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THE 'DOMINION CHALLENGE':  
UNDERSTANDING CANADIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY  
THROUGH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZED HOCKEY  
AND THE BIRTH OF THE STANLEY CUP

■  
LESLEY A. DAWSON

During the nineteenth century, hockey rose to the forefront of Canadian sports and captivated national interest as a year-round sport. As hockey moved from free play on the open-air ponds in winter to newly constructed indoor rinks, an obvious pattern of social exclusion in hockey began to develop. The widespread popularity of hockey during this period prompted the development of organized leagues and the formation of early athletic associations based on traditional European structures, such as sports played within schools and military units. Soon, these athletic associations became centered on perpetuating a new, socially exclusive ideology of the 'athletic amateur' — intended for the improvement of the sportsman and then, through his individual improvement, society as a whole. While this takeover of the greater Canadian sporting community by the ideals and interests of these amateur sportsmen ushered in an era of more formalized competition, and widespread participation in hockey became increasingly popular, the birth of the first Dominion Challenge trophy in 1893, the Stanley Cup, provided the key moment in the proliferation of hockey as an acceptable national pastime and soon, a source of a distinct Canadian identity as it remains today.

Though it remained a true 'challenge cup' for less than twenty years, the Stanley Cup became one of the most sought after and significant aspects of popular Canadian culture beginning in 1893 when Governor General Lord Stanley officially donated the trophy to the Dominion of Canada and the greater hockey community as a whole. In a nineteenth century social environment in which the dominant social class sought to monopolize amateur sport for the benefit of the upper reaches of Canadian society, the creation of the Stanley Cup

— as the first Dominion Challenge Trophy — helped pique a wide interest in the sport of hockey, transforming the game into a wildly popular spectator sport and unifying diverse social groups behind a common Canadian identity in the pursuit of good competition, athletic excellence, and the development of a unique sense of what it means to be Canadian.

Canada is a country that has always been primarily defined by its geographical location because it has most often been associated with the season that dominates every aspect of life in the North: winter. Temperature measurements from throughout Canada suggest that it is the coldest country on earth, given the average temperatures throughout the reaches of the entire country taken annually.<sup>1</sup> Historians Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison give definition to the concepts of the 'North' and 'winter' in their essay "Winter and the Shaping of Northern History: Reflections from the Canadian North," in which Coates and Morrison argue that darkness and frigidity of winter have significantly influenced both the economic and social lives of Canadians over the course of the past two centuries. In fact, Coates and Morrison argue that the ideas of "winter" and the "North" tend to be seen as synonymous because: "without winter, the North is only a direction, not a place..."<sup>2</sup> One of the largest parts of what makes the Canadian North so distinctively 'northern' is the fact that it is wholly inseparable from its geographical susceptibility to the harshest conditions during the winter months. Importantly, this idea of the Canadian North would be motivated in part by some kind of 'northern exceptionalism,' or the idea that the North was unique and thus made Canada different or 'exceptional' when compared to other geographical areas, which Canadian national identity later echoed.<sup>3</sup>

Even with these potentially deadly winters in mind, the final years of the eighteenth century brought a handful of Europeans over to pre-Confederation Canada, allowing them to piece together a portrait of the unique Canadian landscape and describe the lifestyles of

Europeans, first generation Canadians, and natives living on the North American continent.<sup>4</sup> One such traveler, Irishman Isaac Weld, began travelling through Quebec in November 1795 searching for a more “agreeable place of abode” than his war-ridden European home.<sup>5</sup> In his account of the St. Lawrence Valley in the upper region of Quebec, Weld explores the possible benefits of life in Canada to an audience of potential European emigrants. He tells the reader of the hospitable Canadian people — *les Habitants* or the inhabitants — the remarkable retention of European customs and their adoption in Canada, and the natural beauty of the Canadian landscape that is “grand beyond description.”<sup>6</sup>

The tail end of Weld’s account reveals perhaps one of the most important pieces of information regarding this new life in Canada: the unique Canadian spirit. According to Weld, the Canadians he interacts with embody a sense of toughness, and even indifference, towards their climate. Whereas he expects Canadians to shy away from the harsh climate, they relish in the obstacles that accost them on a consistent basis: they “laugh” in the face of “dreadful storms,” never complain when “exposed” to the “inclemency of the seasons,” and gladly accept the prospect of remote habitation in the woods as a welcome challenge.<sup>7</sup> Even before Canada became a true Confederation, it is this fearless approach to accommodating to life in a harsh landscape, as seen in Weld’s description, which helped create the foundation for the most central values dictating the Canadian way of life going forward.

A massive influx of immigrants from Europe beginning in the second decade of the nineteenth century allowed Canadian society to begin building and solidifying its own social structure, separate from Europe but not wholly removed from European influence. The great majority of these immigrants hailed from both Europe and the United States beginning in the eighteenth century and continued forward into the nineteenth century. Most came from the British Isles, along

with Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution in favor of continuing British rule. Collections of immigration data from the Canadian Museum of Civilization show that less than 5,000 European immigrants moved to Canada between 1800-1815.<sup>8</sup> However, the numbers of Canadian immigrants increased significantly in the next four decades. From 1815 until 1830, Canada averaged just above 70,000 immigrants during every four-year interval. Beginning in 1831 and continuing onward, Canadian immigration exploded, bringing at least 100,000 immigrants into Canada every four years, a trend which continued for the next twenty-five years.<sup>9</sup> These immigrants proved to be central to the development of organized sports in Canada because of the Victorian ideals they brought over with them from Europe, which translated into the Canadian way of life in a number of ways: first through basic community development, and eventually through recreational activities and sport.

As the European population in Canada exploded, these immigrants began seeking ways to establish their new life in a new country along with many other first-generation Canadians. Stepping wholeheartedly into a new Canadian life, these immigrants and their Canadian-born children began earnestly searching for more exciting ways to occupy free time during the long winter months to which they were unaccustomed.<sup>10</sup> In an increasingly European-based Canadian culture that relied primarily on agriculture, the few hours of daylight afforded during winter meant that the flow of the seasons dominated much of life in Canada.<sup>11</sup> The lengthy northern winters created many physical limitations for Canadians, primarily forcing them to adapt to the cold temperatures and snow. However, the influence of the harsh winters, which tested the human ability to survive and adapt to life under less than hospitable conditions, became an important element of the Canadian ruggedness pointed out by Weld, a key value in Canadian national identity moving forward.<sup>12</sup>

In order to successfully navigate their new life in Canada, these

immigrants and first-generation Canadians used previously existing traditions to inform their new lifestyle, extending the limit of their previous experience with life and the conditions in Europe. Luckily for these new Canadians, indigenous peoples had already paved the way for survival in Canada, seeking out ways to live with the stifling winters by partaking in seasonal activities. Coates and Morrison describe these indigenous activities as coping mechanisms for surviving the confines of the winter season in Canada.<sup>13</sup> Just as the native peoples created these 'social outlets' during winter, Europeans immigrants and first-generation Canadians had to find useful ways to make the most of a harsh life in the North. These activities began to set the framework for community building and the development of new forms of recreation that could take place throughout the year, and especially during winter.<sup>14</sup>

The role of British influence in the development of the earliest Canadian sports is yet another way in which Europeans translated their old values into their new Canadian society; in many ways, the growth of organized Canadian sport and presence of British influence are inextricable.<sup>15</sup> Drawing on the immigrants' European roots in athletics, many of the first sport organizations in Canada began simply as fraternal-type groups that provided an opportunity for higher classes of Canadian men to socialize and participate in recreational activities with one another.<sup>16</sup> The Montreal Curling Club, formed in 1807 provides an early example of sporting organizations that implicitly limited its membership to men of the same elite social class.<sup>17</sup> The casual nature of these organizations and others like them created little need for regulating actual play, freeing the members to focus their efforts on perpetuating a certain ideal that would drive the development of hockey at its earliest formal stages: the athletic "amateur."<sup>18</sup> However, this ideal motivating the formation of sports organizations, sustained in part by British influence, created a niche allowing social exclusion take a near-permanent hold in the sport of hockey.

Though these 'amateur' collectives drew support from a variety of social and economic interest groups, they quickly populated their membership with members of the Canadian upper-middle class. From their earliest days, the organizers of these 'amateur' leagues relied on the common British practice of drawing members from existing social groups in order to increase membership. Reframing British tradition through the lens of the Canadian experience, these 'amateur' leagues found members in social groups that could likely be found in most parts of Canada at that time such as in universities and military garrisons.<sup>19</sup> Using these membership bases, the game of hockey expanded beyond Montreal and into eastern Ontario to Toronto and Manitoba in the late 1880s, increasing amateur competition so drastically, both within and between Canadian cities, that formalized leagues became a necessary support system. Because these members came predominantly from the upper and middle class, the motivation to give automatic privilege to the higher classes in Canadian society, while paying little regard to the interests or desires of the rest, became ingrained in these leagues from their very outset.

The process of 'inventing traditions,' as explained by economist and social historian Eric Hobsbawm parallels the formation and perpetuation of the amateur ideal at the foundation of Canadian sports during the nineteenth century. Hobsbawm defines 'invented traditions' as a 'set of practices governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature.'<sup>20</sup> Hobsbawm argues for a distinction between the concepts 'custom' and 'invented tradition;' he argues that 'custom' can serve as a historical precedent for sanctioning any 'desired change' or, conversely, resistance to change.<sup>21</sup> However, unlike 'custom,' the 'invented tradition' does not sanction a particular change but instead aims to instill 'certain values' and 'norms of behaviour' through repeated action.<sup>22</sup> At its most basic sense, the formation of the amateur ideal followed the same developmental process as Hobsbawm's idea of an invented tradition rather

than a custom; using elements of their European past, the organizers of early amateur sport had to formalize and ritualize in order to achieve the various goals of its members. One key element of Hobsbawm's definition of the 'invented tradition' that is particularly relevant to the amateur ideal is the presence of a set of specific values that is ingrained in the people through the process of "repetition."<sup>23</sup> According to Hobsbawm, these value sets can be political, social, cultural, or economic in nature, but almost always imply a certain sense of 'continuity' with their European 'past.' As an 'invented tradition,' the prevailing ideal of athletic amateurism in nineteenth century Canadian sports retained a certain set of values in continuity with earlier European tradition: exclusivity.

In order to understand the impact it had on the formative years of organized hockey, it is important to define the amateur ideal in context of its predisposition for and support of social exclusion in hockey. As the numerous conceptions of the 'amateur' floated around in the nineteenth century North American consciousness, the Montreal Pedestrian Club, one of the most well-known amateur athletic associations established in the cradle of Canadian sports, helped push this ideal towards one universal definition. The Montreal Pedestrian Club's 1873 version of its Constitution and By-Laws provides a concise definition of the athletic 'amateur' most in line with the other definitions circulating at the time. According to the Club's Constitution, an 'amateur':

has never competed in any open competition or for public money, or for admission money, or with professionals for a prize, public money or admission money...<sup>24</sup>

This definition shows that from its outset, the Montreal Pedestrian Club's definition of the 'amateur' clarifies that commercial and monetary interests had not yet eclipsed this ideal view of athleticism. At this specific point in time, personal and moral improvement still motivated athletic participation for the 'amateur'; like these other organized sports at the time, organized hockey retained this

romanticized notion of the self-improving athletic ideal and had not yet become a commodity motivated by profit.

The presence of money in athletics would not prove to be the most important element of this ideal of the athletic amateur that became so highly prized by Canadian sportsmen. Rather, the Montreal Pedestrian Club took care to include in its definition of an 'amateur' a key additional stipulation: that the athletic amateur has, at no point in his life, "taught or assisted in the pursuit of Athletic exercises as a means of livelihood" nor is he "a laborer or an Indian."<sup>25</sup> In the clearest language, the Pedestrian Club explicitly prohibits members of certain social classes from participating in such 'gentlemanly' activities. Though the definitions of the amateur circulated freely at this time, the Montreal Pedestrian Club set a standard for other sport organizations to follow by defining the 'amateur' in a narrow context that could be easily translated into the charters of many other athletic organizations modeled after the Montreal Pedestrian Club, such as the hockey-centered Montreal Amateur Athletic Association.<sup>26</sup> Thus, by including explicit racial and socioeconomic boundaries in one of the most widely accepted and 'official' definition of amateur sport, these sports organizations created a precedent for social exclusion based on race and economic class for years to come.

The tale of the development of this amateur ideal in Canadian sports, especially hockey, is a prime example of the intermingling of the idea of keeping 'continuity with the past' and the Canadian adaptation to a new environment. Hobsbawm argues that in a discussion of 'invented tradition,' especially in Canadian history, adaptation has a specific purpose: it allows people to survive by using the 'old models' of what they know for 'new purposes' when living under 'new conditions.'<sup>27</sup> Canadians living during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were doing just that: learning to adapt. Both Canadian frontier sports, and increasingly organized sports developing in urban areas, give two important insights into the very tangible

importance of sport in Canada: first, the ability of the Canadian people to develop a lifestyle in harmony with the harsh and often overbearing physical environment, and second, the ability to translate both traditional European and North American indigenous activities with a new Canadian community in order to help people adapt to a different way of life in the New World.<sup>28</sup>

As a populace initially comprised of predominantly European immigrants, the 'old models' of how to survive came directly from the values of Victorian British society.<sup>29</sup>

British influence on the development of Canadian sport is both obvious and undeniable. Records from the beginning of the nineteenth century show popular involvement in various British sports such as rugby, football, and arguably the most British sport cricket had already been imported into Canadian society in at least the 1830s. By this point, these sports represented not only the strong connection to England, but also the two main pitfalls of European sport in its original form in Canada: first, the lack of formalized competition and second, the inability of these sports to grow past the local level.<sup>30</sup> This informal system of play, or lack of formalized systems of play, limited Canadians' ability to participate in traditional forms of European sport because it removed the support base that later Canadian sports relied upon for growth. Likewise, it failed to spark a desire for increased participation in traditional British sports on the part of the greater Canadian population. Ultimately, this meant that traditional British games massively influenced only the development of organized sports in Canada, but they would never move past the foundation-building stage in Canadian sports.<sup>31</sup>

As an interest in organized sports grew in Canada, so too did the need make a distinction between the sports brought over from Europe, signifying the European past, and the new life born and experienced in Canada. This attempt for distinction can be seen especially in the English-dominated Canadian university system,

where students mostly came from English families that had at least some ties to the landed aristocracy. This new generation of young men, almost all Canadian born and of mostly direct English descent, instilled their social values in sport, rejecting all but the latent British sport ideology for anything that would bring them closer to their home country, Canada. Representing the emergent Canadian middle class, the influence of British sports but also need for differentiation encouraged these Canadian sportsmen, who would soon play a significant role in the development of hockey, to seek a more clearly defined label for themselves and their pastimes in a rapidly changing Canadian landscape.<sup>32</sup>

The same economic changes in Canadian society during the latter half of the nineteenth century, prompted by industrialization, that created what Canadian political scientists Richard Gruneau and David Whitson refer to as a 'democratized access to leisure,' allowed significant social exclusion in hockey to become possible.<sup>33</sup> Historian Alan Metcalfe argues that these combined processes of urbanization and industrialization, along with westward continental movement, radically altered the landscape of Canadian society. The rapid development of urban centers such as Montreal and Toronto caused the demand for land to increase so significantly that property prices skyrocketed. This would impose two main limits on the game of hockey in the years to come: creating physical boundaries for hockey by moving it indoors within a defined spatial area, and because of its economic potential, the construction of 'specialized facilities' to house it.<sup>34</sup>

Hockey's move indoors during the nineteenth century perfectly illustrates one essential development in the Canadian middle class: control. Previous to the city rinks, hockey's only major limitation came from the winter season, a satisfactory amount of players, and the presence of a stretch of good ice on any open surface.<sup>35</sup> However, the move indoors changed the nature of the game; now, economic

development had put new restrictions not only on space, but also the types of men that would be able to play based on their personal economic status. Given the popularity of hockey in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the 'amateur' leagues throughout Canada certainly did not represent all of the teams playing semi-organized hockey in a given area. In Manitoba and Ontario especially, Canadian sport historian Alan Metcalfe writes that the middle-class had near complete control of this formalized league play, which continued to push the interests of other hockey playing classes aside.<sup>36</sup>

From its outset, organized sport made no room for the 'minorities' in the surrounding Canadian society. Developed by a handful of Anglophones from the commercial and professional middle class sectors of the leading Canadian metropolises, organized sport, including hockey, in nineteenth century Canada began with the interests of only the narrowly defined class in mind.<sup>37</sup> Just as with the other Canadian 'minorities,' which included any working class individual or Native American, amateur sport made absolutely no mention of another societal group: women. It is important to recognize that this occurred primarily because the amateur organizers wanted to maintain the "gentlemanly" aspect of the amateur ideal with the utmost strictness. Given that Governor General Stanley's own daughter played on a ladies' hockey team, it is clear that women did play hockey in their own leagues throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. However, one newspaper article written in 1875 provides an example of the most common depiction of women as they relate to hockey during the time of the amateur athletic: lady spectators turning away in terror as a result of witnessing the violence of a random hockey match with little do to with the sport itself.<sup>38</sup>

The original ideological motivation for the spread of athletic activity during nineteenth century came directly out of the elite desire to achieve a 'structured' and more 'rational' approach to leisurely pursuits. The focus of these activities followed a shift in the mentality of

the upper class throughout the nineteenth century. Over time, social activities became intertwined with the prevailing sense of morality driven by the concerns that followed the development of urban industrial society.<sup>39</sup> This mentality carried with it a “spirit of regulation” that inspired the elite to concentrate on personal improvement as a key aspect in the development of all activities, not just sport. As the “traditional markers of masculine competence” that had helped men define themselves became obsolete due to the advent of industrial technology, the ‘gentlemanly’ class attempted to create a new sense of masculinity based on “rational,” organized, and self-improving activities. In the minds of the organizers, Gruneau and Whitson argue, all young men had the ability to benefit from this link between sport and social and physical self-improvement; however, the monopoly of elite interests on the organization and regulation of athletic activities failed to include members of the working class or ethnic minorities — anyone who did not fit exactly the white, English, middle-class mold.<sup>40</sup>

At its most basic level, the organizers sought to promote a narrow set of so-called “universal” interests through sport; according to Gruneau and Whitson, these universal ideals are based on an “implicit social contract” governing participation in sports that drew on the social contract thought to govern the “civilized society” that surrounded them.<sup>41</sup> This new athletic “contract” required its participants to buy in to the idea that through these “modern sports,” society would achieve “universal gains” made through participation in and the institutionalization of activities. Undoubtedly in the minds of the organizers, these “gains” would not simply be tailored to the interests of any specific individual or small community, rather the greater community as a whole.<sup>42</sup> However, a close examination of these lofty aspirations reveal a direct, and inherent, contradiction discussed by Gruneau and Whitson: that the definitions of organized sport, namely how and for what purpose sports should be played, came from the

minds and mouths of the most dominant and narrow social class.

Because of their socioeconomic demographics, the original proponents of organized sport in Canada, especially hockey, considered sport in its earliest stages to be an activity tailored specifically for a particular type of gentleman, namely, the white, English, middle-class gentleman.<sup>43</sup> Before the 1850s, athletic achievement did not yet completely motivate this brand of "gentlemanly" activity; rather, Gruneau and Whitson argue that early competitive hockey contests tended to be more inclusive because they actually brought together disparate social groups on specific occasions such as holidays.<sup>44</sup> Though the competitive spirit actually prompted the inclusion of many different social groups of the time at these special occasions, the organizers ultimately pushed against the institutionalization of any sort of social equalization found in these settings. As the popularity of hockey increased in other social groups — women, Indians, laborers, European immigrants, and especially first generation Canadians — the Anglophone class attempted to withdraw further into even more exclusive groups. Informed by their own specific set of elitist "cultural meanings" and the social, class, gender, and racial prejudices of the nineteenth century, this dominating class pushed an increasingly achievement-based agenda in an effort to insulate themselves from the influence of other social groups.<sup>45</sup>

In the years when the dream of the 'amateur' remained unsullied by the profiteering interests of individual team owners, before participation in high levels of hockey became unattainable to the public, the Stanley Cup became the predominant force in encouraging a widespread interest in hockey. Among other Canadian historians, Gillian Poulter argues that in addition to other Canadian winter sports, the Montreal Winter Carnivals provided the first catalyst for spreading a public interest in hockey.<sup>46</sup> The Carnivals began as an annual event in 1883 to showcase the budding Canadian cultural life to the rest of the world. Poulter points out that the Winter Carnival

could have easily held during the summer months because lacrosse, a sport played in fairer weather, also increased dramatically in popularity at the same time hockey spread throughout Canada. However, the interest in attracting the largest number of foreign visitors to Canada encouraged the organizers to hold a carnival that would showcase the Canadian sports that represented the most common international understanding of life in Canada — winter sports.<sup>47</sup> With commercial and professional interests in mind, the middle-class, Anglophone organizers of the Montreal Winter Carnival created an annual showcase for Canadian winter fun.<sup>48</sup> These displays aimed to display to large audiences what Canadians considered to be the country's most 'unique signifiers,' popular winter pastimes, such as figure skating and snowshoeing.<sup>49</sup> Braving the bitter Canadian cold, over 50,000 visitors from within Canada, the United States, and even visitors from Europe, arrived in Montreal by train to witness the festivities and celebrate Canadian winter life, and an increasingly popular sport — hockey.<sup>50</sup>

The impact of Montreal's Winter Carnivals cannot be understated in the context of hockey's growth as a spectator sport.<sup>51</sup> Just as the organizers intended, the Carnival succeeded in generating wider interest in various winter sports such as snowshoeing and figure skating. However, the hockey matches quickly became the most popular attractions, drawing some of the largest and most enthusiastic crowds ever recorded in the sport.<sup>52</sup> One article in the *Montreal Witness* reports the outcome of the much-anticipated contest between the Montreal and Quebec teams during the first Winter Carnival in Montreal, writing that Carnival-goers and "lovers of the game" alike had "looked forward" to the match with "considerable interest."<sup>53</sup> In this match and so many others like it, the teams "made the most" of unfavorable ice conditions as spectators looked on in earnest, and perhaps most importantly, carried a "great keenness" and a palpable enthusiasm for this growing sport from Montreal to their hometowns.<sup>54</sup>

In its sixth year in Montreal, the Winter Carnival hosted one of its most important dignitaries: the Governor General of Canada, Lord Frederick Arthur Stanley, Earl of Derby. Stanley became the sixth Governor General in Canadian history in June 1888; he arrived in Canada with his wife and children and quickly began settling into their new life in an unfamiliar, young country.<sup>55</sup> On February 4, 1889, Lord Stanley and his entourage became part of the record-breaking crowd at the Victoria Skating Rink in Montreal during the Winter Carnival. Historians Shea and Wilson write that, as Stanley and his group entered the rink, both teams ceased play to welcome the Governor General with cheers and applause as they took their seats next to the ice in a manner of showing respect for the Governor General and his decision to attend their hockey match.<sup>56</sup> According to the *Montreal Gazette*, Lord Stanley expressed his delight with the spectacle he witnessed at the Victoria Rink; Stanley became especially fascinated with and impressed by the “expertise of the players” as his notorious love for the “game of hockey” itself began before the crowd in Montreal.<sup>57</sup>

Historical accounts suggest that, though he attended his first official hockey match at the Montreal Winter Carnival, Lord Stanley's personal involvement in sport was not out of the ordinary; throughout his reign as Governor General, Stanley attended numerous sporting events and exhibitions outside of hockey, including figure skating and cricket.

After attending his first hockey game at the Carnival in 1889, the Stanley family returned to Ottawa and the Stanley children, including daughter Isobel, began participating in informal play at Rideau Hall, which later became the home of the Ontario Hockey Association.<sup>58</sup> The involvement of the Stanley children as hockey players became the most important personal connection Lord Stanley would have to the game itself. Like previous Governor Generals, Lord Stanley became “deeply interested” in hockey, often appearing at the

local rink to show support for his family and watch many of the best players of the time square off.<sup>59</sup> The pool of 'like-minded' hockey 'enthusiasts' in Ottawa grew, bringing in more and more members from the Canadian social elite including many members of Stanley's personal and political circles.<sup>60</sup>

Because of his personal involvement in hockey, Stanley, with the help of his family, sought to encourage his surrounding population to become more involved in the popularization sport. To accomplish this, Stanley chose build on the tradition of previous Governor Generals and hold numerous "at home" parties at Rideau Hall in Ottawa; these "at homes" allowed the early Governor Generals of the Dominion to interact socially with peers while at the same time becoming more intimately connected to the general communities of which they were a vital part.<sup>61</sup> Among the figure skating displays and other popular Canadian winter sports, the 1891 Stanley family "at home" included a mock hockey match.

The players wore clown costumes and, as Shea and Wilson explain, historians believe that the squad of hockey-playing clowns likely included some of the Stanley children.<sup>62</sup> By introducing hockey into the repertoire of most prominent winter sports demonstrated at the "at home," the Stanley family shared their personal love for the game with a larger Canadian audience, bringing hockey once again into their Canadian public sphere.

By 1892, the significance of Stanley's involvement in hockey as a patron figure is obvious based on the numerous articles in Toronto-based newspapers mentioning his presence at well-attended local hockey matches. One such article from *The Globe* mentions Lord Stanley's attendance of a local match between the Montreal and Ottawa athletic association teams, along with his aide de camp Lord Kilcourse, before even revealing the final score of both teams.<sup>63</sup> Less than a month after this article appeared in *The Globe*, another report arrived announcing the formation of the Ottawa Amateur Athletic

Association and its first annual dinner at the Russell House Hotel in Ottawa. Held on March 18, 1892, the dinner honored the Ottawa Hockey Club's triumphant championship season — one that was ripe with the spirit of the 'pure love of sport' and athletic fraternity.<sup>64</sup> After giving a well-accepted toast to Stanley's interest in hockey, Lord Kilcourseie, Stanley's representative at the banquet, read a letter that changed the spirit of hockey competition forever:

I have for some time past been thinking that it would be a good thing if there were a challenge cup which should be held from year to year by the champion hockey team in the Dominion. There does not appear to be any such outward and visible sign of a championship at present...<sup>65</sup>

This excerpt shows that Stanley recognizes himself and points out the obvious 'general interest' that hockey matches throughout Canada quickly garnered leading up to the 1889 Montreal Winter Carnival. Using this popular interest in hockey as his basis, Stanley announces to the banquet audience at the Russell House Hotel that he will establish the newest and most prestigious challenge existing in the Dominion to that point.

By the time Stanley wrote his letter to the Ottawa Amateur Athletic Association, the rules of hockey had been formalized and for all intents and purposes, 'generally recognized' within the larger hockey community at that time.<sup>66</sup> Though he wished to alter the 'present regulations' on the location where the matches would be played, the formalization of hockey rules throughout the athletic community created the perfect opportunity for a championship trophy to be instituted. As a true 'challenge cup' whichever two teams reached the finals of the national competition played for the opportunity to win the Stanley Cup on a 'year to year' basis. No matter who won the trophy in a given year, the 'challenge cup' would return to the hands of the Dominion before the next victorious team could claim its title. Thus, with his letter to the banquet at the Russell House, Stanley created a 'challenge cup' and expressed his profound support for the

sport of hockey from the pen of the most prominent member of the royal government living in Canada, giving anyone who accepted the challenge added nationalistic incentive to become its captor.<sup>67</sup>

Even aside from the influence of Lord Stanley and the Dominion Challenge trophy, no sport is from its very beginning more unquestionably connected to Canadian national identity as hockey.<sup>68</sup> According to Stephen Leacock, the most widely known Canadian political humorist of the twentieth century, hockey defines in many ways what it means to be Canadian:

Hockey captures the essence of Canadian experience in the New World. In a land so inescapably and inhospitably cold, hockey is the chance of life, and an affirmation that, despite the deathly chill of winter, we are alive.<sup>69</sup>

Leacock includes in his remarks two very significant adjectives in his articulation of the Canadian experience as they relate to the harsh environment: first, inescapable, and second, inhospitable. In the most basic sense, the ability of the Canadian people to adapt to their surrounding environment shows the truest sense of the unique Canadian spirit mentioned by Isaac Weld as early as the 1790s. Interpreted through the lens of Canadian nationalism, Weld's discussion of the prevailing Canadian spirit at the end of his account of the St. Lawrence Valley shows the more desirable values highly prized by Canadians that would contribute to hockey's success in Canada over other winter sports. Using the rich country at his disposal, the Canadian sacrifices physical comfort for the excitement of adventure and finding new ways to survive the elements.<sup>70</sup> Discussions of hockey time and again return to the idea that this spirit motivates the Canadian national identity: the ability to survive in a meaningful way in the New World, as Leacock mentions, against all conceivable physical odds.

In 1877, one of the earliest Canadian nationalists and proponents of Canadian sports W. George Beers echoes the same unique Canadian spirit found in Weld's account nearly one hundred years after his

travels in Upper Canada. In his piece highlighting a few of the most pre-eminent Canadian sports at the time — lacrosse in the summer, and tobogganing and snow-shoeing in the winter — Beers remarks on the 'blood-born' and 'bone-bred love of open-air sports' and Canadian climate; especially, the specific climate that favors the freedom allowed by hardy exercise over the 'restraints and conventionalities' that were previously necessary to 'social enjoyment' in the Old World.<sup>71</sup> Beers also comments on the centrality of a love for the outdoors 'instinctive love for outdoor life and exercise' as part of the Canadian spirit:

I think the Canadians well typify the hardiness of northern races; and nothing has perhaps helped more to form the physique of the people than the instinctive love for outdoor life and exercise in the bracing spring, winter and fall of the year. The spirit of sport is born in the blood as well as nourished by the clime.<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, Beers believes that Canadian society, proven to be tolerant and welcoming towards sports and sportsmen alike, allows Canadian sports to have a 'character of their own' through which Canadians can throw off the regulations of the overbearing European Old World and contribute to the distinct Canadian national identity.<sup>73</sup>

Pre-Confederation Canada lacked this clear sense of national identity proposed by Anderson because its people remained informed mostly by their traditional European identities. However, the official formation of the Confederation and the years immediately following its establishment provided a developmentally significant time for the beginning of a unique sense of Canadian identity. Gruneau and Whiston observe that early in the country's history, there existed little reason to conceive a distinctively Canadian national identity they were simply building on the traditions they adapted from Native Americans and, more importantly, their European roots.<sup>74</sup> However, in seeking, yet again, to distinguish their way

of life from their European predecessors, the need for a distinct national captivated the increasingly independent young country; as the number of first-generation Canadians leading up to the Confederation and shortly after began to skyrocket, a clear drive to 'express a clear sense of their own Canadianness' became apparent throughout Canadian society.<sup>75</sup>

Hockey is one of the strongest symbols of popular Canadian culture today. Gruneau and Whitson compare the popular symbolic power of hockey to the Canadian Broadcasting Company, the Canadian federal government, and the maple leaf itself.<sup>76</sup> It is no coincidence that Gruneau and Whitson connected hockey to the Canadian federal government; the relationship between the two is more than symbolic. The birth of hockey and the birth of the Canadian federal government, or the Confederacy itself, are similar in that they come out of the same point in history. Simply aligning the timeline of both Canadian government and the development of hockey can show the most obvious continuity found between the two: only eight years separate the first widely publicized game of hockey and the official establishment of the Dominion of Canada in 1867.<sup>77</sup> These two events occurred in such chronological proximity to one another, coming out of the same unique moment in Canadian history that created the most defining athletic pastime and the Dominion of Canada itself.

The values promised by Canadian government in the Constitution Act of 1867 and the values embodied in the sport of hockey represent a significant dichotomy in the study of hockey and its relationship to Canadian national identity. Unlike the United States' Declaration of Independence, the parallel section of the Canadian Constitution Act of 1867 regarding the division of powers explicitly promises Canadians 'Peace, Order, and good Government...' as the most basic rights afforded to the people by the federal government.<sup>78</sup> As a country plainly based on the ideals of 'peace' and 'order' rather

than 'liberty' and the individual 'pursuit of happiness,' it is difficult for Canadian society as a whole to escape the idea that all Canadians are international 'peacekeepers' and, as historian Michael Robidoux argues, sometimes an 'unreasonably polite' people.<sup>79</sup> The most common perceptions of Canadians elicit the idea that they pride themselves solely on peaceful attitudes; however, the historical departure from more 'civilized' European games, like cricket, to sports like hockey and lacrosse shows the distinct representation of toughness in sport. In particular, through the presence of violence and confrontation often associated with hockey, Canadians are able to use sport to constructively represent this sense of resilience and ferocity in the face of challenges that has over time become so central to the greater Canadian national identity.

Even with this habitual perception of Canadian politeness and acquiescence, the sport most widely associated with life in Canada, and the Canadian experience as a whole, clearly embodies neither 'peace' nor 'order;' the Canadian national winter sport represents different and often contrasting ideals when compared to the commonly held conceptions of the Canadian personality. Hockey places high importance on aggressiveness, rugged utilitarianism, and on so many occasions violence and organized chaos. Robidoux argues that hockey's violent style separated it from other European sports such as cricket, and another rapidly growing American sport: baseball.<sup>80</sup> Numerous newspaper accounts of the earliest organized hockey games expressed concern for the players, and now the large crowds who looked on at their own risk. As an 1875 article from *The Daily British Whig* reports, numerous times violence on the ice caused the lady spectators to flee from the rinks in 'confusion' during the outbreaks of fights that interrupted the matches.<sup>81</sup> The arguments often posed by newspaper reporters during this time period — especially when examining the validity of such a violent sport — show the public perception of a violent sport at that time to be unusual, shocking,

and to some extent, it shows the dangerous excitement and intrigue that helped catapult hockey to the forefront of Canadian sports.

Like the strong link between the origins of hockey and the birth of the Confederation, the beginnings of the formation of a distinct Canadian national culture parallel the development of organized hockey, adding further to the link between hockey and Canadian national identity. Gruneau and Whitson discuss the appearance and formation of a unique Canadian culture for the first time around the same era in which organized sports came about. In a time period in which the focus of the nation remained grounded in the need to establish certain political and national apparatuses rather than defining a particular nation itself, the amateur approach to sports actually encouraged the first underpinnings of the development of the unique Canadian identity through participation in sports and the idea, yet again, of universal gains through athletics. As these developing Canadian sports and the ideals that supported them began to aid the formation of this 'emergent sense of national belonging' discussed by Gruneau and Whitson, we see a symbiotic relationship begin to develop in which this same 'emergent' Canadian national identity worked to further development of these sports and the greater national culture moving forward.<sup>82</sup>

In order to understand the lasting ties between hockey and Canadian nationalism, one major concern found in the discussion of Canadian sport has taken the form of a romanticized call for protection of Canadian national interest and tradition in the face of an overbearing neighbor.<sup>83</sup> While this concern itself is important in hockey history and Canadian history as a whole, it touches on a larger struggle in Canadian nationalism: distinguishing between the reality of "actually existing national popular cultures" and those "imagined national cultures" which lend themselves to more abstract concepts like democracy and conservatism.<sup>84</sup> With this idea of an "imagined national culture," Gruneau and Whitson draw on ideas di-

rectly stemming from Benedict Anderson's commentary on the formation of national identity and the "anomaly' of nationalism."<sup>85</sup> Applying the theories found in *Imagined Communities* to Canadian history, ideas of Canadian nationalism and national identity can both be interpreted in terms of the merger of a "wide variety of political and ideological constellations" into a unified sense of identity. Anderson defines the nation as a 'community' that is 'imagined' because, whether or not exploitation or inequality resides throughout the nation, it can always be seen as a 'deep, horizontal comradeship' in which its members are willing to die for the nation itself.<sup>86</sup> In the case of hockey in Canada, the ties created by the widespread support of hockey throughout Canada provide a key example of this 'horizontal comradeship' discussed by Anderson. As a game, hockey is so popular throughout the Canadian nation that it continues to play a 'key role in the production and reproduction of the type of identity upon which the federal idea depends': that being Canadian is a meaningful identity apart from all others.

It is the combination of these many social and economic factors that led to hockey's rise as Canada's primary nationalistic symbol. As competition increased throughout eastern cities and expanded westward, both public and economic interest on the part of the Canadian public helped catapult hockey into a year-round venture sustained by amateur athletic associations and their socially limited membership bases. Though it proved to be ultimately marginalizing for the minority classes in Canadian society — the laborers, the women, and non-whites - the interests of the dominant elite Canadian class helped create support for the proliferation of winter activities in general, and hockey in particular, as a means of social improvement. This ideal in turn lured the Canadian population into its throes for support, and then immediately excluded large groups by restricting the visible notoriety of participation in hockey to the white elite. While initially, the organizers of amateur sport intended to extend

the universal benefits of athletic participation to members of all social classes, the strict limitations imposed by these same upper class associations sanctioned their own brand of social exclusion in sports moving forward.

Even with the prevailing focus within amateur sport that became so narrowly defined, Lord Stanley's position as Canada's Governor General gave him the ability to provide the burgeoning hockey community, and through it the Canadian people as a whole, with a common rallying point for the support of hockey: the Dominion Challenge Trophy. The birth of the Stanley Cup, however, did not signal the return of the marginalized social groups that the amateur athletic associations pushed aside to the greater hockey community; in many ways, competition for the Stanley Cup failed to include these marginalized social groups outside of the elite because Stanley made no mention of social exclusion in his donation. However, the trophy's original role as a true 'challenge cup' provided the motivation for competition for hockey's greatest prize that caused the eventual blurring of social boundaries in Canadian sports.

As a 'challenge cup' and the first national hockey trophy of its time, the earliest Stanley Cup provided the Canadian people with a rallying point for generating support for the development and spread of hockey throughout Canada, and later the United States and the world. Through the birth of the Stanley Cup, Lord Stanley provided the people of Canada with a single moment in which Canadians could come together in support of the quest for the best team representing an indigenously Canadian pursuit. By building on a pre-existing European influence, the Stanley Cup, sanctioned by the highest governmental representative in the country, created a platform for the development of a wholly unique set of traditions related to hockey, and through hockey, for the development of a greater Canadian culture. In an era of significant social and economic change throughout the young country, the Stanley Cup gave the people of Canada the

remarkable opportunity to initiate the development of a distinctly Canadian national identity that they could claim as their own moving forward, and one that they continue to define themselves by and make meaning through today.

IMAGE INDEX



**Figure 1: Hockey at the Montreal Winter Carnival 1884**

Playing hockey on the skating rink, McGill University, 1884 / Montreal, Quebec. Source: [<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/> Library and Archives Canada]



**Figure 2: Lord Stanley of Preston, Earl of Derby**

Found at the Hockey Hall of Fame's page The Stanley Cup Journal:  
[[http://www.hhof.com/htmlSTCjournal/exSCJ08\\_38.shtml](http://www.hhof.com/htmlSTCjournal/exSCJ08_38.shtml)]



**Figure 3: Stanley's Inscription on the original Dominion Challenge Trophy**

Found at the Hockey Hall of Fame's page, the Stanley Cup Journal –  
[[http://www.hhof.com/htmlstcjournal/exSCJ\\_08.shtml](http://www.hhof.com/htmlstcjournal/exSCJ_08.shtml)]



**Figure 4: The Original Stanley Cup**

Found at the Hockey Hall of Fame's Page, the Stanley Cup Journal:  
[[http://www.hhof.com/htmlSTCjournal/exSCJ08\\_38.shtml](http://www.hhof.com/htmlSTCjournal/exSCJ08_38.shtml)]

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Coates and Morrison in Kerry Abel, and Ken S. Coates, *Northern Visions: New Perspectives on the North in Canadian History*, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2001), 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Gerald M. Craig, *Early Travellers in the Canadas*, (Toronto: Macmillan Co.: 1955), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Weld, "St. Lawrence River Valley," quoted in Craig, 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Museum of Civilization, "Historical Overview of Immigration to Canada." <http://www.civilization.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/tresors/immigration/imf0308e.shtml>. Accessed September 25, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Howell, and Maxwell Leo Howell, *Sports and Games in Canadian Life, 1700 to the Present*, (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Coates and Morrison, 29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 15.

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- <sup>16</sup> Don Morrow, and Kevin Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History*, (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>20</sup> E.J. Hobsbawm and T.O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,1.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.
- <sup>24</sup> Morrow and Wamsley, 71.
- <sup>25</sup> Constitution and By-laws of the Montreal Pedestrian Club, 1873, quoted in Morrow and Wamsley, *Sport in Canada: A History* (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2005), 70.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>27</sup> Hobsbawm, 5.
- <sup>28</sup> Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 16.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael A. Robidoux, "Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey," *The Journal of American Folklore*, 115, no. 456 (2002), 211.
- <sup>30</sup> Metcalfe, *Canada Learns To Play*, 80.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> Richard S. Gruneau and David Whitson. *Hockey night in Canada: sport, identities, and cultural politics*. (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), p. 16.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*,13.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Daily British Whig*, 4 March 1875.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, 40, and Gruneau and Whitson, 43.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.
- <sup>43</sup> Robidoux, 211.
- <sup>44</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, 40.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup> Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture, and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 180.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.
- <sup>51</sup> See Image Index, Figure 1: Playing hockey on the skating rink, McGill University, 1884 / Montreal, Quebec Source: [[http://www.collectionscanada.ca/ Library and Archives Canada](http://www.collectionscanada.ca/Library and Archives Canada)]
- <sup>52</sup> *Toronto Daily Mail*, 23 March 1894.
- <sup>53</sup> *Montreal Witness*. 27 January 1883.

<sup>54</sup> Shea and Wilson, 164.

<sup>55</sup> Kevin Shea, and Jason Wilson, *Lord Stanley: the Man Behind the Cup*, (Bolton, ON: Fenn Publishing Company, 2006), 109.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> *Montreal Gazette* 29 January 1885, Shea and Wilson., 362.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>63</sup> *The Globe*, 12 February, 1892.

<sup>64</sup> Shea and Wilson, 348.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Alan Bairner, *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization: European and North American Perspectives* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>69</sup> "Thoughts on the Business of Life," last modified in 2013. Accessed at:

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<sup>70</sup> Weld, 27.

<sup>71</sup> W. George Beers, 'Canadian Sports,' *The Century Magazine*, Volume 14, May- October 1877, p. 506.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>74</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, 41.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Bairner, *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Robidoux, 223.

<sup>78</sup> Constitution Act 1867 — Section 91: Legislative Authority of the Parliament of Canada. Accessed at: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const//page-4.html#docCont>.

<sup>79</sup> Robidoux, 209.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *The Daily British Whig*, 4 March, 1875.

<sup>82</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, 41.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 4.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.