

**David Whitson & Richard Gruneau, eds.**

**Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture, and Commerce.**

Garamond Press / Broadview Press, 2006, 283 pp.  
\$26.95 paper (1-55193-055-2 ),

In *Hockey Night in Canada*, Whitson and Gruneau (1993) called for further critical analyses on the role of ice hockey in North American culture. *Artificial Ice* is their own contribution to the request. This collection of readings contains six chapters on the role of ice hockey in Canadian culture, and six on the political economy of the sport. It is quite readable and suitable for both undergraduate and graduate courses in the sociology of sport. Since the authors ensure appropriate historical treatments of issues of ethnicity and race, gender, violence, the role of the media, and the effects of globalization, it could be used as an ancillary resource for Canadian Society courses with sections on sport.

Gruneau and Whitson point out that cracks in hockey's mythological position in Canadian society expanded throughout the twentieth century. Competition between the National Hockey League (NHL) and the World Hockey Association (WHA), Vancouver's wait for an expansion team, and Canada's narrow victory over the Soviets in the 1972 Summit Series all gave rise to more critical views on the sport. Cultural idealizations surrounding the sport continued to be exposed by the Gretzky trade from Edmonton to Los Angeles, the Allan Eagleson fraud convictions and ongoing difficulties keeping small market Canadian teams profitable.

Hegemonic ruptures are examined by Harvey as he explicates how the sport has undergone significant changes in Quebec culture throughout the century. Rather than being the important cultural expression it once was, hockey is now more comparable to, and in competition with, other entertainment options due to changes in ownership of *les Canadiens*, the ethnic composition of players, the location of games (moved from the Forum to the Molson Centre), and means of broadcasting (from Radio-Canada to RDS).

This theme is explored further by other contributors. Wilson maintains that in an increasingly global culture, hockey has diminished in importance for many young Canadians, in part due to gender and racial exclusion. Adams indicates that ice hockey privileges white males through discourse and practice as mass media tend to concentrate on national victories achieved by males, and recreation facilities frequently devote more time to its play than alternatives. Stevens maintains, however, that women's legal challenges in the courts have provided further opportunities to play, but she is concerned about the increasingly competitive and selective nature of the game. Rather than women changing the way the game is played, it seems that the game is changing the way women play it. Exclusion of First Nations peoples and Blacks is considered by Pitter. He convincingly asserts that although stars such as Grant Fuhr and Jarome Iginla have become prominent, discriminatory behaviour is still evident.

The section focusing on political economy is a valuable contribution as ice hockey has faced an uncertain financial future, particularly in the United States. In his comparison of professional baseball, football, basketball and hockey, Rosentraub problematizes the definition of "revenue" as owners attempt to ensure cost certainty by introducing salary caps on players, particularly following the 2004-05 lockout. While national television monies and incomes flowing from ticket purchases are obvious forms of revenue to be shared with players, less apparent are those obtained by local media or from merchandise sold by separate but intertwined companies.

Bellamy and Schultz note that the NHL has faced problems securing lucrative television contracts because large market teams are content to retain revenue streams from local markets. This has resulted in reduced national exposure in the US, making it difficult for small market and expansion teams to remain viable. Expansion into the Sunbelt states, claims Mason, has been fraught with uncertainty despite the optimism of the 1990s. He questions whether the NHL has truly attracted many serious fans, or just *flaneurs* with short-term interests in the game. Hannigan articulates how local communities are affected by changing urban landscapes. When teams such as the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Montreal Canadiens move into new facilities in search of additional revenues, they create fantasy cities based on consumption that are cut off from nearby neighborhoods, and which adversely affect many existing local businesses.

The book concludes with an analysis of the global composition of the sport. Cantelon reviews the challenges of developing a team to represent Canada in international competitions. Although he claims the NHL has generally been considered the dominant force in professional ice hockey, he argues that the sport could expand further with the development of a rival European professional league. Ammirante explicates that association with professional ice hockey businesses is now perceived as a global choice rather than the expression of local communities.

Social change is an important theme that permeates this work. Indeed, the sport has changed rather quickly. In the New NHL of 2006-07, referees issue more penalties for obstruction, interference, holding, and high sticking and the game is played more offensively. Are these changes due to US expansion attempts, and globalization more generally? If Teitel (as cited in Hall, 1999, pp. 5-6) is correct and women are seen to play the "pure" version of the game, it might have been intriguing to consider whether these struggles have contributed to some of the recent regulation changes. Sports settings are often characterized as terrains contested by women (see Coakley and Donnelly 2004; Hall 1999; Messner 1988; Theberge 1995; Young and White 1995).

Surprisingly, there is little discussion of violence apart from Robidoux and Trudel's critical analysis of Hockey Canada's position on bodychecking. The subculture of minor hockey sustains this practice even though evidence demonstrates that bodychecking contributes to injuries. This topic could have been examined in conjunction with changes to the NHL. Of course, these changes are very recent and it still remains to be seen how long they will be sustained.

In conclusion, *Artificial Ice* is a compelling book that explores the changing nature of the sport. Readers will find all of the chapters engaging and even controversial at times. For instance, there are contentious claims about the importance of hockey for various social groups in Canadian society, the effects of rough play at the minor levels and the current marketing strategies employed by the NHL. It is a rich piece of literature that will no doubt become an important resource for those interested in the sport.

### References

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