inclined players, while smaller, finesse-type players fall through the cracks. An essential ingredient is described as having a “chip on your shoulder” – that little bit of nastiness or meanness on the ice, that makes one tougher, more intimidating, and in the end, more successful. One player describes her brother’s hockey career, and how it came to an end, because he was too nice.

*“Skill wise, my brother was great – he had an awesome shot, great hands, and was a great skater. But he was a good kid, and that was his downfall. He didn’t have that fire in his eye, that made him want to go out and just wreck someone. He was strong and tough, but he was too passive. And so slowly, he got cast aside. He was the top player on the best team in the league. Then he got less ice time, so he went to a less competitive team, soon he got cast aside there and went to a lower level of hockey, until he stopped altogether. He had everything else going for him, and he*

*could have gone really far with his hockey – but he was not aggressive enough.”*

The environment of the sport breeds a certain level of aggression that becomes necessary for a player to be successful in men’s hockey. Particularly if he wants to play professional hockey. Thus, from an early age, players, and males in particular, are encouraged to “toughen up” and develop a “mean streak” to prepare them. One player described how he and his father would mock fight at home, to get him prepared. Another described how he and his brother would practice hitting drills on each other under their father’s supervision. All so they can handle the roughness and aggression of the game. The game breeds tough, mean, scrappy players who can take hits, and give them back twice as hard. It is not a sport for the faint-hearted or the polite, the passive or nice. Not if you want to succeed. Thus, from even the earliest of ages, and the lowest of levels, players know that if they want to go far, they must toughen their image and roughen their game, because skill alone simply is not enough.

### The “Ideal Man”

Because women’s hockey does not feature body checking and fights in the capacity of men’s hockey, some of the characteristics described in this section may not be as blatantly pertinent to the women’s game as it is to the men’s game. Thus, the attitudes and traits described in this section, while applicable to female hockey players, is more centered around the men’s hockey game and its players.

As with any team sport, there are various roles and duties available for different hockey players to fulfill based on their abilities and strengths. Nonetheless, there are certain traits specific to hockey players that are lauded by both players and coaches as

being integral to the success of a player. As previously noted, once the game becomes full contact, certain players are more apt to succeed, based on their ability to embrace the increased violence and aggression. This is not to say that all players are particularly aggressive, but that they at least accept this increased level of aggression and either make it an integral part of their game, or at the very least, do not allow it to hinder the strongest points of their game. A player's ability to adapt their personality to fit that of the game determines his or her success, particularly in the men's game.

So what kinds of players are valued in hockey? Its hard not to love players like Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux – two of the best to ever play the game, not necessarily because of raw skill or talent, but due to their natural ability to see and play the game at an unprecedented level that has still yet to be matched. But when younger hockey players are asked who they admire, its not always these two names to come up. In fact, quite often, it is not even a team's most skilled players, top goal scorers, or dazzling playmakers who players admire and aspire to be like, but rather the gritty, tough, "character" players. As one member of the women's team describes,

*"I admire both finesse and gritty players. I think it is amazing to watch truly talented players that make hockey look so easy. However, I only like watching finesse players if regardless of how effortless they make hockey seem, in reality they are putting in the effort and dedication needed to be a great hockey player. So I guess overall, I admire the gritty players that are always giving 100%. These players may not be as talented as other players, but they have more heart and determination than anyone else. Through their relentless effort, these players perform well, set a positive tone for their team, and create numerous opportunities."*

According to the hockey players I interviewed, traits of an "ideal" player include players with a lot of "heart" and "guts" and players who "would be prepared to work through discomfort." These players are constantly "trying to make him/herself better" and more

importantly, “they would work to make those around them better as well.” This applies equally to both male and female hockey players. While the pretty plays of a finesse player are certainly admired, these are not the players who the fans adore. People want to be inspired. Fans love the players who will do whatever it takes, to themselves or their opponents to help their team win. As one player notes, she admires “Scott Stevens, because he is the player you love to play with, but hate to play against.”

An NHL Poster boy is not the handsome, all-American mama’s boy, with perfect hair and shining pearly white teeth. Rather, he is a rugged, tough, hard-nosed warrior, with long tousled hair peeking from under his helmet, numerous cuts and bruises on his unshaven face, and of course, the trademark gaping toothless grin. It is a tough game, for tough individuals, men and women alike. This, however does not mean that off-ice, hockey players are uncivilized and barbaric. The game calls for a certain character and brings it out of the players. It is those who allow this aggression to be brought out of them to succeed, not those who have this aggression as a primary facet of their character.

#### He Shoots...Who Cares?

*“Don Cherry is right. On some nights, when a goal is scored, the fans don’t ever get up. But when a fight happens, the whole rink stands up and yells...The home team can win the game 8-1, but the fans will walk out of the arena saying, ‘Did you see that fight with Craig Berube?’ Now, convince me that fans don’t love that stuff.”* Greg Smyth

There is something about a fist fight that will get even the most good-natured person riled up, where they suddenly find themselves screaming bloody murder in an adrenaline-filled rage. People are fascinated by fights, whether they see one on the street, on TV, in video games, or in sporting events. Thus, its no wonder that a sport that

features fights on a regular basis would receive extra attention. People cannot help themselves!

Nearly all interviewed hockey players, male and female alike, stated that they appreciate a nice goal over a good fight. Nonetheless, many of either gender note that there is a certain special excitement that is felt when one sees a fight. This is for a number of reasons, including the fact that particularly because it happens less often than goals and because of the large response it draws from the crowd. As one male player debates,

*“As much as I appreciate the physical aspect of the game, an unreal goal always gets you going. Its tough to compare the two, [however] because they’re completely different elements of the game. A nice goal shows off teamwork, skill, whereas a fight gets the adrenaline going more than a goal. The loudest the fans ever get is for a fight.”*

Another male player also notes how a “good fight will be more remembered and talked about with people after.” It won’t be the passing play, or the nifty moves, or end-to-end rushes that people will reminisce about after the game, but rather the scuffle in front of the net, the two players shoving each other in the corner, and the fight between the two heavyweights in the middle of the game. A player on the women’s team recalls a memory of when she played boys hockey and they were on a road trip, watching an NHL Playoff game between bitter rivals, the Detroit Red Wings and the Colorado Avalanche.

*“I think the most memorable hockey game for me, was that one. There was a huge brawl...all of the players on the ice were paired off with someone else and going at it. The goalies left their nets, met at center ice and started pounding each other’s faces. And the coaches, were climbing over the glass that separated their benches, and screaming at each other. And the entire time, me and my teammates were yelling our heads off, ecstatic at what was going on. It was by far the coolest thing we had ever seen, and we*

*could not stop talking about it – hey, I’m still talking about it, and its over 10 years later!”*

Fights are a point of fascination, for most sports fans. It happens extremely rarely in every other sport, and although it is certainly more frequent in hockey, it would be, on average, less than a fight a game, depending on the teams and the general tone of the match up. Thus, the prospect of a fight gets fans excited, because it is somewhat of a rare experience. The energy in the reaction of the fans, no doubt spurs the players to continue to fight, and likely elevates the aggression and intensity of the moment. Thus, the players and fans work off of one another’s excitement, letting the atmosphere take over.

Goals are exciting, particularly in close games, where it could go either way. And a young player playing by him or herself on the pond is not dreaming of pounding their opponent’s face in, but rather, scoring the winning goal in Triple Overtime in the deciding game of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Gold Medal Game of the Olympics, or the NCAA National Championship game. Goals are highly valued, by players and fans alike, and goals certainly can generate electricity in the building. Nevertheless, there is something about the fist fight that has the ability to put fans over the edge. It taps into an entirely different side of people, bringing out a part of them that even they were not fully aware of. Whether they love it or hate it, few who frequently watch the game of hockey can honestly state that they have no opinions or emotions regarding this aspect of the game. So what exactly is the consensus among players and coaches about the existence of fighting?

## Why can't we be friends?

To the uninvolved observer, there is no rhyme or reason for the fist fight. A member of the men's lacrosse team at Harvard cites,

*"I think they are an interesting part of the game although I don't really understand why they are any more acceptable in hockey just because it is hockey. Seemingly they are there simply because they always have been. It doesn't seem to contribute anything to the actual game, other than making the sport more of a spectacle."*

Even women's hockey players are somewhat divided on what they believe the purpose of fighting to be. One women's hockey player interviewed states,

*"I think that it's a ridiculous sort of element to the game. I know that it happens and its permitted but its not really hockey. The clock's not running its not part of the game."*

Nonetheless, even she admits, that "it's an extra that's kind of a necessity to the game" however, attributes this to the fact that

*"People appreciate the fight. Whatever gets people going to the game and keeps it going. Also they're big guys and they can handle themselves. Half of me thinks its ok but half of me thinks its not hockey and is a poor example for young players."*

Another women's hockey player interviewed cites,

*"Personally I don't like fighting in hockey. I think it takes away from the game of hockey in its purest form of stick, puck, goal, and team. However, I also know that fighting enthralls people. Even on the playground, fighting isn't fun...it's not part of any game that gets played by little kids. But as soon as a fight does break out because of a natural competitive impulse, kids are drawn to it... and they have not been conditioned into that fascination. Therefore it seems to be a natural impulse to be interested, intrigued, and in a sense, captivated by it."*

Not all female hockey players discredit fist fights, however. One women's player states that fights "Provide a spark for a team if they're losing" while another states that "it's a big part of hockey." And even some of the players who dislike the presence of fights in

the game agree that this does not necessarily mean that they should be banned from the game outright. Though opinions of the purpose of the fist fight can vary greatly, it seems that most hockey players, male and even female, do generally agree that it has always been a part of the game, for whatever reason, and should continue to be a part of the game.

Though most of the female hockey players at Harvard attributed the purpose of fighting to entertainment and monetary purposes, the male hockey players gave more complex reasons. Many psychological, tactical and strategic gains can be made in a hockey game as a result of a fight, regardless of who wins it. As a men's player states, "I don't think it has anything to do with what the fans want. I don't think its to get a rise out of the crowd." The players gave several reasons for the existence of fights in the sport that centered around two main components: Motivation and Energy, and Payback and Protection.

### *Motivation & Energy*

Just as fights can get the fans pumped up, it has the same effect for players as well. Fights ignite a fire and energy in the players on the ice that can serve as a jump-start for a team that is playing flat or uninspired. As a men's player explains, fights "used to be only to protect the best players...but now its also used as a momentum shifter."

Another male player describes how fighting,

*"Can be an intimidation factor, mentally [because when] a guy on your team does well in a fight it gets everyone going. Even if he doesn't do well, you see a teammate laying safety on line for the team and it gives an emotional lift."*

This emotional lift can change the momentum of a game quickly. Hockey is a highly emotional, adrenaline-charged game and a team's success can depend greatly on how well they develop and channel their energy. The aggression that is created when one is engaged in or watching a fist fight creates an energy in the arena that truly affects the way both teams play. Thus, when a team is not playing well, one of their "enforcers" or fighters, will pick a fight with the enforcer on the opposing team. Even if he loses that fight, the fact that the player initiated it to begin with, is enough. This is because the fight adds passion, emotion and that primal aggressive instinct that will motivate his team, bring some life and energy into the building, and help his team regain momentum turning the game around as a result. A fight has the potential to be the biggest turning point in a game, and a large determinant in whether a team wins or loses.

### *Payback & Protection*

In the sport of hockey, there exists an inherent speed and aggression that naturally translates into more violent behavior. This will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter, however simply based on the fact that the game is played on skates, one can infer that hockey is played at a faster pace than other contact sports. Consequently, this high rate of speed results in more collisions, with less time to act rationally, leading instead to aggressive, instinctive and thus, violent reactions as a result.

While referees certainly do their best to regulate this, the pace and close quarters means that actions will be missed, liberties will be taken, and a game can be seriously compromised as a result. Thus, according to some players, fights provide a means of "policing" and regulating opponents, ensuring that opponents aren't playing dirty and

making cheap plays that could potentially injure a player. As one player explains, “I think fighting regulates the game, and keeps it clean. Players know that they have to ‘pay the price’ and suffer the consequences if they play dirty.” He goes on to state,

*“I think fighting plays a very important role in the game of hockey. Playing junior hockey, I can understand first hand. On our team, we had two players just to fight. They were there to protect our star players. We had the best fighter in the league and it definitely made a difference. Teams would not take liberties on us and for the most part, play a clean game. However, when these fighters were not in the lineup, opposing teams would bully and run our guys, just because they knew that they would not have to suffer the consequences.”*

Rule infractions in hockey are penalized by a player sitting in a “penalty box” for a prescribed time, depending on the severity of the infraction. “Minor Penalties” are two minutes, “Double Minor Penalties” are four, and “Major Penalties” are five minutes. Should an infraction be especially serious, a player can get a “Misconduct Penalty” which is either ten minutes, or for the remainder of a game. A player can also be suspended from play for a number of games, at the discretion of the league’s commissioner. And while it is difficult for a team to play short-handed at times, and while it is certainly punishment for that particular player to sit out for whatever his or her penalty is, in relation to the injury and damage they can inflict from their actions, a simple penalty, even a suspension is sometimes not enough. As such, players feel the need to take matters into their own hands, to ensure their own safety and the safety of their teammates, by sending a message to opponents that certain actions are not acceptable, and that there will be repercussions. As one male player explains, “If you didn’t have fighting people would go after your best players and there wouldn’t be consequences.” Another male notes, “there are a lot less liberties taken when there is fighting because players know that

there are strong repercussions for blatant slashes.” Thus, just as it is used to increase the intensity of a game, a fist fight can also curb and regulate this intensity, to protect the safety of the players. Knowing that they will have to answer for certain actions in a fight will make a player much less likely to commit dangerous plays that are harmful to other players. At least, they’ll be less likely than if their only punishment was sitting in the penalty box for a couple of minutes.

While even male hockey players admit that fights can “detract from more skilled play” it is generally agreed amongst them that there are multiple valid reasons for the existence of the fist fight within the game itself. As a male player summarizes,

*“I agree with fighting because its for protection. If someone goes after your best player you need someone to retaliate so they can’t take liberties at your best player. Its also for momentum to get your team going. And to settle things safely. Letting people fight is better than having them swing their sticks or settle it off the ice.”*

Thus, it would seem that in a sport like hockey, fights are not only acceptable, they are completely necessary. However, not all leagues and levels of hockey have fighting. Women’s hockey and men’s collegiate hockey have no fighting at all, and European hockey has significantly less fighting than North American. If fighting is so integral to the sport as a strategy for winning and a means of protection and prevention, why is it not a universal practice?

#### (Not) Everyone is Kung Fu Fighting

It is generally known in the “hockey world” that European hockey is a more skill-based game. They play on larger ice surfaces, and from a young age, develop skating, passing, stick handling and shooting skills, much more so than North American hockey players. As one player describes,

*“European Style focuses more on skating and skill with the puck so as a result most of their players and their game in general – there’s more flow to it, and it’s faster and therefore requires players that are fast and skilled. North American has evolved into more of a contact sport, and less based on skill and speed, and more focused on systems and physicality.”*

As such, there is less of an emphasis on physical play in European hockey than North American hockey, because the players are more skilled. Another player notes, “North American hockey is a lot more physical. European is a lot of skating; more finesse...players not as willing to play physical.” Though the game is more skill-based, with less hits and fights, however, this does not mean that the game is completely devoid of any aggressive behavior. One player describes,

*“North American hockey is more about big huge guys and big hits and playing the ‘trap’ whereas European hockey there is a ton more flow, more team chemistry. North American hockey is becoming more individual whereas European is more team orientated. But where North American hockey has more fights, European hockey has more stick work.”*

“Stick work” is when a player uses his or her stick to slash, spear, hook or trip another player, to impede their progress. Such plays are much less noticeable by referees and fans, however they are still large factors, as they are not only disruptive to one’s ability to play, but they can also be painful at times. Thus, while European players focus more on skill, and thus, are less apt to deliver crushing body checks or engage in fights, there still exists that aggressive instinct, merely expressed in a different manner – through the use of their sticks.

The collegiate hockey game, seen as a feeder for many NHL teams, differs from its pre-NHL counterparts, namely Junior hockey leagues, in its outright ban of fighting. One male player informs, “fighting is not allowed in College hockey. If you fight in

college you get suspended for a game. If you fight twice or three times you sit out 10 games.” This has resulted in many NHL scouts dismissing collegiate hockey players, or putting them lower on the list of potential draft picks, because of the college emphasis on skill and finesse. Collegiate hockey is to Junior hockey, what European hockey is to North American – a more skilled, less physical version of the game. College players wear full face masks, instead of the half-visors in Junior hockey, and this in and of itself curbs much of the fighting, because the helmet is far more difficult to remove. It is also much more strictly regulated by not only referees, but coaches, school administrators and the NCAA. As one player explains,

*“The college game is so closely policed by the referees that no one is gonna run your goalie twice. Maybe that’s the only thing. It’ll take one fight. But the refs will take care of that first. But you’re still dealing with young men not grown men like in the NHL. Its going to take more than 2 mins to tell someone to stop doing something. The majority of the NHL guys are older and it wont take a slap on the wrist to stop them.”*

In the collegiate game, you’re dealing with young men, who are also in school, and more easily controlled as a result. They are not only hockey players, but students as well, and because their hockey, school and personal life are so closely intertwined, the consequences for certain acts can have severe effects on other aspects of that player’s life. They can get kicked out of the school, lose their scholarships, or be deemed ineligible for NCAA play. These consequences have far greater weight with a collegiate hockey player, playing on an athletic scholarship while studying at a university, than a Junior hockey player, who is simply playing semi-professionally, or an NHL player, who has made hockey his living. As such, collegiate players are far more likely to abide by rules and regulations, and not feel as great a need to take matters into their own hands.

Furthermore, coaches and scouts in general recruit more skilled, talent-focused players, as opposed to the less-skilled, goon-type players, so there are less acts that require serious policing.

Another difference suggested by a member of the men's hockey team between professional and collegiate hockey had to do with season duration and frequency of playing certain teams.

*In the NHL you have 82 games – I don't know how many times you play teams in your division. A lot of it has to do with reputation. If you didn't know a guy personally I don't think it would happen. In college hockey we only play 2 games against each team. There's less frequency of violent play and even still there's only 2 games to develop personal rivalries.*

When you play a team more frequently, you begin to learn their tendencies, know their players, and develop more of a rivalry with them. Games become more heated battles as a result, because the players begin developing feelings of bitterness and even hatred toward their opponents. Play is more physical, more aggressive, and dirtier, as players seek to hurt, or even injure their opponents, causing their opponents to return the favor in retaliation. As the saying goes, "familiarity breeds contempt." The long schedule of the NHL, and Junior leagues is long enough to breed much contempt between opposing teams, that just cannot be developed in the same way in collegiate hockey, with only 35 or so game, compared to 80-plus games. And while certain schools have those rivalries that certainly bring out the aggressive sides of the players; these games are extremely intense, but simply not as frequent.

Like European hockey, however, this too does not mean that collegiate hockey is completely devoid of aggression and intimidation tactics. One player believes that "having masks promotes stick work and more dangerous attempts of hitting like in the

boards and from behind.” Thus, while actual fist fights are not allowed in the game, there still exists a certain amount of aggression that require an outlet. Such outlets replace fist fights in serving as means of channeling aggression without seriously injuring their opponents.

While women’s hockey is one of the most aggressive female sports, the sport still lacks many of the elements that make men’s hockey so aggressive, namely body checking and fighting. Granted there is “hitting” in the sport, however players cannot outright “line up” or seize up their opponents and outright hit them the way the men can. And fights are more severely punished in women’s hockey. While there still exists scuffles around the net and in the corner, very rarely do these result in one-on-one fist fights that stop the game, particularly at the higher levels of the game. One member of the women’s team speculates,

*“I wonder if the fighting is just an outlet for male testosterone and it’s a chemical thing. Hockey is faster than any other sport. You have boards which are like running into a brick wall. More embarrassment. If you get hit, fans cheer. Your pride is hurt and there’s a need for revenge. You can either go head hunting or just fight the guy. And a male response is a protector or aggressor. Females are not more prone to go after the person.”*

Perhaps males are simply more prone to fighting than females, even in a sport that brings out one’s most aggressive instincts. As one player explains, “Women’s hockey doesn’t have fighting because its so severely punished.” She notes, however that there is “Trash talking, slashing, a lot more stickwork.” This stick work includes “crotch shots,” which is when a player uses her stick to strike her opponent between the legs. This is absent in men’s hockey, as there appears to be an implicit agreement that such actions are unacceptable.

The refs will intervene much more quickly in women's hockey than men's hockey, according to another player. She notes that perhaps this is because of a social acceptance issue, where fighting is more acceptable and encouraged for men than women. She explains, "in the world, guys settle things through fighting whereas girls settle things through arguing and bitching." While male players certainly do their share of trash talking, it appears that women's hockey players use trash talking as their primary aggression outlet, talking to their opponents while play is going on and during play stoppages as well.

*"I get a lot of girls slashing me a lot and talking to me, especially in the corners, and at face-offs. Most of the time they make comments about how you look, insults about weight, or the way you play. Pretty much anything goes. It's usually out of earshot of the referee, so they don't get penalized for it."*

It seems as though females use more psychological and emotional intimidation in lieu of the physical intimidation employed by males in order to obtain a competitive advantage. As such, while there are certainly instances of females responding to aggression through physical force, it is more likely that they will use verbal abuse as their primary aggression outlet.

### The Point

Based on the interviews I had with collegiate male and female hockey players I have come to arrive at the following conclusions about violence in hockey, and the sport in general:

- 1) Upon the inclusion of body contact in the sport, around the age of 13 years old for most players, the game takes on a much more aggressive spin that results in

certain players being forced to quit or play lower levels, due to their inability to prevent this change from negatively affecting their game. This occurs sometimes irregardless of that player's prior skill level.

- 2) The players valued from this point forward are intensive, aggressive individuals, who are willing to put their physical safety on the line for the sake of their team. They are fearless on the ice, almost reckless, as they inflict harm on others and themselves. This persona, however is an on-ice persona and does not necessarily mean that the individual off the ice is the same. The most mild-mannered person off the ice can be transformed into an animal on the ice given the right stimuli.
- 3) The fist fight and the implicit "code of conduct" associated with it, is something most hockey players, both male and female, are well acquainted with. They are understood expectations of behavior, and regulated among players only, not the league.
- 4) While there are varying opinions on the purpose and function of fist fights, it is generally agreed that they can be used for motivation and energy, or protection and intimidation. For the most part, males support fights, whereas females disapprove, however both male and female hockey players do agree that to a certain extent, fights can serve a constructive purpose.
- 5) Fights are present only in certain leagues, namely, North American Junior hockey leagues, and professional hockey leagues. European hockey leagues have significantly less fighting, and collegiate hockey and women's hockey have no fighting at all, aside from the odd rare occurrence. Although there aren't fights in all the leagues, the aggression is still present, however it is merely expressed in

different ways. In some leagues, such as Collegiate and European leagues, it is through the use of the hockey stick to slash, spear strike or trip an opponent and in women's hockey it is through crotch shots and trash talking.

Based on my interviews and these premises, it can be inferred that the sport of hockey breeds an aggression in its players, both male and female, that, for the safety of all involved, require an effective and safe release. In professional and junior leagues, fist fights serve as that release. In women's hockey, trash talking serves as that release, and in European and collegiate hockey, stick work is that release. The fast pace, high intensity, closed-in environment, and energy dynamic between players, coaches and fans, makes violence and aggression in the sport an inevitability, and fist fights one apparent solution for keeping everyone under control.

## Chapter 7: Third Period

### *Introduction*

The first two components of my research looked at Contextual and Situational reasons for the presence of fist fights in hockey. And while both components do provide extremely relevant answers, they are from a somewhat biased perspective, as they stem from the perspective of those deeply involved in the game. The purpose of this section is to outline the Environmental component, or the external perspective of those factors not directly involved with the game, but still important nonetheless.

This will be accomplished by looking at two primary external factors: The Arena Climate and the Social Climate. My observance of countless hockey games, will attempt to break down the physical and social structure of the hockey arena, and what makes it unique from other playing surfaces such as a football or lacrosse field, or a basketball court. I will also look at the relevant interactions between spectators, be they fans, officials or coaches, and the players on the ice, and how certain actions and reactions precipitate certain behaviors. I will then observe the social climate of modern-day North American culture. Fighting in hockey exists today for various reasons, however one that cannot be discounted is the fact that it generates revenue through fan support. Who is watching hockey, and why are they watching?

### *Arena Climate*

#### Baby, its cold outside

Part of my research involved interviewing lacrosse and football players at Harvard University. Though both are highly intense, aggressive and physical sports,

neither football nor lacrosse feature fist fights in the same capacity as hockey. One factor that differentiates hockey from football and lacrosse, is the fact that hockey is played indoors, whereas football and lacrosse are played outdoors. The intensity and aggression that is developed in the three sports, can be somewhat dispersed a little more if it is outdoor, whereas, when indoor, the energy is contained, within this building, and built upon, by the spectators, officials, coaches, and players. The crowd is more audible indoors, because the noise is contained, and thus, it is much easier to get adrenaline-charged and respond to certain events in a high-energy, aggressive manner. One lacrosse player notes how while there is no fighting in outdoor lacrosse, indoor or “box” lacrosse, which is frequently played inside hockey arenas without the ice, is extremely violent, with numerous fights a game. I recall watching a tournament with children who looked about nine years of age playing indoor lacrosse, and fights broke out every few minutes between the players. As the player explains,

*Box lacrosse is very violent and there are more fights in pro-box (both leagues) than the NHL. In box, types of violence range from brawls to two people fighting (hockey-style fighting). There are always a number of fights in a box game and these fights escalate more quickly into brawls than they do in hockey because there seems to be an informal code of fighting (where there are no cheap shots and individuals square off and have one-on-one fighting). Professional outdoor or pro-field lacrosse has more fights than collegiate lacrosse but these fights are generally contained so it is only two people fighting. This is because the league (MLL) monitors violence so the league can maintain good public relations (like the NHL).*

There seem to be certain elements of playing indoors that increases the adrenaline of the players, making them more prone to respond to events violently. As noted in the literature review, hockey became more violent once it was played indoors as opposed to outdoors. Indoor lacrosse is more violent than outdoor lacrosse. While regulations play a

hand in this, it is undeniable that there must be some sort of effect that competing indoors has on an individual, helping to influence what they do in certain situations, making them more likely to act violently.

### Weapons of Mass Destruction

There are more “weapons” at the disposal of a hockey player than other athletes in other sports. Pucks, sticks, stiff boards, hard ice, unforgiving goalie posts, and of course, fists, elbows, knees and even heads are continually threatening to cut, bruise or break any part of a player’s body at any given moment. Even when one is not intending to do so, there are various ways by which they can inflict pain on another, just during the normal course and flow of the game. Anything can happen to a player, who is already precariously balanced on two thin strips of steel, as they race up and down the ice, sometimes as fast as 25 miles per hour.

### The Need for Speed

This speed is an essential element of the dynamic in hockey. According to Garth Vaughan in his book *The Puck Starts Here*, in the game’s infant stages, it was when “the boys developed more speed and skill on the ice” that the game got rougher, starting to “take on a character of its own” that differed from the way it was played on the field. (Vaughan 1996: 17) Skates are a unique piece of equipment, but particularly for contact sports. Not only do they allow a player to travel faster, but it also facilitates sudden and speedy changes of direction, and the opportunity to generate a significant amount of momentum with minimal exertion of energy. As such, the game is played at a much faster pace than those not on skates, and collisions are much more intense, because they

are occurring at a high speed. With high-intensity impacts occurring at a fast pace in a short period of time, one is not given an opportunity to collect themselves and respond rationally or logically. They respond instinctively, seeming to regress into a mode where they rely on primal instincts. Consequences are not taken into account. Adrenaline takes over, and anything can happen.

### The Legend of the Iron Mask

The equipment worn by hockey players can also play a role in the presence and frequency of fighting. While football, lacrosse and hockey players have very similar padding, there are some significant differences that can also affect the frequency in fighting. As many collegiate hockey players interviewed noted, wearing full face masks makes fighting more difficult sometimes, because they are harder to remove, and it is pointless to punch someone with a helmet on. A football player agrees, noting “since we are wearing helmets [fighting] is not the smartest thing in the world to do.” Football helmets are heavy, and difficult to remove, so to go through all this trouble to take off a helmet, makes the fight more burdensome and somewhat awkward. Lacrosse players also wear full masks, and thus face a similar dynamic. While this is not to say that face masks eliminate fighting, what it does imply is that such equipment promotes certain behavior and norms, and inherently discourages others.

The game of hockey was originally played without helmets, which explains why fights were even more frequent in the past. Helmets were introduced, fairly recently, approximately 30 years ago or so, and were made mandatory as little as 10 years ago. Thus, players never had to face the trouble of removing helmets for the purpose of

fighting. This also meant, however, that players did not take certain liberties. They were conscious of the equipment they and their opponents were wearing, and thus, were not as liberal with certain hits, out of an unspoken respect they had. As players are more heavily padded, this can sometimes lead to cheap shots behind the play, that could actually cause more injury. Thus, though fights might decrease because of face masks, other forms of violence exist as a result.

Exceptions will exist, however, for the most part, face masks hinder fighting, not only in football and lacrosse, but hockey as well, and consequently, will affect the way that particular game is played.

### There's No 'I' in Team

One football player interviewed proposed an interesting theory to why football does not have fights in the same capacity, citing it has to do with the essence of the "team" in the sport of football. He states, "football is a team sport more so than any other I feel and if there was a player on the team that got into a fight I feel as though the rest of the team would jump in and it would result in an all out brawl." Because actions can be so easily escalated when over 100 testosterone-charged men, brimming with adrenaline and aggression are lumped together in an arena with thousands of screaming fans, they are somewhat more likely to be kept in check, to avoid possibly grave consequences. This year, a brawl broke out in college football between Clemson and South Carolina, that ended up involving the majority of the players on either team. It was a huge spectacle that made its way onto every news station. As a result, both Athletic directors

of the schools rejected all bowl invitations to punish their players. Such severe consequences make fighting not even worth it for most players.

### Mob Frenzy

More so than any other event or play in a hockey game, the fist fight has the ability to evoke certain emotions from the crowd that are simply unparalleled. As one individual I spoke to described in an e-mail,

*The other night I was at a Kitchener Rangers game - that's the junior team here. The home team was listless, lacking in energy and fell behind by a couple of goals. The crowd was sleepy as well. In the second period, the captain of the team dropped the gloves to fight an opponent.*

*Mike Richards is the Rangers' big star, not a goon, and a guy who rarely fights. But he has a reputation as one of those hard-working "character" players, a true leader, someone who will do anything to win, etc. This is the sort of one-dimensional characterization athletes often get painted with. I'm sure the guy is more complex, but anyone can see he is a talented and very hard-working player.*

*The result of his fight was to fill the building with energy, get the crowd going and energize his team mates. They didn't win, but for a long stretch after the fight they played with more jump. Obviously, that was his intention when he started the fight. This sort of "give the team a spark" fight doesn't always work, but it does often enough for guys to keep trying it. In the seats around me, everyone approved, and people said it was significant that it was the captain who started the fight, not some guy who might be characterized as a goon.*

*It was hard to argue with any of it, which is why a lot of people who oppose fighting in theory can be found applauding it when they're at the game*

As described in the previous chapter, there is something about the fight that touches on certain nerves and primal instincts of the spectators that elicit highly adrenaline-charged

responses. The emotion and aggression created in the building as a result is contagious – with players, spectators, coaches and officials feeding off of each other’s energy. It increases the intensity of the game, the passion the game is played with, and the overall meaningfulness and significance of the game, making it a more enjoyable experience as a whole. Fans will feel as though they witnessed an emotional, hard-fought contest, that left them feeling excited, somewhat emotionally drained, and satisfied. And while goals can certainly have a similar effect, it is simply not in the manner and magnitude of the fist fight. A professional hockey sportswriter Jamie Fitzpatrick notes,

*“Physical, bloody hockey is dear to the hearts of fans and players. The best games are the ones that begin with a touch of hate in the air, and come perilously close to boiling over. Everyone loves a genuine rivalry, in which the animosity extends far beyond the professional obligations of the men in uniform. Everyone loves to see bodies fly (as long as all the hits are “legal,” of course).”*

Based on my experience as both a hockey player and a fan, even the most insignificant tussle is able to draw a reaction. At the Harvard University men’s hockey games, where fist fights are not allowed, when a scuffle breaks out in front of the net, or at the end of the period, the fans (particularly the intoxicated male fans), will jump to their feet, screaming, pumping their fists in the air, in an excited, impassioned rage. And these aren’t even real fights. This is because, as Fitzpatrick states, “In most cases, the fight itself is inconsequential, a silly, shirt-tugging dance. But it can augur well. A fight often acts as an ignition switch, stoking the passions of everyone in the building. The players bear down; the intensity rises; the plot thickens; the game is on.” This ability to effectively hit that nerve of fans bodes well for the fight and the game as a whole. As Fitzpatrick notes, “this menacing streak is one of the game’s most valuable assets” and

consequently, must be preserved. Its code of conduct, unique to its players and fans alone, universally accepted and celebrated in hockey circles, in a way that is just not possible in other cultures.

### *Social Climate*

#### He's no Domi

Above all other sports, it is safe to say that Hockey is Canada's first love. And the sentiments of many Canadians were often expressed by Don Cherry, a notorious and sometimes infamous Canadian broadcaster and former coach of the Boston Bruins. Cherry continually voiced his disdain for European players, whom he deemed to be "pansies" and not true hockey players, due to their emphasis on skill, and tendency to shy away from fights and scuffles. He praised rough, sometimes even dirty play, by mainly Canadian hockey players, who played, as he describes it "with a chip on his shoulder." He liked feisty, tough hockey players who never backed down from a fight. To Cherry, the ideal hockey player is one who esteems "dropping in front of shots, risking injury, sacrificing the body for the squad." (Scanlan 2002: 27) This opinion was generally shared by Canadian hockey fans as well, as evidenced by the fact that Cherry's annual *Rock 'em Sock 'em Hockey* highlight videos, glorifying some of the most brutal hits and toughest fights, have sold over 20 million copies.

In hockey-crazy Toronto, the fan favorite is not captain Mats Sundin, nor is it leading goal scorer Alexander Mogilny. Rather, it is Tie Domi – the team's "tough guy." Domi is no exceptional skater, passer, or playmaker and he rarely scores, however despite his small stature, he is likened to a pitbull, always gnawing away at his opponents, frustrating them, getting under their skin, getting in their heads, until they have had enough and

challenge him to a fight. He never backs down from a fight, and has certainly had some “classic” bouts against many of the league’s other tough guys. He is the kind of player who is reverently hated in every other city except the city he plays for, where instead, he is worshipped.

There are many reasons for why this is so, including the fact that Domi was born and raised in the Toronto area, so there exists a lot of hometown pride, however it goes much deeper than that. The commentary of individuals like Don Cherry and other hockey analysts have bred Canadians, and thus all other North American hockey fans, to appreciate the gritty, gutsy, violent side of hockey and demand more of it. They refer back to “the good ‘ol days” when players used to play without helmets, use heads, sticks, and even skates to strike their opponents, and played through injury, whether it was a broken limb, a concussion, or near-death! While hockey has deviated quite a bit from that stage in its existence, this is still seen as the ideal, the long-desired past, that will never actually be returned to, but that people can still dream of, nonetheless.

People associate immense talent with a lack of work ethic, passion and heart. When someone is able to make a game look effortless, no matter how hard they may actually be trying, people will always cite them as being impassioned. Passion is the essence of hockey. It is what drives its players on the ice to go that extra inch when their legs are about to give out. What gives a player the courage to drop down on the ice and allow a 100mph shot to hit them in the body, only to immediately bounce back up and chase the puck the other way. Fans need to see this passion. They need to know that the player they watch loves this game as much as they do. And if that player is unable to effectively display his passion, he will never be truly admired.

### What other athletes think of Fights in Hockey

While hockey is certainly an extremely aggressive and violent sport, it is not the only one. Sports, such as lacrosse and football have full body contact, requiring their players to wear similar protective padding. Nonetheless, these sports rarely have fist fights, and certainly not at all in the capacity that hockey does.

Varsity Football players and Lacrosse players at Harvard University agree that their sport is extremely violent, with some football players stating that their sport is “the most violent collegiate sport at Harvard.” The majority of football and lacrosse players interviewed cited either hockey or football as the “most violent” sport, because football is a “very intense, high collision sport” and hockey because “people with sticks are encouraged to fight.” Football, a sport predicated on full body contact and uber-aggressive behavior, however, lacks fist fights in the capacity that hockey features it. So does outdoor lacrosse. How is it that these sports, with many similar features, lack the violence in the same capacity?

For the most part, lacrosse and football players, are somewhat divided on their beliefs regarding the presence of fighting in hockey. While most do see its purpose, noting, “they minimize all the other dirty plays such as slashing” and are “something that has been engrained in the hockey culture” there are others who believe it has no place in any sport, including hockey. For the most part, however, while football and lacrosse players don’t believe fighting has a place in their sport, most agree that fighting does have a place in hockey.

### What society as a whole thinks of fights in hockey

In the United States of America, hockey is not as popular, nor is it as widely viewed as it is in Canada. As Jamie Fitzpatrick (2004) states,

*“the target audience for sports – fat guys sitting on couches in places like Des Moines and Wichita – do not want hockey. They want hoops, football, NASCAR and bowling. They might go for Survivor or American Idol, or anything featuring half-naked women. But not hockey.”*

For whatever reason, the sport of hockey simply does not have the fanfare of other “major” sports – at least not in America. And while Canadians are frenzied hockey fans, Canada has one-tenth of the population of the United States, two-thirds of which is residing within hours of the US border, and an economy that heavily relies on its American counterparts. The NHL as a whole is losing money, with only a handful of teams actually turning in a profit, and as the 2004 Lockout that cancelled the season shows, it’s not being missed. As less and less people watch hockey, owners and commissioners seek means of grabbing people’s interest, of gaining publicity, good or bad. After all, bad news is still good news if people are watching.

### The Need to Fight

Boston Globe Columnist Kevin Dupont (2005) wrote a column on February 18, 2005 noting that the NHL product today is a weak one, and undesirable to non-die-hard hockey fans.

*Not long after the last lockout ended in 1995, hockey as we knew it began to wither in rink after rink after rink. Once the New Jersey*

*Trappist Wonks won the first of their three Stanley Cups that spring, clogging up the middle of the ice evolved to an art form. Obstruction and goaltending have ruled the day ever since. Building out the game's footprint, expanding to a 30-team league, also all but obliterated division rivalries. The game once thrived on tribal warfare, emotionally charged matches between the likes of Boston and Montreal, Toronto and Detroit. But as the spontaneity, speed, and skill got trapped out of the game, the rivalries also died on the vine, all of it contributing to a boredom factor that engulfed rinks from Boston to British Columbia.*

He notes that the game has lost much of its passion, intensity and aggression that made it so beloved in the 1970's and 1980's, when it became more systemized, predictable, and essentially boring. One of Dupont's proposed remedies of the game includes the return of fist fights as a more dominant part of the game, rather than a side-note spectacle.

*"It's hard not to come across tongue-in-cheek here, but let's be honest, real fighting, up to and including the donnybrooks, personified the game's passion. Sure, it sometimes got out of hand. But it also put real juice in the building on a nightly basis, and it did a masterful job of keeping most everyone honest. The punk who tried to get away with shifts of hook and hold ultimately had to answer to a right hand to the kisser.*

By making the game more impassioned and intensive, it will be more desirable to the public. While hockey is not as popular today, much of this is because it does not feature the amount of violence and aggression it used to be known for. This is what set the sport apart from all others, and gave it some uniqueness and originality. Even today, it is those aspects of the game, though they are less frequent, that get highlighted the most, because they are what the people want to see.

It seems that hockey is more of a novelty to the average American. For most, the one aspect of hockey that is well known and notorious, is the fist fight. Just as people will stop and watch a bar fight, or a car wreck, they'll stop to watch a hockey fight. Not

because they have any emotional investment in it, but out of mere and pure curiosity. So in between Sportscenter's plentiful coverage of baseball and football's off-season, and lengthy reports on basketball, both professional and collegiate, they will throw some hockey fights in to add some spice and flavor.

As such, if this is what the people want to see, then as an enterprise in the entertainment business, the National Hockey League will give the people what they want. They could so easily ban fighting altogether, severely punishing the players who break the rule, but they elect not to, because they know that this is what gives them notoriety, attention, and consequently, money.

The NHL is not solely to blame for this, however. Much of the glorification of gratuitous violence and fist fights in hockey comes from news outlets, editorial columns, and general discussion amongst American people about certain issues or events. As Fitzpatrick notes in a column about media reaction to an incident involving Todd Bertuzzi of the Vancouver Canucks, and Steve Moore of the Colorado Avalanche,

*America's media turned its full fury on the NHL, casting thunderbolts from anchor desks and editorial pages. Bertuzzi's attack was denounced as sickening and vile - though this did not prevent television networks from replaying it over and over."*

People will express their outrage over certain actions of the players, while these same actions are being repeatedly shown on television. In the act of speaking out against fighting and violence in hockey, these same individuals are giving it more publicity, and consequently more power. Thus, it is a two-edged sword. And how can the NHL effectively get rid of what is at the heart of their popularity?

Die-hard hockey fans, and true students and players of the game appreciate all aspects of the game, from the pretty plays, to the gutsy battles. However, such a fan is

not as common, in many parts of the United States. Thus, in order to gain the mass appeal of the casual fan, it benefits the NHL to have the one thing that truly sets it apart from other professional sports highlighted – the fights. As such, even if analysts, broadcasters and columnists bemoan the fact that hockey promotes such seemingly deviant actions as an integral part of the game, the mere fact that they publicly express these opinions simply further legitimizes the existence of exactly what they are speaking out against.

## Chapter 8: Overtime

It is doubtful that people will ever be able to arrive at a consensus about the role of fighting and violence in hockey. Just as some strongly support it, there are many who remain vehemently against it. My thesis did not seek to evaluate either argument, nor do I intend to take sides. Rather, I hoped to provide an unbiased, objective stance, by presenting a variety of reasons for its presence in the game, in turn allowing for more probable and agreeable solutions.

While I encountered compelling research that provided various theories and opinions about the existence of fighting in the sport of hockey, no single argument was able to adequately address the issue of violence and fighting in the sport of ice hockey.

Even if the sport of hockey were merely a positive outlet for innately aggressive individuals, as proposed by Freud (1950) and Lorenz (1966) why is it significantly more violent and dangerous than other contact sports similar to it? And why has this violence been taken to a new level, as an accepted means of gaining tactical advantage, irregardless of the fact that it has nothing to do, directly, with winning the game.

Leonard's (1988) frustration hypothesis does not hold up either. The players most likely to be faced with the most "frustrating" stimuli, are not the ones who are fighting. Rather, they are the skilled players, whom the enforcers are employed to protect. Skill players are continually harassed physically and verbally throughout the course of a game. Enforcers seek to protect these skill players from such abuse. However, it is a double-edged sword. If teams did not have "enforcers," and replaced these players with more skilled players, would skill players still require protection?

The known consensus about the majority of “enforcers” is that they make up for their lack of skills, by being tough, “character” players, who fight (literally) for their respect. They fight for two main reasons: Motivation and Protection. However, for the purposes of the game, in and of itself, is there a true need for these enforcers? They are protecting their teammates from each other, even though their job would be nonexistent without one another.

While most of the pressures and influences to fight in hockey are internal, stemming from the game’s history and nature, there does exist a certain pressure from the public to play in an aggressive manner. This pressure is the ticket sales, jersey sales, fans cheering wildly at every fight or altercation in the ice, the signs of approval that the violence is welcomed and enjoyed and more is wanted.

### Why is there fighting in hockey?

Based on the flaws in some of the arguments noted about, my research sought to look deeper into three possible reasons for fights in hockey: Historical, Situational, and Environmental.

#### Historical

In doing a historical review of the game of hockey, I discovered that fights in hockey was not a modern phenomenon, nor a consequence of a bloodthirsty, violent society spawned by professional wrestling and video games. Fights and gratuitous violence have been a part of hockey since the first organized game was played in 1875. Hockey was always bemoaned or praised for its edgy, violent nature and this aggressive

nature is accepted and expected by players and fans as having always been a part of the game and always continuing to be a part of the game.

Also embedded in the game is a certain “tribal history” where fans and communities vehemently support their teams, creating intense rivalries that arise particularly out of frequently playing a certain opponent. In the early games of hockey, games pitted communities of different social classes, religions or cultures against one another, making the competition much more than simply a sports event. This resulted in deep-rooted dislike for one’s opponents, which brought out the most intense and aggressive sides of individuals, translating in a more violent game.

### Situational

This “tribal history” embedded in the game of hockey creates an unspoken behavior or “code” that is accepted and enforced by players during the game. There are expectations of behavior that are not necessarily explicitly stated, but are known widely in the hockey culture, and seen as integral parts of how it is played. My interviews with elite male and female hockey players shed some light on this culture and attempted to explain and verbalize what exactly was taking place out there on the ice.

Based on my interviews, I was able to determine several things to be true or at the least, prevalent in hockey, and more specifically, men’s hockey. First, upon the inclusion of body contact around the age of 13, the men’s game becomes significantly more aggressive and violent, and those unable to handle this play a lower level of hockey, or if female, switch to women’s hockey. From this point forward, highly valued players are intensive and aggressive and willing to place their own personal safety on the line for the

good of their team. They are fearless, reckless, and able to inflict harm on others, while experiencing pain themselves. The fist fight, and “code of conduct” implicitly associated with it is something most hockey players are well acquainted with. They are understood by the players, and regulated amongst themselves, not the league. Fights are seen as emotional “sparks” in a game, giving a lagging team some energy, passion and emotion. They also protect players from dirty or “cheap” plays that can seriously harm someone, setting the standard that certain behavior will not be tolerated. And while some hockey players, both male and female, question its purpose, the majority do agree that the fist fight does serve a constructive purpose when used properly.

In the leagues and divisions of hockey that do not allow fighting, there are other forms of aggression that takes place instead. Stick-abuse or verbal abuse are quite prevalent in collegiate and European hockey, and women’s hockey, among other forms of intimidation to “send a message.”

My interviews support the belief that there are inherent aspects to the game that require “outlets” for built up aggression and frustration. However, they also present other reasons for fights, namely as a form of motivation for one’s team. While many make the argument that fighting is fueled mostly by its own popularity with fans, many of the hockey players interviewed disagreed, believing that fighting is a part of the game irregardless of the fans, and that fans merely add to the atmosphere and enhance it.

### Environmental

While most hockey players believe that fans are not the reason for the fist fight in the game, this does not mean that fans, and society as a whole, don’t play an integral part.

As Rick Horrow (1980) noted, there are strong pressures within leagues from both players, coaches, officials to support the fact that fighting is “a fact of hockey life” (21) and thus, this phenomenon, which is also popular among fans, is not curbed or banned altogether by professional leagues.

Because hockey does not have the mainstream appeal of baseball, basketball or football in the United States, the attention it draws from its fist fights, be it positive or negative, is much needed. As such, while some leagues have been able to effectively ban fighting, the NHL and the major North American junior leagues have opted not to, because these fights add a certain novelty or interest to the game that it otherwise lacks. Fist fights aren't the core of hockey's popularity, particularly among the serious fans in Minnesota, North Dakota and New England, however they attract the interest of the casual fan, watching Sportscenter, or flipping through the channels, and thus, can play a role in generating revenue in non-diehard fan areas.

My observing of fans at hockey games, be it professional hockey games, or more recently, Harvard Hockey games, showed that even the smallest tussle between players drew a huge reaction from fans, and ignited an energy in the building that no other play could generate.

In talking to lacrosse and football players, athletes who also play high-intensity, contact sports, I also discovered another aspect that separates hockey – namely, the enclosed space in which the players play. Hockey is played indoors in an arena, on a sheet of ice that is enclosed by boards and plexiglass. This enclosed space allows for noise and energy to be retained, and consequently built upon, by everyone present. A lacrosse player pointed out that indoor lacrosse, (ironically played in hockey arenas with

the ice taken out) is significantly more violent than outdoor lacrosse, and in my experience of having watched both, I can attest that this is true. Indoor versions of sport, be it lacrosse, soccer or football, are all more aggressive and violent than their outdoor counterparts, leaving open the possibility of being in enclosed areas as having something to do with retaining and elevating aggression and intensity levels.

It has been established that fighting has always been a part of the game of hockey, and that there are certain “codes” and expectations players have of one another, and that fans, coaches and officials have of the players, that make fighting an inevitability in certain leagues. Nonetheless, the environment, be it the physical environment of the arena itself, or the social environment of the fans at the game or the social context of the leagues as a whole make do precipitate and encourage fighting, in giving owners and league commissioners incentive to allow it to continue, through ticket sales, television ratings and merchandise sales of not only the star players, but the gutsy, gritty fighters, who arguably would not have the same fame or attention in the league, if they were even to be in the league, were it not for their fists.

What does this say about our culture as a whole?

It seems it is human nature to be fascinated by a certain level of violence and gore, depending on one’s tolerance. From ancient Roman gladiatorial games, to horror movies, to the nightly news, people have continually infused themselves with a certain level of violence and aggression. Whether its an inherent animal instinct, or some sort of biological make-up we possess, the fact is, human beings as a whole, are aggressive by nature. Sigmund Freud (1950) believed aggression is natural and essential to our

existence. Other social theorists such as Lorenz (1966) agree, stating that human beings have an aggressive instinct making us predisposed to automatically protect ourselves, and those around us. And while civilized life keeps us contained for most of the time, a sport like hockey contains some of the necessary triggers to bring out the worst in us, because it serves as a “positive social context” in which to discharge our aggression.

Durkheim as noted in Maguire & Young (2002) proposed that there exists an “underlying social order” based on “obligations” of an individual, where he must conform to “social facts he did not create.” (Durkheim as quoted in Maguire & Young 2002, 45) Failure to do so results in “social disapproval and punishment.” (45) This was found to be true based on my interviews with hockey players, particularly the male hockey players. Because of the standard of violence and aggression that exists in hockey, and the fact that such a standard has existed for as long as the game has been played in an organized manner, those who are involved are “obligated” to conform to a certain style of play, otherwise, they must switch to a lower level, or as in the case of females, switch to women’s hockey. Furthermore, a player who does not adhere to the “social facts” or “code” of hockey players, can face severe consequences, as in the case of Steve Moore, when he attempted to skate away from a fight, and received a sucker punch to the back of his head that left him with a broken neck and concussion. Thus, players, regardless of their style, must adopt a certain aspect of their game in order to survive and succeed. They must have that grittiness, that toughness, that “heart” that is so valued at high levels in all leagues of hockey. Players lacking these, no matter how skilled they are, will have trouble. Not to say it’s not possible for them to succeed, but its certainly much more difficult.

Max Weber in Maguire & Young (2002) identified “Affectual or Emotional” behavior, as an “uncontrolled reaction” to “exceptional circumstances.” (Weber as quoted in Maguire & Young 2002, 70) These are applicable to some hockey fights, however not all of them. While some fights might arise as a result of a certain incident, many are pre-meditated, and somewhat less emotional, where they are between two ‘designated fighters’ who are doing it as naturally as another player would pass the puck or take a shot. Some fights are in direct retaliation to a certain act, however many are simply to incite some fire and energy into the team and the atmosphere as a whole. Thus, while there is emotion involved, it is not as personal all the time, and it does not necessarily involve two individuals who dislike each other. Many ‘enforcers’ know each other and some are even friends. They respect and understand the job the other is trying to do. While hockey may not be the only team sport that has fist fights, it is certainly one of the only sports that feature fist fights in a less emotional capacity.

Valerie Debendotte (1988) highlights the role of spectators in her studies, noting that spectators derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their team, thus accounting for their impassioned reactions and responses. These reactions, while not necessarily directly affecting the actions of players, can certainly create a certain mood or atmosphere of increased intensity and energy, that would cause players to be more sensitive to certain triggers, and thus, more prone to react to certain stimuli in a violent manner. I have found in my ethnographic studies that fans can play an integral part to the energy and mood of a game. Fans who are active, loud, and into the game, generally help generate a more exciting, emotion-filled game. In many cases, a home crowd can be the difference for their team, in their involvement or lack thereof in a game. Thus, it only

naturally follows that they would have a similar effect on the amount of aggression.

When a violent act is met with approval of fans, it only creates more incentive to do more such acts. Thus, when a fight breaks out and sends fans in a frenzy, it merely enforces that such plays are “good” and makes players only that much more prone to committing them.

### Legal Implications

The NHL as a governing body wants to keep its regulation within the league and is reluctant to allow outside judicial services to investigate or try their cases. This is understandable, as while certain actions that occur on the ice that are completely unacceptable off the ice, they are done in a completely different context, and not truly comparable. Furthermore, players go into a game knowing the risks they face, as that is simply how the game of hockey is played. Nonetheless, there are certain circumstances that result in severe injuries to players. Players get concussions, broken limbs, and even paralyzed or killed, in extreme cases, due to the reckless play of others.

According to the hockey players I interviewed in my research, fist fights are meant to address such dangerous actions. While in some cases, this may work, I have come to wonder if this is truly an effective means of regulating such behavior.

First of all, if someone blatantly attempts to injure another player and their harshest punishment is a couple of punches in the face, are they really going to be more disinclined to commit similar acts in the future? Secondly, fights in and of themselves set a poor standard of behavior. They promote an ‘eye for an eye’ mentality that in some cases, has the potential of becoming a never ending vicious cycle of continuing and

escalating violence. Does the NHL truly believe that the best means of controlling violence in the league, is by having fist fights serve as a form of conflict resolution?

As this has been the norm in the league and the sport for generations, changing this is far easier said than done. As famed enforcer Jim McKenny once stated in an interview, “whether we like it or not, that’s how the game is played” and “what happens on the ice should stay on the ice.” Perhaps this mentality is easy to adopt when one is an “enforcer” whose paycheck and employment is determined by the number of players he hits and fights he engages in, however I believe that it is not unreasonable to allow for off-ice intervention when the repercussions of what happens on the ice spills over to off-ice life.

Harvard Law School graduate Michael Vathilakis (2004) wrote his dissertation on fighting in hockey. He believes civil lawsuits would be the best deterrent to acts of gratuitous violence. As quoted on the December 27, 2004 episode of “Legal Briefs,” Vathilakis’ thesis argued that

*“Multi-million dollar lawsuits initiated as a result of decisions taken by players and not by the province or state, will create an environment where the athlete will think twice prior to engaging in an act that may severely injure a player on the ice.”*

While ideal, implementing such a notion is much easier said than done. Like many other sports, the strongest governing body in the NHL is the “unwritten code.” This is the implicit agreement among players, that does not need to be written down or formally established, but rather, is simply known among all players, coaches and fans of the game.

Professor Paul Weiler (2004) of Harvard Law School believes that instead, there should be public sanctions on the National Hockey League and its member teams to keep

the players regulated. He believes that “the league pursues objectives that are not necessarily the same as those of individual clubs or their players and fans.” (Weiler 2004:11) Thus, relying solely on the league for its discipline and sanctions is not in the best interest of players, nor society as a whole.

#### Means of addressing these implications

After Todd Bertuzzi entered into a plea bargain that left with him with minimal punishment, it was recently announced that Steve Moore would file a civil lawsuit against him. This is only a possibility because Moore will likely never play in the NHL again. Had he any hope of returning, he would not have filed the lawsuit, because he not only would be alienated as a “coward” by the other players, but he would likely not be an appealing player to most teams, and would be a target of abuse for many of the other players. After being failed by the criminal system, Moore was forced to rely on tort law for his justice. However, not all players are able to do so. As this thesis attempted to demonstrate, there is a strong “moral” and behavioral code that exists in hockey that is extremely difficult to go against as a player. Moore was only able to turn to a lawsuit because of the grave unlikelihood of returning to professional hockey. Had there been even the slightest hope, he would not have filed suit.

Thus, there must be a means of regulation, outside of the league, that is not so degrading to players, and yet, severe enough to warrant attention and adherence to. Public law may be the answer, however even this, can be too broad or overreaching to properly address the specific environments that sports, and hockey in particular present.

I believe a potential solution would be to have a form of Public Law that was sport-specific, monitored and regulated by the Federal Court, but with sanctions and implications that are realistic to context and environment of the sport. Sports present a unique environment with unique circumstances and events. Thus, it only naturally follows that it be regulated by a unique body of law.

### Final Thoughts

In the 14 years that I have been playing hockey, I have been involved in one fight. I have never been much of a fighter. While I do get hit a lot throughout the course of the game, I never really retaliate, because I have always been taught to get my revenge by scoring. However, this one time, when I was 13 years old, I too, allowed my frustrations to get the best of me, and engaged in a fist fight on the ice. We were playing a team that was far less skilled than us, and we were beating quite handily. This one player continually gave me cheap shots. After I had scored a goal, she hit me from behind into the goalpost. She would use her stick to slash the back of my legs, my wrists, and even spear me in the stomach. My frustration built as no penalties were called, and she continued this behavior. Finally, with one minute left in the game, I lined up for a face off at center ice, only to see she was to my right. Right before the puck was about to drop, she slashed me again. Getting angry, I slashed her back. She punched me in the face, and at this point I lost it, dropping my stick, and punching her four times square to the jaw. She fell to the ground and I jumped on top of her punching her some more. The

ref picked me up and threw me off the ice, and I was suspended for 4 games. But my teammates, coaches, and even my father were all proud of me for sticking up for myself.

At that time I was the youngest (by two years) and smallest (by two feet) player on the team, and got picked on quite a bit. Most of the time, one of the other bigger, less skilled players would have to stick up for me. But this time, I defended myself. One thing is for sure, however – the next time we played that team, the girl did not go anywhere near me. Sometimes, to defend yourself, it takes drastic action. While I have never fought again, sometimes I wish I could. As a primarily finesse player, many times, opponents take liberties, slashing, hooking, spearing and other cheap plays with their sticks. They yap at me behind the play, trying anything to get me off my game. And all I want to do is punch them in the face, but I can't because I know I am much more valuable on the ice than off the ice. And while I'm not trying to say that a fist fight is the one and only answer to this, I do think that I see where a lot of men's hockey players come from when they advocate fist fights.

Nonetheless, I don't think that they are as necessary and integral to the game itself, as many preach they are. From an environmental perspective yes, they provide a 'spark' in a lacklustre game, they provide controlled means of payback and retribution for unacceptable actions, and they help keep many players' aggression and frustration in check. However, the presence of elite leagues with minimal to no fighting, allows me to believe that hockey without fighting is possible. After all, if all the "goons" were replaced by skilled players, who would these players need protection from?

But is a fighting-less hockey, truly hockey? It is not simply the beauty, speed and grace of the game that makes it so unique and enjoyable to watch, but the speed, brute

force and intensity that is such huge a part of every game. This is a game that is known for its fights, that is loved for its fights. Fights are what get fans in the seats, and jumping out of them at the drop of a glove. They create an intensity in the air, raising the stakes of the game, making every subsequent play that much more meaningful. Most of all, however, they challenge every player to not solely rely on talent, but to have that fire in them, that chip in their shoulder, that should they ever be confronted with the situation, they too will rise to the occasion. Thus, if perhaps players could use other means to demonstrate this intensity that so vital to the game, hockey without fighting is an achievable goal.

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## Appendix

### *Interview Questions – Collegiate Hockey Coach:*

Name:	Sport:
Years of Coaching Experience:	Years of Playing:
Describe the “Ideal hockey player” with regards to on-ice attributes (can be skill, character, style, etc.)	
Describe the “ideal hockey player” with regards to off-ice attributes	
Compared to other sports, how violent would you say the sport of hockey is?	
How important would you rate aggression, with regards to a player, when measuring his on-ice value to the team?	
What do you believe the purpose and function of fighting in hockey is?	
Do you believe fighting should be condoned hockey?	
Do you believe fighting should be condone in other sports?	
Why does fighting exist in some levels of hockey (ie. Juniors, Pro) but not in others (ie. Collegiate and Women’s)?	
Some see fighting as a “controlled outlet” for a certain amount of inherent aggression in the game, that actually prevents more serious acts of violence form occurring. Do you agree with this, and if so, why or why not?	
As a coach, do you encourage fighting, aggressive or violent behavior? If so, to what extent?	

*Interview Questions – Collegiate hockey player*

Name:	Year:
Age:	Position:
1. Where were you born and raised?	
2. When did you start playing hockey?	
3. Where did you play minor hockey?	
4. At what age/level could you start playing 'full contact'?	
5. How did you feel about playing full contact at first?	
6. How did you prepare for playing full contact hockey?	
7. How would you describe your style of play growing up? (Finesse vs. Physical)	
8. Who was your favorite hockey player growing up? Why?	
9. How did you try to emulate this player?	
10. What is your favorite NHL team? Why?	
11. What do you think you appreciate more: a nice goal, or a decent fight?	
12. Have you ever been involved in a fight during a hockey game?	
13. Were you penalized? If so, how harshly?	
14. On a scale of 1 to 10, how violent do you think hockey is?	
15. Do you think hockey is too violent?	
16. How would you compare North American Hockey to European hockey?	
17. What role do you think fights play in the game of hockey?	
18. Do you think fighting should be allowed in hockey?	
19. Describe any etiquette or standards for behavior in fist-fights you are aware of.	
20. Any other comments/opinions you'd like to add?	

*Interview Questions – Collegiate Lacrosse/Football Player*

Name:	Year:
Hometown:	Position:
How long have you played for?	
How violent would you say lacrosse is?	
What sport do you think is the most violent? Why?	
Have you ever seen an ice hockey game?	
Have you ever seen a fight in a hockey game?	
What are your thoughts on fights in hockey games?	
Is there fighting in lacrosse?	
If so, how are players penalized for fighting?	
Is it normal for players to stop play, to square off and engage in a fist fight?	
Do teams in your sport recruit players specifically for fighting?	
Is it common to have fist fights among teammates in practices?	
Have you found that highly skilled players in your sport have fallen through the cracks in lieu of coaches recruiting bigger, stronger, tougher players instead?	
Have you ever been involved in a fist fight in one of your games? If so, please describe it.	
Why did you fight?	
How did you feel before the fight? During the fight? After the fight?	
Were you penalized? If so, how harshly?	
Would you fight again?	
Do you think fighting has a place in your sport? In hockey? In any sport?	