**Ice Hockey**

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Ice hockey is one of a group of sports invented in regions where play on the ice was possible during winter time. The sports modern origins are in Canada particularly in cities and towns in southern Ontario, around Montreal in Quebec and in Nova Scotia. Hockey then expanded across Canada, into the USA and across northern and central Europe before expanding today to some 76 countries around the world.

The sport of ice hockey is governed by the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) based in Switzerland. Major professional leagues exist in North America (National Hockey League - NHL) in Russia, eastern Europe and Asia (Kontinental Hockey League - KHL) with other smaller scale professional leagues in Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, France, Czech Republic, Finland and the United Kingdom for example. Ice hockey is the flagship team sport of the Winter Olympic Games with many famous Olympic battles including the “Miracle on Ice” win of the USA over the Soviet Union in 1980, the Canada overtime win over the USA in Vancouver 2010 in the men’s competition, and epic battles between the Canadian and USA women’s teams in the 2000s. While the NHL is regarded as the best hockey league in the world, the KHL is close behind and includes the Kunlun Red Star franchise in Beijing, China. At the Pyeonchang Winter Olympics in 2018, North and South Korea combined for a unified Korean team. While largely still confined to countries in colder climates, hockey continues to expand throughout the world and into new markets.

While soccer is the dominant sport in most countries, ice hockey can lay claim to being the most popular sport in Canada, Russia, Finland, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, though soccer in strong in most of these countries as well. In Switzerland, hockey is not far behind soccer and the leading Swiss league team, Servette in Geneva, draws more spectators per match than any club outside the NHL. The most famous professional hockey players of all time come from these countries. The Montreal Canadiens hold the record for most NHL Stanley Cup wins, the Red Army team of the former Soviet Union dominated hockey there during the period before 1990 as well. From the 1920s until 1967, the NHL consisted of the “original six” teams of Montreal Canadiens, Toronto Maple Leafs, Boston Bruins, New York Rangers, Detroit Red Wings and Chicago Black Hawks. In the latter 1900s and early 2000s the NHL expanded across North America placing teams in the south and west in the USA including notoriously hot cities of Phoenix and Dallas.

After using the mid-1920s as a decade for the expansion of the NHL, the late 1920s through the early 1940s can be described as an era of trial and error for the NHL. Complicated by the great depression and North America’s entrance into the Second World War, the NHL franchises struggled to stay in operation (Klein, 2016). By 1942, the league was down to six teams, the “original six”. The NHL expanded for the 1967 season, which is commonly viewed as the largest expansion of any professional sports league in sports history (Klein, 2016). The NHL added the California Seals, the Los Angeles Kings, the Minnesota North Stars (now Dallas Stars), Philadelphia Flyers, Pittsburgh Penguins and St. Louis Blues, doubling the NHL from six teams to twelve (Klein, 2016). Throughout the 1970s the NHL continued to expand throughout the United States and Canada (Klein, 2016). Despite the majority of hockey clubs being located in the United States, an overwhelming majority of players were from Canada.

With the NHL consisting mostly of teams located in the United States, it is surprising to note that for the most part throughout the history of NHL expansion, there was a drastic difference in where teams were located, with a majority of the teams being located in the heavily populated northern and eastern half of the United states, only two teams located west of Minnesota and no teams located in the southern part of the nation. One of the reasons why the NHL did not expand to the West during the 1970s is due to the formation of the World Hockey Association which was active from 1972-1979 (“WHA-Teams,” n.d.). When the World Hockey Association ceased operations after the 1979 season, the two leagues merged, resulting in the NHL starting the 1980 season with three new clubs located west of Minnesota (“WHA-Teams,” n.d.). In recent times, debates over the soul of hockey versus the economics of hockey have plagued the NHL and the sport, With several new teams located in the southern USA such as Arizona, Texas and Florida, the percentage of NHL teams in the USA is at an all-time high with only Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Winnipeg, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver in Canada having teams. The Winnipeg team was initially lost to Arizona (Nauright & White, 1996; Silver 1995), before being restored a decade later. Large arenas exist in Saskatoon, Hamilton and Halifax, but the markets have been deemed too small for the NHL. The Quebec Nordiques were highly successful in attracting local and regional fans but were relocated to Colorado. It is most likely that any new Canadian team will be based there in future.

While Canada pioneered the early development of ice hockey in the 1870s and 1880s, the game also expanded internationally by 1900 especially to colder countries in northern Europe and into the USA. The first organized hockey competitions in Russia began in St. Petersburg in 1898. After 1900 hockey began to develop in Moscow as well. The special requirements for standardized arenas did not exist yet, so hockey could be played anywhere a clean sheet of ice could be found. Snowdrifts acted like a board area, ice hockey sticks were made of tree branches bent at a right angle and dried over fire to fix the shapes, sizes, hockey goals were similar to the size of football goals, and player equipment was very primitive. In 1907 the Saint-Petersburg Hockey League was created and moves towards standardization began (Altukhov & Nauright, 2018).

Early games in Canada and Russia were amateur with many early club members coming from middle and upper classes. Increasing competition led to regular competitions and moves towards commercialization. The development of hockey coincided with the emergence of new indoor sporting arenas such as Madison Square Garden in New York City. Early sporting entrepreneurs who built and operated ice rinks and new arenas in both Canada and the Northern United States recognized the value of hosting games to be watched by many spectators. As experts on hockey history have pointed out, this phenomenon quickly left large cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Detroit spreading the game to more remote towns where local business leaders attracted players with increasingly large sums of money to play for local teams such as those in Cobalt and Renfrew, Ontario, and Houghton and Calumet, Michigan (Cosentino, 1990; Mason & Schrodt, 1996; Mason, 2018). As hockey scholar Dan Mason states: “The local arena thus became a focal point of local communities where spectators could gather on cold winter nights to watch their teams play” (Mason, 2018).

**Cold War Hockey**

The sporting events that were by far the most symbolic during the Cold War were nearly all hockey matches. The 1972 “Summit on Ice” series between Canada and the Soviet Union, the 1975 Montreal Canadiens versus Red Army game and the 1980 “Miracle on Ice” matchup between the USA and the Soviets, all were significant moments during the Cold War. The Red Army match against the Montreal Canadiens at the Montreal Forum which ended in a 3-3 tie on 31 December 1975 is considered by many to be the greatest hockey match in history. The game featured superstar goaltenders Vladislav Tretiak for the Red Army and Ken Dryden for the Canadiens. Tretiak is credited with single-handedly keeping the Red Army in the game as the Canadiens dominated the play (Denault, 2010). Leading NHL and Soviet teams continued to play against each other during the late 1970s and early 1980s paving the way for Soviet players to come to play in the NHL by the late 1980s.

**Hockey in Popular Culture**

The success of hockey stars and their increasingly celebrity as role models for communities has consistently expanded in the post-World War Two era. While hockey competitions remain central to the success of the sport, in countries where hockey is the dominant sport, hockey stars achieve tremendous fame and adulation as well as serving as focal points for identity. Most Canadians born before 1970 can tell you where they were “when Henderson scored for Canada” in the final game of the 1972 Summit on Ice series against the Soviet Union. In the Province of Quebec, the province of Canada that is predominantly French speaking, the Montreal Canadiens have served as a key focal point for identity. For many decades most of the Canadiens’ players were raised in Quebec and many of them were French-speakers such as Maurice and Henri Richard, Jean Beliveau, Jacques Lamaire, Guy Lapointe, Bernie “Boom Boom” Geoffrion, Yvan Cournoyer, Guy LaFleur and goalies such as Jacques Plante and Patrick Roy (Ransom, 2014).

In the case of Maurice Richard, he became symbolic of the struggle of the Quebecois in the face of Anglo-centrism. Richard was clearly denied assists that would have gone to him had he been an English-speaking player and he was ejected for the end of the 1955 season which cost him the scoring title. This prompted a series of riots in Montreal which were called the Richard Riots. Many attribute as the starting point of Quebec nationalist activism which led to two referenda on separation from Canada that narrowly failed, but did lead to a nationalist government in the Province (Belanger, 2013; Salutin, 1977; Ransom, 2014). Quebecois cultural scholar, Benoît Melançon produced one of the best cultural biographies ever written on the legacy and cultural meaning of Richard in his *The Rocket: A Cultural History of Maurice Richard* (Melançon, 2009). A movie by the same name portrayed the career of Richard up through the time of the Richard Riots. In the famous Canadian cartoon movie and children’s book *The Hockey Sweater*, all the boys in a small town wear Richard jerseys (Melançon, 2009; Ransom, 2014). Canadian playwright Rick Salutin placed the Richard Riots and other key events in Quebec history together with that of the Montreal Canadiens in his 1977 play *Les Canadiens* which culminates in the first referendum on Quebec independence from Canada.

While hockey is a national sport in Sweden, Finland, Russia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia as well in Canada, the politics of hockey and nationalist identity have been most pronounced in Canada and Quebec. Other hockey players have achieved iconic status in wider culture, most notably Wayne Gretzky, known as “The Great One”, who is the all-time leading scorer in the National Hockey League and holds 61 NHL records. Gretzky created a moment of national angst when he was traded by the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings in 1988. Many Canadians blamed his American wife who worked in Hollywood and viewed the loss of Gretzky to an American team as momentous for Canadian identity (Jackson, 1988). Indeed, the Disneyfication of hockey reached its peak with the *Mighty Ducks* 1992 movie (and its sequel *D2*) which was linked directly to the NHL through Disney’s investment and creation of The Mighty Ducks of Anaheim (1993-2006), though now the team is back to being styled the Anaheim Ducks. The *Mighty Ducks* movies grossed nearly $100 million between them.

Gordie Howe became known as “Mr. Hockey” playing competitively well into his 50s, while Boston Bruins defenseman Bobby Orr was thought to be the best pure talent in the history of the sport. In a strikingly similar storyline to *The Rocket*, Russian star Valeri Kharmalov, who died tragically at age 33 in 1981, had his life story told in *Legend No. 17* released in 2013. The following year *Red Army*, a documentary about the great Soviet teams of the 1970s and 1980s appeared. Several movies and documentaries have appeared examining the Summit on Ice series between Canada and the Soviet Union that took place in 1972. However, the movie *Miracle* released by Disney in 2004, which grossed over $64 million became the most watched hockey movie of all-time. Starring Kurt Russell as US coach Herb Brooks, the movie follows the USA men’s hockey team of 1980 which miraculously defeated the multiple defending Olympic and World Champion Soviet Union in an epic semi-final game in Lake Placid, New York.

**Globalizing Ice Hockey**

The Swedish Ice Hockey Federation is a member of the Swedish Sport Confederation which was established 1903. The Swedish Sport Confederation today consists totally of 71 sport federations, with 20,000 sport clubs and over three million members in a country of eight million. Initially hockey fell under the auspices of football (soccer) with the Swedish Football Association becoming a member of the International Ice Hockey Federation in 1912. As ice hockey grew in popularity the Swedish Ice Hockey Federation was founded in 1922 (Backman, 2018; Stark, 2010). The Swedish Ice Hockey Federation has since been the governing body for all Swedish ice hockey. In Finland, hockey first appeared in 1899 or the 1920s depending on the source. Regardless, the sport was organized in 1927 under the Finnish Skating Federation, which also released the first rules, based on the IIHF rules for ice hockey. The Finnish Skating Federation joined the IIHF in 1928 (Backman, 2018). Sweden and Finland began a long rivalry in the sport in 1928 first playing on 29 January. Not surprisingly Sweden, with a longer history of organization, won the first match easily prompting the formation of a separate ice hockey federation in Finland in 1929. Sweden and Finland both have professional leagues, with Sweden having a promotion-relegation system and Finland have a closed league structure. The largest Finnish team, Jokerit now plays in the Russian-dominated Kontinental Hockey League (KHL). Top players from both countries since the 1980s have aspired to success in the NHL, however.

Since the 1980s, the number of non-Canadian players achieving stardom in the NHL has increased dramatically. Before that time up to 90% of NHL players had been born in Canada with most of the rest being from the USA. Players from the former Soviet Union, particularly Russia have had a significant impact on the NHL. Alex Ovetchkin, who has played his entire career with the Washington Capitals leads all Russian point scorers in NHL history. Other great Russian players have included Sergey Fedorov, Viacheslov Fetisov, Evgeni Malkin (entire career with the Pittsburgh Penguins), Pavel Datsyuk (Detroit Red Wings). Finnish star Jari Kurri won several Stanley Cups partnering Wayne Gretzky scoring 601 goals in his NHL career. His scoring total of 1,398 points was later passed by Temu Selanne, second all-time European scorer and leading Finn with 1,457 total NHL points including 684 goals. Swedish star Peter Forsberg has only been surpassed in assists per game by Gretzky, Mario Lemieux and Bobby Orr. Nine Swedish players have now won the “Triple Gold” (Olympic Gold, World Championship Gold, and a Stanley Cup title), only trailing Canada with ten as of 2019. Russian star Pavel Bure, “The Russian Rocket” was perhaps the fastest of all players and stands fourth all-time in goals per game. Bure began a Legends of Hockey series pitting star former players from European countries in competition in 2016. Czech player Jaromír Jágr played 24 seasons in the NHL and six seasons in the KHL before returning to the Czech Republic in 2018 to finish his long career. Jagr was one of only three players to lead the NHL in scoring between 1981 and 2001 (with Wayne Gretzky and Mario Lemieux being the other two). He is the third all-time leading scorer in NHL history and leading European scorer in history with 1,921 points including 766 goals (3rd all-time behind Gretzky and Gordie Howe).

With the advent of the KHL in 2008, leading Russian and European players have been able to earn substantial incomes without coming to North America. Several star players with NHL experience have chosen to play in the KHL including Pavel Datsyuk and Ila Kovalchuk, both of whom play for SKA in St. Petersburg. KHL teams compete for the Gregarin Cup and the league now boasts teams in several European and Asian countries including Kulun Red Star in Beijing, China. The League pays the highest salaries and attracts the most total spectators of any league outside the NHL.

The World Championships and Olympic competitions remain the pinnacle for national hockey teams with the Soviet Union and Russia being the most successful over the latter four decades of the 20th century and into the 21st. NHL players on teams in the Stanley Cup playoffs routinely miss the World Championships while most Olympic competitions have occurred without NHL players. One exception was at the 2010 Vancouver Olympics when Canadian superstar Sidney Crosby scored a goal in overtime to defeat the USA. In the women’s game, Canada and the United States have regularly contested world and Olympic titles, though in 2019, Finland defeated Canada in the semi-finals before losing in a shoot-out to the USA. In the USA, intercollegiate hockey has gained in strength with the “Frozen Four’ emulating the “Final Four” in basketball. Teams from New England and the upper Midwest have dominated NCAA competition and college players have formed the bulk of US national teams including the “Miracle” gold medal winning team in the 1980s Olympics.

With tiered international competition the sport of hockey continues to expand around the world with teams such as the New Zealand “Ice Blacks” competing for championships and opportunities to move to the next level of competition. With the Winter Olympic Games coming to Beijing, China in 2022, there has been massive investment in Chinese hockey with the best players joining Russians in Kunlun Red Star. The club also is home of the best women’s players placing two teams in the Canadian professional women’s league which sadly folded in 2019 (Li & Nauright, 2018). In the Pyeonchang Winter Games the two Koreas fielded unified teams in the men’s and women’s competitions with Seoul being mentioned as a potential leading candidate for further KHL expansion in Asia (Kim, 2018).

**Expanding Ice Hockey Research**

Ice hockey has been well served by scholars internationally with much of the English-language literature produced by scholars based in Canada and the USA. In 1991, the Society for International Hockey Research was created by a group of 17 scholars in Canada. Since that time several academic conferences and international forums have been held in Canada and Russia to expand the impact of ice hockey research on the history and contemporary issues facing the sport. Ten conferences beginning in 2001 have been organized in Canada and the northern USA, known as “The Hockey Conference.” Since 2017, the International Ice Hockey Federation and Russian Hockey Federation working in conjunction with academic scholars, journalists and hockey officials have held the World Hockey Forum annually each December in Moscow, Russia. In 2018, the first major academic global history of hockey was written, by Stephen Hardy and Andrew Holman, long-time scholars of the sport, simply titled *Hockey: A Global History*. Also that year, feature panels on ice hockey appeared at the European Association for Sport Management Congress held in Sweden. While there have been clear advances in research on the history, culture, science, business and political economy aspects of hockey around the world, much remains to be done particularly outside of core hockey regions of North America and northern Europe.

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