

Two Outs; Or, Yogi Berra, Sport and Maritime Historiography

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REVIEW ESSAYS/NOTES CRITIQUES

Two Outs; Or, Yogi Berra, Sport and Maritime Historiography

THERE IS A BURDEN ATTACHED to being a sport historian. That burden, of course, is to convince academic historians that the enterprise is worth more than passing interest. Just as the sports pages of our daily newspapers — conveniently set apart in a section of their own — provide a respite from apparently more important matters relating to politics, the economy, education, or the precarious state of the stock market, so has the history of sport in Canada been set aside from mainstream writing about the history of the nation and its regions. If one adds the adjective “Maritime” to the designation “sport historian”, the burden of convincing an academic audience of the subject’s importance becomes even weightier.¹

When I began my academic career some 30 years ago, the field of Maritime history existed at the periphery of Canadian history. Many of those dedicated to researching and writing about the region were located at the University of New Brunswick, and they included in addition to Stewart MacNutt, people such as Murray Young, Jim Chapman and Alfie Bailey, as well as Murray Beck in the political science department at Dalhousie University. These people worked in something of an historiographical vacuum, and their accomplishments stand as remarkable individual achievements. Much of their work focused on the pre-Confederation period, on the politics of colonialism, the achievement of responsible government and the road to nationhood. And for some observers, especially those from outside the region, there was little more that needed to be said or done in the field. Reflecting on the state of Maritime historiography at the end of the 1960s, one Central Canadian historian offered a pessimistic prognosis. “Further study is rather a discouraging prospect”, he concluded, “since Maritime history, in a way, stopped in 1867”.²

This comment, reminiscent of Frank Underhill’s oft-quoted judgement in *The Image of Confederation* (1964) that “nothing much ever happens down there”, should alert us to the fact that Canadian history has at times been presented as a story of “winners and losers”, of the important and the unimportant, or the triumphant and the victimized. I count myself lucky to have been part of a generation of Maritime scholars whose careful scholarship, evident in the pages of *Acadiensis* and in a growing number of important monographs, has consistently challenged the notion that Maritime history is peripheral and unimportant, or that ours is the history of losers or victims.

And yet there are those who continue to dismiss much of what has been written about the Maritimes as the wrongheaded and parochial caterwauling of sore-headed regionalists. One of the first to criticize the work of Maritime scholars along these lines was J.M.S. Careless of the University of Toronto, who had initially championed

1 The original version of this discussion was presented as the W.S. MacNutt Memorial Lecture at the University of New Brunswick in October 1998.

2 C.M. Wallace, “The Nationalization of the Maritimes, 1867-1914”, in J.M. Bumsted, ed., *Documentary Problems in Canadian History* (Georgetown, Ontario, 1969), II, p.131.

the idea that Canadian history had too much of a centralist bias, and advocated an appreciation of the country's "limited identities". In his keynote address to the Atlantic Canada Studies Conference in Saint John in the spring of 1983, however, Careless made clear his misgivings about what he regarded as the writing of the nation's history from the point of view of victimized interest groups. Although Careless presented his critique in a light-hearted manner, his remarks suggested his discomfort with the new emphasis on women, native peoples and regional grievance in the writing of Canadian history. More recently, Lovell Clark, Michael Bliss and Jack Granatstein have each argued that the emphasis on social and regional history has weakened the fabric of the nation and contributed to what Bliss calls "the sundering of Canadian history". In his most recent polemic, *Who Killed Canadian History?* Granatstein makes a passionate appeal for restoring political and military history to a place of appropriate importance in the writing of the history of the nation. This seems a worthy enough objective. Yet Granatstein cannot resist the temptation to dismiss much of social history, and especially that from a regional or feminist perspective, as "victimization and blame seeking on the fringes".³

This characterization of the "new" social and regional history is misguided. In the first place it glosses over the fact that the history of the country looks different from the periphery, and that real and legitimate grievances are embedded in the historical experience of marginalized peoples or of regions such as Atlantic Canada. And secondly, it ignores the fact that most scholars have dwelt not upon victimization at all, but on the ways in which people in the region have found room to manoeuvre and make choices that they hope will improve their lives within the existing structures of power and authority that confront them. Whether we are talking about women's use of petitions in 19th-century New Brunswick, or the way in which settlers manipulated the patronage system to their advantage in their struggles with timber companies, or the labour militancy of miners and steelworkers, or of more broadly based political movements such as the Maritime Rights movement of the 1920s, the story was not that of victimization, but of people using the resources at their disposal to make a difference in their lives and their region. Those who would find in Maritime historiography only the undignified whining of the victimized, or deterministic assumptions about dependency and regional underdevelopment, would thus profit from a more comprehensive understanding of the body of scholarship that has accumulated over the past 25 years.

For the most part, that work has been about the contribution of the Maritimes to the *making* of Canada, rather than to its *dismantling*. As Ian McKay has suggested in a recent address, notions of Maritime dependency, underdevelopment and victimization belie the existence of a more "subtle, complex, communitarian critique of the liberal order" which has been a fundamental component of Maritime political culture and represents our gift to the nation. This communitarian vision, rooted in a critique of liberalism's individualistic excesses, McKay suggests, "can be found in Angus L. Macdonald and also in Robert Stanfield, in Allan MacEachen and now in Alexa McDonough: in all these cases, which can hardly be reduced to some homogeneous

3 J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998), p. 76.

essence, one nonetheless finds a sense of the Canadian liberal project as having a social sense, a politico-ethical justification".⁴

Much of the scholarly work on Atlantic Canada undertaken over the past two decades has focused upon the struggles to create a more equitable and socially responsible society in the face of debilitating processes of economic transformation. At the same time, what is especially remarkable is the sheer breadth of that undertaking. In addition to a large body of work in article form, there are monographs and/or edited collections dealing with Native, Planter, Loyalist and Acadian communities, with borderland interaction, with 19th-century mercantile and industrial development, with the emergence of urban centres such as Saint John and Moncton, on banking, finance and entrepreneurship, on industrialization and de-industrialization, on working-class history, on politics and Dominion-provincial relations, on shipping, sailors and seafaring, on the crucial role native peoples played in the balance of power in the region, on women's active involvement in education, literature, religion and politics, on the history of agriculture, forestry and the fishery, on connections between countryside and metropolis, on science, medicine and the law, on the militia, the military and international conflict. And with Ian McKay's magisterial *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia*⁵ we have a path-breaking intellectual portrait of the region, something David Alexander called for in his MacNutt Lecture some 20 years ago.

Yet there is still much that needs to be done. As Professor Granatstein has suggested, we do need to focus attention once more on the political history of the region, and on the long-term significance of the military in the development of Atlantic Canada. At the same time, we also need more rather than less social history written from the perspective of the region. My criticism of Maritime historiography, as it has developed over the past two decades and more, is that it has been excessively economic, focusing largely upon the male-oriented workaday world, although the scholarship of the past few years has begun to address many of my misgivings. Indeed, as historians shifted their attention from issues relating to regional economic development writ large, to social and cultural relations at the level of the community, neighbourhood and household, they gave greater attention to women and their role in the domestic or informal economy. Even more important is the recognition that while the doctrine of "separate spheres" was a powerful prescriptive ideology intended to limit women's involvement in public activity, women nonetheless ventured beyond the home into a broad range of important cultural and social activities. Nevertheless, I can't help but think, as I wrote a few years ago, that "historians of the region have tended to discount the significance of those social and cultural practices whose history does not on first glance contribute to an understanding of regional economic development".⁶

Indeed, there are a number of neglected areas of *cultural* production that cry out

4 Ian McKay, "The Eclipse of Region in the Contemporary Writing of Canadian Social History", keynote address to the Atlantic Canada Workshop, Halifax, August 1997.

5 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston, 1994).

6 Colin D. Howell, *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball* (Toronto, 1995), p. 9.

for scholarly attention. Take, for example, the ways in which music has been produced and consumed in Atlantic Canada over time, the representation of our history in radio and television production and in documentary and feature film-making, the significance of churches, service groups and other voluntary organizations to the social and cultural identity of our communities, especially at the small-town and village level,⁷ and finally, the production and commercialization of sport and recreational life. All of these topics connect in subtle and complex ways to that critical social vision that McKay sees as our contribution to the making of the Canadian liberal order.

In speaking of sport we come to the second of the “two outs” that I wish to investigate. I use this metaphor, of course, to draw attention to the neglect of sport history on the part of Maritime historians. In fact, sport history stands in much the same relation to the history of the region that Atlantic Canada does to the history of the nation; that is, it has been pushed to the margins of our inquiry and consigned to its own “separate sphere”. The justifications for sport’s exclusion from mainstream history can take many forms. Sport has often been dismissed a priori as little more than a social opiate, an avenue of escape from issues of greater importance, an invitation to avoid deeper social responsibilities. After all, is not play less important than work? Do not sports and games smack of childishness rather than maturity? Does not sport cultivate the body at the expense of the intellect? For those who regard sport as having questionable social worth, these questions need no answering; simply raising them is reason enough to turn one’s attention to other concerns.

Yet most academic historians, despite the lingering effects of the Calvinist work ethic and the scholar’s tendency to privilege mind over body, should recognize instinctively that sporting life has never been insulated from the broader concerns of the day, not now or in the past. So it was that I tried in *Northern Sandlots* to demonstrate baseball’s implication in broad social discourses about rowdiness and respectability, masculinity and femininity, regionalism and nationalism, as well as class, ethnicity and race, that accompanied the shifting patterns of capitalist production, consumption and commercialization over the past century. At the turn of the century promoters of organized recreation regarded organized team sport as a crucial instrument for human betterment, as a social technology that would fashion a “manly” and Christian nation-state, protect animals from the brutalization inherent in the so-called “blood sports”, save children from the temptations of the sinful city, dissolve class antagonisms on the field of fair play, and promote a more healthy and efficient population. Others approached organized sport in more entrepreneurial ways, as a potentially profitable business enterprise, or as a way to secure one community’s advantage over another in an age of urban boosterism. The sporting rivalry between Saint John and Halifax was particularly heated, for example, as the two cities jockeyed for position in their struggle to become the major eastern Canadian railway terminus and winter port.

7 I have in mind here something akin to Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto, 1996), which probes the relationship between religion and leisure in the construction of the community identity of three small towns in Ontario.

With the revival of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, sport was actively enlisted in support of the cause of both national revitalization and international brotherhood. The founder of the modern games was Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin, whose dreams of a world united remain with us today in the five rings which he designed to symbolize the linking of the five continents in a commitment to fair play and international harmony. Like many of his fin-de-siècle countrymen, de Coubertin was also obsessed with what he saw as signs of degeneracy and national weakness in France that followed on the heels of the nation's humiliating defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. The idea that sport and the strenuous life equipped the nation to meet potential enemies was central to discourses about physical and moral degeneration not only in France, but throughout Europe, the United States and Canada as the 20th century began. At the Berlin Games in 1936, and after the Soviet Union's "defection" to what it had earlier regarded as the "bourgeois Olympics" in 1952, the idea that sport demonstrated the virtues and limitations of rival state systems and their peoples was presented in even sharper relief. Many will remember that the Canada-Russia hockey series of 1972 was dramatized not just as a contest between two styles of hockey, but of two diametrically opposed systems of social, cultural and economic organization. As the series approached, most Canadians could not imagine that our Canadian emphasis on the individual player's freedom to innovate and respond to the challenges of the moment, unencumbered by the constraints of rigid planning, would ever succumb to the Soviets' highly systematized approach with its patterned plays and its unsmiling, dictatorial coach who seemed the sporting equivalent of Leonid Brezhnev.

In today's discourse about sport's social worth, criticisms of excessive nationalism, denunciations of spectator hooliganism, concerns about the distortion of sport's nobler aspirations in the age of consumerism and global capitalism, and controversies relating to performance-enhancing drugs, are commonplace. Remarkably, however, the belief that sport will ultimately serve useful social ends remains a resilient notion. In *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1991), Robert Putnam argues that the existence of soccer clubs and other sporting associations in northern Italy from the middle of the 19th century onward created important traditions of community collaboration and civic engagement. Since the implementation of a long-neglected constitutional provision for regional governments in 1970, these have translated into a responsive democratic political culture with relatively high levels of public participation and an equally high level of political responsiveness to public concerns on the part of regional governments. By contrast, the absence of these associational traditions in the south has resulted in the maintenance of client-based politics, social disconnectedness and mistrust, and civic disengagement. "Voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs — these were the hallmarks of a successful region", writes Putnam. "In fact", he continues, "historical analysis suggested that these networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being an epiphenomenon of socioeconomic modernization, were a precondition for it" (p. 66).

Putnam contends that sport creates "social capital" and thereby represents a community resource important to the maintenance of democratic practice. In a recent essay in the *Journal of Democracy* entitled "Bowling Alone: America's Declining

Social Capital”, Putnam lamented the weakening of American traditions of participatory sport at the community level, as well as the more isolating influence of spectatorism which characterizes contemporary capitalist sport. Putnam expressed his discomfiture with the fact that while more Americans are bowling today than ever before, league bowling has decreased by 40 per cent. And for those who might consider this of little consequence, Putnam observes that nearly 80 million Americans went bowling at least once in 1993, nearly a third more than voted in the 1994 Congressional elections and about the same number that claim to attend church on a regular basis. The broader social significance of this, Putnam concludes, “lies in the social interaction and even occasionally civic conversations over beer and pizza that solo bowlers forgo. Whether or not bowling beats balloting in the eyes of most Americans, bowling teams illustrate yet another vanishing form of social capital”.⁸

The weakness of Putnam’s argument is that it overemphasizes the positive contributions of sport to social renewal and minimizes its more destructive tendencies. In *It’s A Workingman’s Town: Male Working-Class Culture in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), Thomas Dunk provides a more ambivalent assessment of local sporting associations and the civic value of post-game libations. Dunk analyzes a present-day softball tournament in Thunder Bay, Ontario, and he shows how the participation of young men in the games and the post-game celebrations create feelings of masculine camaraderie and working-class identity, while reinforcing traditional divisions between the sexes. The women provide support by washing and ironing uniforms, attending the games as spectators and driving home when their mates have too much to drink at the tavern. Yet even if Putnam’s argument that sport creates social capital and civic engagement glosses over sport’s social costs, and minimizes the extent to which sport is a contested territory upon which class, ethnic, racial and gender divisions abound, it does provide a clue to understanding the continuing cachet that sport maintains in our contemporary world.

Given the time and effort that capitalist entrepreneurs, social reformers, athletes, spectators, educators, journalists, parents and the state have invested and continue to invest in sporting culture, the lack of attention Canadian and Maritime historians have given this form of cultural production is curious indeed. As the American historian Mark Dyreson has suggested, other than sport there is probably no social invention, with the possible exception of education, organized religion or politics, that has maintained such an enduring level of public attention and support over the past century and a half. What other 19th-century reform initiatives, Dyreson asks, “still have cultural power at the end of the twentieth century? What has become of abolition and crusades for civil rights, temperance rallies, prison and asylum reform, the benevolent empire of Evangelical Christianity, or Sylvester Graham’s crackers? We see their offspring in some cases, and in others their skeletons or ghosts, but none remains securely at the center of national culture as sport does”.⁹

8 Robert Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital”, *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (January 1995), pp. 65-78.

9 Mark Dyreson, “Maybe It’s Better to Bowl Alone: Sport, Community and Democracy in American Thought”, unpublished paper presented to the North American Society for Sport History, Auburn, Alabama, May 1997, p. 10. See also his *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture and the Olympic Experience* (Urbana, 1997).

Despite the centrality of sport to the making of our community, the early pioneers of sport history in Canada came not from the discipline of history itself, but from departments of physical education and kinesiology. While much of their early work was descriptive and theoretically innocent, it nonetheless provided a foundation for future work. At the same time, more perceptive scholars such as Alan Metcalfe, Patricia Vertinsky, Don Morrow and Bruce Kidd challenged their Canadian colleagues to master the theoretical debates within disciplines such as sociology and cultural anthropology, and to apply the techniques of social history to the history of sport. Anthropological approaches which address sporting events as social rituals which “tell ourselves about ourselves”, postmodernist concerns about the representation of “normality” and “abnormality”, and how these were implicated in discourses about the body and the mind, Gramscian assumptions about the cultural and intellectual dimensions of class formation and hegemonic authority, and Marx’s doctrine of use-value and exchange-value, all are employed on a consistent basis in contemporary writing about the sporting past.

In fact, the most compelling treatment of the contribution of sport to the development of our national culture, Bruce Kidd’s *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996), is the work of a former Olympic athlete, who trained in sociology and is currently the director of the University of Toronto’s School of Physical Education. Kidd concentrates upon four national sporting organizations: the Amateur Athletic Union, a bourgeois and mostly English-speaking organization formed in 1894; the Women’s Amateur Athletic Federation, dedicated to expanding the field of opportunity for women athletes; the Workers’ Sport Association of Canada, which provided sporting opportunities for Canadian workers while maintaining a systematic critique of capitalist sport and the Olympic movement; and the National Hockey League, a fully market-oriented or capitalist sporting organization that has promoted sport’s exchange-value at the expense of its use-value. Unabashedly nationalist and influenced by contemporary currents in Marxist thought, Kidd laments the capitalist organization of sport, in which profit takes precedence over the community’s interest, and where owners are by no means averse to moving franchises even when there is considerable community allegiance to the team.¹⁰

Ironically, while Kidd’s sensibilities are democratic, and although he champions a more inclusive and participatory vision of a sporting culture, his book has very little to say about Maritime sporting life. In part this neglect derives from his emphasis on national sporting organizations, within which both francophone Québécois and Maritimers exerted little influence. Yet there is a further explanation for Kidd’s neglect of Maritime sport, one that is connected to his assumptions about how sport relates to national consciousness. Had he not chosen to exclude baseball from his analysis, and had he dealt in a more serious way with the amateur or community-level alternative to the NHL’s “brand name hockey”, Kidd would have been able to present a more comprehensive picture of Canada’s sporting culture. No doubt baseball was excluded because on the surface it appears to reinforce American rather than Canadian

10 Such was the case, for example, with the Winnipeg Jets franchise. As Jim Silver observes in *Thin Ice: Money, Politics and the Demise of an NHL Franchise* (Halifax, Fernwood Publishing, 1996), hockey tradition and community loyalty meant little in the market-driven world of corporate sport.

sporting traditions; yet at the same time it was unquestionably the most popular summer sport in Canada by the third quarter of the 19th century, and in our own time it is challenged only by softball and youth soccer. In addition, had Kidd emphasized the persistence of community-level hockey in Canada, he would have been able to bring Quebec and the Maritimes more fully into the story of sportive nation-building.

Despite Kidd's failure to write the Maritimes into his story of Canada's sporting past, he nonetheless recognizes the need to counter popular and nostalgic representations of sport history that obscure — in a cloud of sentimentality — the struggles involved in the production of sporting life over time. It is useful, therefore, to look at the way that sport history is produced outside the academy for broad public consumption, and to raise some questions about the relationship between history and memory in our own time. Andrew Huyssen has noted that the contemporary withering of our historical consciousness, fed by futuristic cyberspace imagery and the contemporary fascination with virtual reality, has been accompanied over the past few decades by a memory boom of unprecedented proportions, a boom evident in everything from museums and heritage restoration to flea markets and the marketing of "collectibles".¹¹ The new technologies of memory, from hand-held video cameras to the microchip, have undermined traditions of historical materialism and drawn us into a post-modern world of imagination and visual imagery that, for many, implies the dissolution of history itself. Our concern should be that the more we retreat from history into the realm of memory, and the more our historical consciousness erodes, the more susceptible we are to those who market our remembrances for commercial and ideological purposes.¹²

Popular assumptions about the sporting past invite an exercise in deconstruction. Most people today derive what they know about the history of sport from journalists, novelists, film-makers (both documentary and fictional), athletes, sports enthusiasts of various sorts, and from those institutions dedicated to keeping alive our sporting memories and beatifying the great athlete. For the most part, these cultural producers have little interest in the questions that social historians might raise about sport. Instead they revel in memory: recalling the heroic accomplishments of star athletes, recounting colorful anecdotes drawn from the field of play, mastering sporting trivia, or displaying a civic sporting heritage as a form of community boosterism. In our post-modern consumer culture, moreover, these memories are often turned into marketable icons of our sporting past. Sporting nostalgia has served to inflate the market for baseball, football and hockey cards. Major league hockey and baseball teams outfit themselves in uniforms of earlier eras, and sporting goods companies mass-produce vintage uniforms for sale. Baseball parks such as Baltimore's Camden Yards merge tactile images of baseball's past with the reality of the modern game, as

11 Andrew Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London, 1995).

12 McKay has made a similar point in *The Quest of the Folk*. The essentialist description of simple Maritime folk, he complains, is exploited by virtually every mass-production industry, from beer to automobiles, by regionally-based grocery chains, and of course by provinces in search of tourist dollars. McKay deconstructs these hitherto unexamined or taken-for-granted discourses about the folkish Maritimes, and explains the social, economic and cultural contexts in which these notions are produced and reproduced.

though changes in the game over time, including its excessive commercialization, are insignificant. What is at work here is the elevation of nostalgic memory above other, more critical, forms of historical consciousness.

It is in the novels of Alberta-born W.P. Kinsella that the dissolving of history into sentimental remembrance is celebrated most seductively. In both *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (1986) and *Shoeless Joe* (1982), Kinsella presents baseball as a social elixir and cultural restorative that brings past and present together, uniting fathers and sons across the generational divide, and equating baseball in the Iowa corn belt with heavenly tranquility. Both novels are replete with religious imagery, both novels allow for people to pass through time, both see baseball as providing a way of reconciliation between those who have been estranged, or in the case of Shoeless Joe Jackson, to allow those who have been wronged to fulfill dreams that have been denied them, and to return to the family like the prodigal son.

The rejection of traditional forms of historical inquiry is explicitly presented in *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. The story recounts the efforts of Gideon Clarke to prove, as his deceased father had believed, that the Chicago Cubs had come to Iowa in 1908 to play a group of all-stars from a league that no-one recalls in a game that nobody remembers. Years earlier, Gideon's father Matthew had written a history of the Confederacy as his doctoral dissertation in history. After consulting sources that he felt would confirm the league's existence, Matthew "quickly put them aside. He didn't need any confirmation from outside sources. The history of the Iowa Confederacy was carved on stone tablets in his memory. He couldn't know such things if they were not true".¹³ Unfortunately for Matthew, his dissertation committee would not accept his lengthy manuscript because of its lack of documentary evidence and suggested he submit it instead to the English department because of its literary merit. Haunted by the knowledge that he knew the truth, and that memory was often more important than other forms of evidence, Matthew ended his torment by putting his head in the way of a foul ball off the bat of Billy Bruton at Milwaukee County Stadium.

Gideon's mission to prove his father right leads him through a seam in the fabric of time back to Big Inning (beginning), Iowa, and to a game that took 2,614 innings to complete. Accompanied by his friend Stan, an aging journeyman minor league ballplayer who dreams of someday playing in the big leagues, Gideon becomes enchanted with the town and begins to fall in love with a young woman named Sarah Swan. Stan suits up with the All-Stars and fulfills his dream of playing beside the heroes of the 1908 Cubs, demonstrating to them that he had the ability to play in the majors. The game goes on despite a constant rain, 40 days of it in fact, until a flood sweeps the town of Big Inning and its history away. Gideon and Stan return to the present without Sarah, but with a knowledge of a world that exists beyond our time, a world accessible only through remembrance.

Kinsella's better-known *Shoeless Joe*, the inspiration for the Hollywood movie *Field of Dreams* (1988), contains many of the same elements as *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy*. Many will no doubt remember Iowa farmer Ray Kinsella, who is convinced that "if you build it, he will come". The "it", of course, was a baseball

13 W.P. Kinsella, *The Iowa Baseball Confederacy* (Toronto, 1986), p. 29.

diamond in the midst of a golden cornfield, and the “he” is Shoeless Joe. Two other characters appear who, like Shoeless Joe, had real life counterparts. First there is “Moonlight” Graham, whose name appears in various baseball encyclopedias, as he played one game for New York in 1905 without coming to bat.¹⁴ In the novel Graham is depicted as having realized his dream of playing in the major leagues before going on to a socially useful career as a small-town doctor. Then, by way of contrast, there is author J.D. Salinger, whose novel *The Catcher in the Rye* created a storm of controversy during the 1950s. (Note the clever connection here between the title of Salinger’s novel and Kinsella’s theme of baseball in a cornfield). In the novel, Salinger is portrayed as a cynical, disillusioned recluse who formerly loved baseball but has not been to a game in years. Ultimately he has his faith in humanity resurrected by coming to Kinsella’s Iowa ballfield. And finally, Ray is reunited with his father, a former professional catcher. The two of them engage in the proverbial game of catch between father and son, testifying to baseball’s bridging of generations and even of time itself.

In his recent and wonderfully insightful book *Cooperstown to Dyersville: A Geography of Baseball Nostalgia* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press, 1996), anthropologist Charles F. Springwood provides an ethnography of two baseball sites at which tourists absorb “a hegemonic, leisure-class reading of America, under the pervasive veil of nostalgia” (p. 2). Cooperstown, once regarded as the birthplace of baseball, is the site of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, opened in 1939 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Abner Doubleday’s supposed invention of the game. Dyersville, Iowa is the site of Donald Lansing’s farm, house and baseball field featured in *Field of Dreams*. Shortly after the release of the film, people began arriving at Lansing’s farm, many of them searching out pastoral representations of family life and mythopoetic connections between baseball and the American dream in a space imagined to contain the “essential” elements of American history. As one interviewee told Springwood, “we just had to see the field because the movie was so special. It was instilled with ‘family values’ and a respect for history” (p. 117).

But when history is reduced to a vague sense of getting in touch with the past, it can be put to any desired purpose; and, in this case, the purpose is decidedly conservative. I find it somewhat bewildering, therefore, that despite the neo-conservative and anti-historical implications of Kinsella’s novels, many of my friends, historians included, are disarmed by Kinsella’s charming mysticism. This is in part a testament to Kinsella’s cleverness, and it may also derive from the beautiful simplicity of the game of baseball itself. At the same time it reflects the inclination of many historians to dismiss sport as a relatively harmless and childish form of escapism not worthy of serious analysis.

Springwood also turns his attention to how baseball’s past is represented at the Cooperstown Hall of Fame, which from the time of its inception has been considered America’s “baseball shrine”. Cooperstown differs from Dyersville in one crucial respect: it deals only with real historical figures, and in that way it is committed to a vision of authenticity not found at the Dyersville site. Ironically, however, it is now universally conceded that the story of Abner Doubleday’s invention of the game in

14 John Thorn and Peter Palmer, eds., *Total Baseball* (New York, 1991), p. 938.

this small town in upstate New York was itself an invention designed to promote baseball's American pedigree, and to counter those who regarded baseball as evolving out of the British game of rounders. Moreover, the collection of baseball artefacts at Cooperstown and the reliance on statistical measurements of performance that provide one important criterion for the selection of inductees to the Hall, imply a commitment to historical facticity in a curiously inauthentic invented space.

Yet as Springwood points out, the point should not be to debunk Cooperstown for its historical inauthenticity. More important is to realize that the concept of history presented at Cooperstown, though different from that at Dyersville, serves a similar ideological purpose. Baseball's history at the Hall of Fame is a story of progress and evolution, rooted in a linear chronology and saturated in the language of triumphant individualism and American democracy. Even the legacy of racism and the marginalization of women from the game can be neatly accommodated within this story of progress. Jackie Robinson's breaking of the colour bar is thus seen as baseball's contribution to the dismantling of segregation. Drawing on the contemporary interest in the history of the so-called negro leagues, moreover, the Hall has moved as well to exhibit this history of exclusion as an aspect of baseball tradition. Yet by implying that this is a social problem of the past, it relegates this era, and racism in general, to the conceptual category of by-gone days. Similarly, with the recent interest in the All-American Girls' Baseball League, the Hall in 1988 opened an exhibit on women's baseball, a few years before the release of the film *A League of their Own* (1992). In one sense the Hall should be commended for demonstrating a sensitivity to feminist concerns, yet the exhibit fails to address in any serious way the continuing marginalization of women in the game. In the end, what is presented at the Hall, despite its concern for factuality, is not far removed from the nostalgic sentimentalism of the "field of dreams" in Dyersville. These two sites, Springwood writes, "are broadly conservative in how they distance the political complexity and plurality of the world, inscribe and reproduce traditionally gendered, "oedipalized", family orders and effect an erasure of racial difference in America" (p. 2).

Springwood's book takes on a particular significance for Atlantic Canadians, given that the town of Windsor, Nova Scotia has entered into a twinning arrangement with Cooperstown as part of its campaign to be recognized as the birthplace of hockey. In *The Puck Starts Here: The Origin of Canada's Great Winter Game, Ice Hockey* (Fredericton, Goose Lane Editions, 1996) retired surgeon Garth Vaughan presents his case that hockey began around the beginning of the 19th century on Long Pond near King's College School in Windsor, evolving out of the Irish field game of hurley. A critical piece of evidence, Vaughan believes, is an 1844 reference from Thomas Haliburton from *The Attaché; or, Sam Slick in England* (1844) where Sam Slick recalls his younger days on "the playground, with games at base in the fields, or hurley on the long pond on the ice". Whether this is enough to make the case for Windsor as the birthplace of hockey is open to question, but there is plenty of evidence of hurley on ice being played extensively in Nova Scotia in the early 19th century. Even if Windsor's claim is based on an after-the-fact comment, Vaughan effectively demolishes the claim that hockey was born in Montreal in 1875 when Halifax native James Creighton organized the first game in that city. (The rules for the Montreal game were referred to as the Halifax Hockey Club rules, and the two dozen sticks, likely made by Mi'kmaq craftsmen, had been sent to Montreal by Creighton's

friends in Halifax, suggesting an earlier genesis of the game in the east). Vaughan also puts to rest the particularly preposterous suggestion that Kingston, Ontario was the birthplace of organized hockey, based on a match between the Royal Military College and Queen's University in 1886.

Vaughan has received the support of many hockey people and sport historians in his claim that the game began in Nova Scotia. Included among them are hockey broadcaster and honorary president of the Society for International Hockey Research, Brian MacFarlane, and Nova Scotia sport historian A. J. "Sandy" Young, whose two-volume history of sport, *Beyond Heroes: A Sport History of Nova Scotia* (Hantsport, Lancelot Press, 1988), remains a useful reference work. A few months ago, the National Hockey League gave tacit recognition to the legitimacy of Vaughan's claims by releasing its new hockey encyclopedia, Don Diamond, ed., *Total Hockey* (New York, Total Sports, 1998) in a ceremony in Windsor. All of this is a testament to Vaughan's dogged efforts and careful sleuthing through the documents.

At the same time, Vaughan's efforts raise questions about the responsibility of professionally-trained historians to subject popular and public representations of the sporting past to critical analysis.¹⁵ My intent in what follows is not to dwell on the issue of the sport's birthplace, or even to note — given the widely recognized inauthenticity of the Cooperstown myth — the irony of Windsor's association with Cooperstown. Instead I want to assess the deeper assumptions embedded in this representation of hockey history. At Cooperstown baseball is presented as quintessentially American (despite the growing internationalism of the game), and as a way of assimilating immigrants into an American way of life. By contrast, *The Puck Starts Here* contains few explicit references to hockey and Canadian identity, other than to recount the origins of the game in the east and its spread to the rest of the country. It is, however, a story of progress uncomplicated by class, race, gender or ethnic conflict, and redolent with the symbols of contemporary Canadian multiculturalism. In order to emphasize Windsor's contribution to "Canada's game", the author includes a time-line beginning with the founding of King's College in 1788 and ending with Foster Hewitt's first Hockey Night in Canada radio broadcast in 1933. Windsor is foregrounded throughout the book. In addition to its hockey history, Vaughan presents a story of the community's progress from its 17th century origins, through the Acadian expulsion, the Planter and Loyalist migrations, the age of sail, the coming of the railway and finally to the great fire of 1897 and the rebuilding of the town in the early 20th century. This serves as the backdrop for a celebration of Windsor's hockey history and the recognition of "local hockey legends", such as Blaine Sexton who is credited with introducing hockey to Great Britain, Ernie Mosher

15 There is a growing literature addressing this issue, particularly with respect to sport halls of fame and resource centres. See in particular, Bruce Kidd, "The Making of a Hockey Artifact: A Review of the Hockey Hall of Fame", *Journal of Sport History*, 23, 3 (Fall 1996), pp. 328-34; S.W. Pope, "Sports Films and Hall of Fame Museums: An Editorial Introduction", *Journal of Sport History*, 23, 3 (Fall 1996), pp. 309-12; S.W. Pope, "Sport History: Into the 21st Century", *Journal of Sport History*, 25, 2 (Summer 1998), pp. i-x; Wray Vamplew, "Facts and Artefacts: Sports Historians and Sports Museums", *Journal of Sport History*, 25, 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 269-82; and Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "Reflections on Creating Critical Sport History for a Popular Audience: The People and the Bay", *Journal of Sport History*, 25, 2 (Summer 1998), pp. 309-16.

who led the Halifax Wolverines to the Allan Cup in 1935, Gordon “Doggie” Kuhn who played in the NHL with the New York Americans, and John Paris, Jr., the first black coach in professional hockey.

If Vaughan’s study can be read as a forthright expression of community boosterism, it also involves nostalgia for an earlier age when community loyalties and small-town rivalries abounded. Vaughan focuses on the Annapolis Valley Senior League before the Second World War, and the particularly intense rivalry between Windsor and nearby Kentville, which often led the Dominion Atlantic Railway to put on special cars to cater to the large number of fans wanting to get to the rival town. “Barely a night went by in town without a game”, Vaughan writes, “as the rafters rang with shouts and cheers and the sound of the boards being pounded with fists and sticks when goals were scored or fights broke out (fun things one never does while watching on TV!)” (p. 173). Vaughan remembers with affection the intense loyalties that occasionally boiled over into donnybrooks on the ice and carried over after the games when “old fashioned fists were cause of many a bruise and black eye” (p. 177). All of this evokes a simpler time when hockey expressed a loyalty to the town and a sense of shared and highly masculinized identity. Anti-modernist in its orientation, Vaughan’s study is implicitly critical of our contemporary age of commercialized hockey, its excessive salaries and the withering of local allegiance. As such it conforms to what McKay refers to as “an imagined descent from a Golden Age of folk authenticity . . . [that] flattered certain things about Maritime society — such as the continuity of communities and the persistence of tradition”.¹⁶ This same ideology permeates contemporary tourist representations of the region and connects history to the modern consumer marketplace.

In addition to nostalgic anti-modernism, Vaughan’s history reproduces contemporary notions of liberal multiculturalism. He acknowledges the contribution of Mi’kmaq people to the evolution of the game, playing their own stick and puck game called Oochamkunutk, setting goal stones parallel to the line of play, and using skates fashioned from animal bones. He also devotes an entire chapter to Mi’kmaq hockey stick makers, which along with an extensive section on hockey outfits and the advances in skate making at the Starr Factory in Dartmouth, gives further authentication of Nova Scotia’s leading influence over the game in the 19th century. Vaughan also provides two brief chapters, amounting to ten pages in all, recounting the involvement of women in the game and the development of the Nova Scotia Coloured Hockey League around the turn of the century with teams in Africville, Dartmouth, Halifax, Truro and Amherst.

If Vaughan’s history of hockey in Nova Scotia serves discursively to reinforce notions of liberal pluralism and an anti-modernist idealization of small-town life, it also tends to camouflage the race, gender and ethnic conflict that has been part of the game, not only in the contemporary period but throughout its history. Had Vaughan conceived of hockey not simply as a unifying community enthusiasm, but as a contested territory where social differences were given ritualistic expression, the results of his research might have been much different. Take, for example, the issue

16 McKay, *Quest of the Folk*, pp. 306-7.

of race. Although noting the existence of “local prejudices” and the fact many black players “were not always treated with the respect they deserved in some of the rinks where they played” (p. 139), Vaughan makes little attempt to describe the racial dynamics of the sport. Nor is there any recognition that racism remains part of the game even into the present. As a result, the race issue is consigned, as it is in Cooperstown, to a comfortable space somewhere in the past.

Vaughan’s approach differs considerably from that of Sheldon Gillis in a recent thesis on the social history of hockey in the Maritimes. Although Gillis notes, as does Vaughan, that games in the Coloured Hockey League drew large crowds that were predominantly white, he also emphasizes that these games rarely were divorced from the broader question of race relations throughout the province. Press reports of the matches were blatantly racist, in their treatment of both black and Mi’kmaq players. Reporters often noted their inability to tell one player from another. “All coons look alike to us”, said one sportswriter in the 8 March 1904 issue of the *Sydney Daily Post*. At other times they mocked black dialects or played upon the crudest stereotypes about blacks and native peoples. The *Truro Daily News* of 14 February 1905 reported that Anson Clyke played well in the first period of a game the night before, but then “faded away like a watermelon before a southern darkey”. In noting an upcoming match between Mi’kmaq from Millbrook and Halifax County, the same newspaper reported a few days before that “Thayendensga is playing point for Halifax and it is said that he has a tomahawk in his moccasin for any Truro brave who slides past him”.¹⁷

At the same time, however, the press came gradually to recognize the quality of play in the Coloured League, and encouraged white fans to patronize league games. “At one time people went to see those games as a burlesque”, a reporter for the *Acadian Recorder* noted in 1904, “but the members of the teams have made such improvements that the games are now good exhibitions of hockey”. Noting Judith Fingard’s judgement that the black community in Nova Scotia “had direct influence only over their own, segregated, voluntary institutions”, but that their interest in such things as temperance gained some black citizens “influential friends among whites” and respect from their dominant counterpart,¹⁸ Gillis suggests that the Coloured League served a similar purpose. For example, when two black clubs in Halifax, the Eureka and the Seaside played an exhibition game to raise money to offset the losses of the white Halifax Crescents who had travelled to Montreal to challenge for Lord Stanley’s cup, the press was grateful for their support.

Gillis also notes the significance of the names chosen by black teams in the region. Teams in Charlottetown, Truro and Dartmouth chose to be called either the Jubilees or the Victorias, suggesting their respect for the monarchy and an assertion of their claims to full citizenship. This symbolic attachment to the Crown was replicated on baseball diamonds as well. Black teams in Amherst and Saint John called themselves the Royals, and in Halifax one black club took the name Victorias. Given that the black community regarded the Crown as the final arbiter in matters pertaining to

17 These quotes are taken from Sheldon Gillis, “Putting it on Ice: A Social History of Hockey in the Maritimes, 1890-1914”, M.A. thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 1994, pp. 76, 86, 88.

18 Judith Fingard, “Race and respectability in Victorian Halifax”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies* (1992), as quoted by Gillis, “Putting it on Ice”, p. 86.

matters of citizenship and justice, and claimed their rights as British citizens through appeals to their liberties under the British constitution, the naming of teams should not be considered a trivial exercise. The decision of one Saint John black baseball club to call itself the Ralph Waldo Emersons is more difficult to comprehend, although it may have been chosen to signify the separation of the black community from mainstream society, a declaration of the natural rights of the individual to life, liberty and possession, and a commitment to transcending the circumstances that constrained them.

Beginning in the inter-war period a few black and native hockey and baseball players, such as John “Buster” Paris, Freeman Paris, Ernest Dorrington, Bill Bernard and Mattie Lewis began to find their way onto formerly all-white teams throughout the region. They were joined after the war by athletes such as Manny McIntyre, Stan “Chook” Maxwell, Charlie Pyle, Art Dorrington, Johnny Mentis and Willie O’Ree, who were equally at home on the baseball diamond or at the rink. Of these, the careers of New Brunswick’s McIntyre and O’Ree deserve special note, because of their significance in the erosion of the colour bar in professional sports. Born in Devon, New Brunswick (near Fredericton), McIntyre was one of only six black players signed to play professional baseball for the 1946 season, the year that Jackie Robinson began his professional career with the Brooklyn Dodgers’ farm team, the Montreal Royals. Signing with the Cincinnati Reds, McIntyre was the only one of these players not in the Dodgers’ organization and also the only one who did not have experience in the so-called negro leagues in the United States. McIntyre was assigned to Sherbrooke in the Class C Border League, breaking the colour bar in that loop. Ostracized by most of his white team-mates, some of whom came from the deep South, he left the club after 30 games and returned to the Maritimes to play for Middleton in the Halifax and District Baseball League. McIntyre also played professionally for the Cuban Giants of the Negro American League in 1948. McIntyre also had a superb professional hockey career, playing for a number of years on an all-black line with the Sherbrooke Aces, a farm team of the Montréal Canadiens. Despite his obvious talent, and that of his linemates, the Carnegie brothers, McIntyre and his black teammates were not once invited to the Canadiens training camp or given a chance to make the big club. Herb Carnegie received a tryout with the New York Rangers, and although some considered him to be the best player in camp he was not offered a contract.

Indeed, it was not until 1958, more than a decade after the breaking of the colour bar in baseball’s major leagues, that a black player appeared in a National Hockey League game. Fredericton’s Willie O’Ree became hockey’s equivalent of Jackie Robinson that season when he donned the uniform of the Boston Bruins. O’Ree’s career is the subject of an excellent 30-minute film, *Echoes in the Rink: The Willie O’Ree Story* (Fredericton, New Brunswick Film-Makers’ Cooperative, 1997 [distributed by Goose Lane Editions]). This film follows his athletic accomplishment from his youth in Fredericton, where with the support of his family and the encouragement of an older brother he starred in both sandlot baseball and hockey, through his graduating to a professional hockey career which spanned more than two decades.

Recently, at the time of Joe DiMaggio’s passing, I showed this film to my class in sport history. Despite the fact that O’Ree was both a Maritimer and a pioneer in race relations, none of the two dozen students in the class had heard of him. All of them,

however, knew the essentials of DiMaggio's life, including both his baseball accomplishments and his marriage to Marilyn Monroe. All of them were familiar with the Jackie Robinson story as well. This led to an interesting discussion of how heroes are constructed, and why others with a claim to recognition are largely ignored. Our discussion centred upon the power of the media to universalize the American hero, and upon the perennial problem Canadians have in constructing cultural alternatives to things American. 1997 was the 50th year of Jackie Robinson's entry into the major leagues, and major league baseball dedicated its season to his courage and skill. But 1998 also marked the 40th anniversary of Willie O'Ree's breaking of the NHL's apartheid policy, and the league remained somewhat ambivalent about his accomplishment. O'Ree currently works as youth development officer for the NHL/USA hockey diversity task force, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing opportunities for children of different ethnic and racial backgrounds to play hockey.

It is thus important to emphasize the accomplishment of two natives of Fredericton, Willie O'Ree and Manny McIntyre, in the struggle to overcome racial segregation in North America. The story of their lives, moreover, hardly conforms to the assumptions of those who dismiss Maritime history as a story of blame seeking and victimization. Rather they represent the continuing struggle to create a more humane and communitarian order in the face of larger processes of oppression.

Although I have focused upon the question of sport and race in the last part of this discussion, the examples chosen reveal sport's connection to important discourses about social reconstruction. Other people might be more interested in sport and the construction of masculine identity, sport as child-saving, sport and the school, sport and international relations, sport and class identity, sport and nationalism, or sport and the capitalist marketplace. Whatever one's interest, our sporting past deserves to be taken seriously by academic historians, and to be rescued from the nostalgic province of memory. Indeed, given that so much still needs to be done in the writing about sport and Maritime history, Yogi Berra's conclusion that "the game's not over till it's really over" still makes eminently good sense.

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