

**A Season for the Ages: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change
In the Life Course of Amateur Hockey Players in Montreal**

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ABSTRACT

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In the Life Course of Amateur Hockey Players in Montreal

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This thesis employs a dialectic of continuity and change to examine the ways in which adult amateur hockey players in Montreal account for, and represent, the effects of aging. The findings are based on fieldwork conducted with three amateur hockey teams over the 2013-2014 winter season. The thesis explores what amateur hockey means to participants throughout their life course and how that meaning shifts with age. Examining how hockey fits into everyday life at different points in the life course of players reveals how participants understand their present age, and the aging process. This thesis considers both the socio-cultural and embodied aspects of the game in exploring how players sustain their engagement in hockey over time in the face of competing domestic and work commitments as well as their own aging bodies.

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“It’s hard to find constants in life. But hockey is one of those rare things.”
- (Paul, 52, from interview transcriptions).

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the ways in which involvement in amateur hockey and other sports changes over the life course of players. This study was inspired by my own past experience of playing the game as a child in recreational leagues, quitting the sport as an adolescent and then getting back into the game in my early twenties. At every point in my life so far, participating in hockey has defined some parts of my experience of getting older. Even when I was not playing hockey, it was defining the break it left. When I returned to the game as an adult I realized what a transformative effect hockey could have on someone’s life. I also realized that I was not the only person who felt that way: many of the players I shared the ice with on those late winter nights voiced similar sentiments. Amateur hockey for many people is a very important part of life. I have continually been trying to uncover what that importance is.

This thesis is an examination of how adult amateur hockey players in Montreal account for, and represent, the effects of aging. It explores what amateur hockey means to participants throughout their life course and how that meaning is constructed. Examining how hockey fits into everyday life at different ages reveals how participants understand their present age, and the aging process. The following ethnographic account shows how sport fits into, adds to and enhances everyday life.

In describing my interlocutors’ participation in amateur hockey I have focused on both the socio-cultural and embodied aspects of the game. Recent efforts at re-conceptualizing the life course have likewise considered both the embodied and social aspects of aging (Hockey & James, 2003). Because of their engagement in hockey, a sport that brings the body to the fore within a distinctive social context, my interlocutors were in a valuable position to comment on how they understood their aging. Unlike work and family their participation in amateur sport was a non-essential activity to their lives, which made it possible for them to quit at any time. In this thesis, I consider how the players sustain their engagement in hockey over time in the face of

competing domestic and work commitments as well as their own aging bodies. I further consider how they infuse their playing hockey with meaning at different ages.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. This first chapter provides an introduction to the field, gives some context, and introduces my interlocutors. Following that I provide a discussion of the methodology employed in the research for this thesis. It then moves onto a literature review that examines the anthropology of sport, and theories of embodiment and of the life course. The second chapter provides an account of what transpires at an amateur hockey game in Montreal, along with the organization of the leagues in which I participated to provide of foundation for the rest of the thesis. The third chapter focuses on the sociality of hockey, the nature of the social interaction between players on and off the ice, as well as how their participation in this sport interconnects with their domestic and occupational commitments outside the arena. The fourth chapter focuses on players' accounts of their body as it ages and considers subjects such as health, injury and 'hockey intelligence'. And finally, in the conclusion, I discuss some of the contributions my thesis makes both to the anthropology of sport, the theories of the life course, and the understanding of hockey and amateur sport in Canadian society.

Methodology

For my ethnographic research on the perception and effects of ageing in recreational hockey players, I conducted fieldwork with three teams in two adult recreational hockey leagues in Montreal; the Cyclones¹; the Bulls and the Hustlers. The teams were composed of 10 to 15 players each, including (depending on the week and availability) substitute players who were not regular members of the team. Eleven players per team usually played on any given night, including the goaltender. I played as a goaltender on each of these teams.

The majority of participants in both leagues were men between the ages of 23 and 60. They were predominantly white males who had completed some form of post secondary education (university, vocational and/or otherwise). The occupations of participants ranged widely from construction workers, nurses, osteopaths, servers, and teachers, to students, lawyers, neurologists and engineers. There was also a small minority of female hockey players, whose

¹ All names of players, arenas, teams and leagues have been replaced with pseudonyms to ensure my participants' anonymity.

numbers varied substantially between the two leagues involved in my study. In one league, women comprised some 10% of all players, while in the other there were only one or two female players involved in any one division

Through contacts made with my primary participants I was able to use a snowballing method to include players who were 60 years and older in my study. These individuals played in other leagues. Sometimes I was put in contact with these players to fill in for their missing goalie, other times it was simply because they were interested in my research, some times both motivations were operating. The participants in my study have played at a variety of different levels of hockey in their playing “careers” and for different durations. Some started later in life and others have played since they were four or five years old and have never taken a prolonged break from the sport.

The Cyclones and the Bulls were in the same league, but in different divisions, based on caliber (divisions 3 and 4, out of 6, respectively), and always played in the same venue, the Consortium Center in the West of Montreal. They played on Thursday, Friday, Saturday or Sunday between 6 and 10 pm once per week. The Consortium was a publicly owned arena facility that organized many levels of hockey (and other skating activities, such as figure skating and free skating times), both competitive and recreational, catering also to collegiate, university and high school hockey teams. The consortium also rented out ice-time to privately organized hockey teams and leagues.

The Hustlers were in division 6 (out of nine) of a separate larger league, the Western Hockey League (WHL), and their games were played in many different arenas located in many different districts of Montreal. The WHL was a privately owned organization that had arrangements with many different arenas and rented ice-time as needed, charging individual teams a set amount for participation and organizing multiple divisions on a variety of nights. The Hustlers, however, played exclusively on Sunday nights between the hours of 6 and 10 pm.

In both leagues caliber was determined by gaining promotion (or relegation) from one division to another, which usually happens (if at all) between seasons, although a team doing exceptionally well (or exceptionally poorly) can also be moved up or down a division during the season. The location of these arenas ranged from Westmount to the West Island, and the ice ranged equally in quality. League fees varied between \$350 and \$600 per person per season and there were approximately 15 to 25 games in a season (September to mid-April), including

playoffs and final games. Each game was played in a session lasting approximately an hour and a half (including the ten minutes required for the Zamboni to resurface the ice), though the clock formats for both leagues were different. In the Consortium League, they stopped the clock between plays, there were three periods and each was 15 minutes long. In the WHL there were three periods of 23 minutes, but they did not stop the clock between plays, except with less than 2 minutes before the end of the each period. There was usually a 2-3 minute intermission between periods.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork consisted of both participant observation as well as open-ended interviews. Before my study had started, I had previously played in both teams as a goaltender. I verbally explained to the teams involved in my study what my research entailed and why I was conducting it. This was done in straightforward language that could easily be understood. This explanation was received very well and there were no concerns voiced over my research, many of the players were enthusiastic to be involved and volunteered for interviews. In addition to playing, I engaged in informal conversations and socializing with team members, officials (primarily referees, but also league officials and administration) and spectators both before and after the games.

Fieldwork was conducted during the 2014 winter hockey season (i.e. January – March 2014) but some interviews were conducted in the months that followed the end of the season. All fieldwork (including participant observation and interviews) was completed by the end of December 2014. I obtained verbal consent from teams involved in my research and I obtained written consent from individuals participating in interviews. Consent forms were kept with records of transcribed interviews in a locked filing cabinet and were for my exclusive use only. Team managers were already aware of my intentions to begin research and had given me consent to address the prospect with the entire team beforehand.

Relationship to Participants

I would term my relationship towards my participants as one of friendship, what might be functionally labeled a 'hockey friendship'. However, this term is generally used very loosely in the hockey context, the actual relationship that is established between most players does most closely resemble that of consociates. According to Dyck (2012: 41), citing Sansom (1980: 138),

“consociate relationships arise through casual co-participation with others within one or another delimited field of happenings or activities”. I know these players intimately because “[o]ver a season, one’s mannerisms, enthusiasms, and domestic relations can be observed and subjected to interpretation and commentary by others” (Dyck, 2012: 41). However, they were largely detached from any other facet of my social life outside of the realm of playing amateur hockey.

I had played hockey with the Cyclones and Bulls for 2 seasons before the 2013-14 season, so I knew this set of players fairly well and I had already established a rapport with them through our shared experiences on the ice as well as through our conversations in the dressing room. We

had a beer together twice after games in those two years and I once ran into some players at a bar by chance, but aside from those instances I have never interacted socially with my teammates outside of the hockey context. I therefore believe that my prior relationship with these individuals did not interfere with my fieldwork. I would argue instead that this background and previous relationships ensured that I was relatively well positioned to undertake my fieldwork in this setting. Our relationship shifted to some degree, because I was asking more specific questions which departed from our usual hockey discourse, but this was expected. In any situation I attempted to maintain a similar rapport with the players and create an atmosphere of shared interest by sharing in the process of crafting this thesis to create a collaborative work.

In contrast to my earlier experience with the Cyclones and Bulls, I had only joined the Hustlers the year of my fieldwork, and was playing with them for the first time. I was introduced to the team through a friend with whom I had attended elementary school but I did not know the majority of players.

Participant Observation

As a participant-observer, I played with the three aforementioned teams as their goaltender throughout the months of September 2013 to April 2014. In doing so, I had the chance to share in their experiences throughout the season. I was able to listen to what they discussed in the dressing room as well as on the ice. However, because I was their goaltender I occupied a very specific and in some respects limiting role on the team. It has been argued that goalies are a part of the team and *apart* from the team. They reside within the team, but on the periphery. It did have its limitations, thus I was not be able to directly experience the discussions that took place

on the bench during periods of play; approximately half of each game I spent the time watching the play at the other end of the ice and in the other half the action so centered around me that I could not pay too much attention to the play as it unfolded. The position of goalie is very specialized and in most hockey circles (from pick-up to the pros) they are viewed as distinct from the players, both in their actions, equipment and individual personalities. How this distinction began I could not say, but there is an understanding that goalies are somewhat of an enigma in hockey. Goalies are rarely referred to as players, they have different sets of rules that govern their actions, they have different equipment and they do not spend time on the bench. For these reasons, to get a better sense of the game I focused on questions in interviews about what sorts of discussions took place in the places/times that I was not present. I observed some games from the stands, to get a different perspective of amateur hockey games. And, I also participated as a player in some 'shinny hockey'² with the Hustlers on two separate occasions.

Participation was an important way to gain access and as with the Hustlers, I would have never come into contact with the players on this team if I had not agreed to substitute for them one evening in early September. Having a goalie is key to having a team, and both teams require one for a game of recreational level hockey to be played (whereas shinny or other hockey may not) and therefore getting a goalie so that a game can be played is of utmost importance to players and managers. Goalies can be in great demand, because there are far fewer of them than players. Goaltending is a specialized position that requires specialized movements, muscles and game knowledge; it is not something that a player (even a proficient player who is very familiar with hockey) can learn on the spot.

Playing with these teams also enabled me to observe the discussions and interactions that took place in the dressing room and over beers after the games. It would probably not have been possible to gain access to such a place otherwise and even so, the naturalness of the discourse would have evaporated due to a feeling of being under surveillance. As a goalie, I was able to be in the dressing room without creating such a feeling³.

² Shinny hockey refers to hockey that is usually played outdoors, with less structure and different rules. These differences include both implicit and explicit rules, less protective equipment, and most often no goaltender.

³ Outsiders may affect the atmosphere of the room, whereas a goalie is part of the team, but apart of the team. As such, I was viewed as an insider/outsider to the team and any of my actions could be accredited to the historically bizarre behavior of goalies.

Also, it was during the moments before, during and immediately after play in which players most frequently expressed how their bodies felt and expressed sentiments concerning their age. It is when they experience the aches and pains, as well as emotional sensations that are derived from the game. To accurately capture these moments I had to be a part of the group, but also apart from the group, ever watchful and attentive to detail.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with 15 players from the three teams participating in my field research. Some of the interviews were held before or after games, others at restaurants cafes or at their residence, and basically at any time and location of their convenience. I met two players on their lunch breaks near the place of their employment. I explained my research again in detail, answering any questions they may have had and provided them with a written consent form, made sure to inform them that they may withdraw their participation at any time and that this withdrawal would mean any material they contributed to be excluded from my final dissertation and immediately destroyed.

The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended. While the focus of the interview was on the specific subjects of aging and amateur hockey participation, I also facilitated opportunities for interviewees to raise other subjects, which they believed relevant to the question of their participation in adult amateur hockey. The questions I posed were meant to act primarily as thematic guides to discussion, prompting thought and eliciting responses. Questions varied from one interview to the next, but the themes remained constant, allowing for more varied and representative discourse.

Analysis

After having completed my fieldwork, transcribing all my interviews and writing up my field notes I analyzed them by highlight specific themes and concepts. In doing so I was able to identify common traits between the different participants and games that I had observed. At first I had the idea of grouping my findings by team, which I identified as occupying three distinct age ranges, however this became problematic when I realized that there was constant crossover between the groups. Therefore, I decided to look more critically at the things that my interlocutors described as being important to them and which they really emphasized in

interviews. These were things such as family, friends, work, their bodies and hockey. After categorizing these themes and grouping them together based on similarity, while noting the variance and exceptions, I began to realize that much of the information relayed to me by all of them concerning their participation in amateur hockey as it related to their everyday lives was informed by either continuity or change. When I was beginning to formulate my plan to understand the place of amateur hockey through the life course as a dialectic between continuity and change I discussed these theories with some of my interlocutors. They were very enthusiastic about my theoretical interpretation of the material and encouraged me to further explore that line of thought, which eventually became the foundation of my thesis. It was very pleasing to see that my interlocutors were able to recognize their contribution even in the theoretical aspects of my work; something that I had not expected when I began my research.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to outline some of the contributions of the anthropology of sport and of theories of the life course as these relate to my research on adult amateur hockey players in Montreal. I first discuss where both fields are to date and then how these fields relate to my research. Adult amateur hockey speaks well to the anthropology of sport and because of the age range of the participants in my study and their extensive histories within the sport, it is also useful to consider their involvement in the context of contemporary efforts to reconceptualize aging in terms of the life course.

The Anthropology of Sport

For a long time, games and sports were not a major anthropological concern, mainly because these activities were viewed as less important than other aspects of society and culture, or as falling outside the purview of the discipline. Organized western sport was viewed as a product of modern society, and for anthropology, whose main concern at that time was for indigenous, native, and “primitive” cultures, sport was seen as outside the discipline’s gaze. As well, compared to the aspects of culture that anthropology regularly focused on, such as kinship, rituals and political structures, games and play were viewed as leisure activities which did not make central contributions to socio-cultural functions, structures, or reproduction.

Developing the Anthropology of Sport

There were a few exceptions to the more typical, early anthropological disregard of sport, which prefigured the later more systematic attention given to the discipline to sport. Two of these earlier examples were Mooney's (1890) account of "The Cherokee Ballgame", which explored the origins of ball games from *La Raquette* and *Lacrosse* played by Native tribes all across America, and Culin's *Chinese Games with Dice* (1889), which outlined the numerous dice and domino games that were played by Chinese in late 19th Century America, and their rules. Both explored the games in great depth, describing and recording their practices in rich detail (Blanchard, 1995; Dyck, 2000, 2015).

However, for the most part, the treatment of sport was ignored or pushed to the fringes of serious consideration. And, when contributions were made to the study of sport, these usually highlighted the "exoticism" of their particular inquiry (Dyck, 2000).

The interpretive turn in the anthropology of sport had a resounding effect on how sport practices were recognized and conceptualized in relation to the culture and societies in which they operate. Many believe the contemporary study of sport to have been launched with Geertz's (1972) analysis of the Balinese cockfight, in which the author related Balinese culture to an interpretation of the "deep play" involved in this practice (Besnier & Brownwell, 2012; Blanchard, 1995; Dyck, 2000, 2004, 2015). This was an important change in the anthropology of sport in that it attempted to describe Balinese culture through sport, instead of maintaining sport as a subset.

Anthropology of Sport Today

Fast-forward to the beginning of the 21st Century and things look far different. Games, sport and play have now received much-needed attention within anthropology: there now exists a bevy of thoroughly developed analyses that take games and sport as their main point of departure, and loci of interest (Dyck, 2015).

Anthropological work within the last two decades has made large strides in looking into the social and cultural importance of sport, which is no longer viewed simply as frivolous play. Contemporary studies look to the ritual performance, symbolism, embodied practices, and identity politics, which are informed by, and exist within, sports (Dyck, 2015). Sport is also seen

as constituting serious work which demands training and discipline (Coleman & Kohn 2007) and which exhibits a larger range of cultural attributes and characteristics than was previously acknowledged (Dyck & Archetti, 2003).

There are diverse cultural representations of sport, and anthropologists have questioned the adoption of strict and narrow definitions of these practices due to their essentializing nature. In some cultures sport is defined as casual play and in others it is highly organized and competitive, which makes cross-cultural comparisons difficult and potentially biased, and makes any adherence to a specific definition problematic. Anthropologists have argued that distinguishing between “games”, “sports” and “play” is no easy task, because such clear-cut definitional distinctions are temporally and spatially relative and almost never static, but instead tend to be continually negotiated, both by practitioners of specific games and sports, and by the larger society in which such practices operate (Dyck & Archetti, 2003).

Anthropological perspectives on sport have also contributed to evaluations of sport’s place in society by combining both the specific and general levels of analysis in the investigation of sports as a cultural phenomenon. “Ethnography stands as the hallmark of social and cultural anthropology” (Dyck, 2000: 16), and the anthropological method of participant-observation allows the anthropologist an intimate vantage point through which to observe and experience events alongside participants. It can also be combined with other research methods, such as quantitative statistical analysis, sports science and sports psychology (Dyck, 2000). This approach encourages anthropologists to accept the subjective nature of experience, and allows for a greater stratum of polyvocality within the field of inquiry (Dyck, 2000). Ethnography goes beyond the surface level of institutional and social discourse to challenge the status quo of sports participation by looking at it from less commonly represented perspectives. Along with these methodological and analytical contributions, anthropologists are also well placed to undertake cross-cultural and comparative analyses of sports. Anthropologists of sport are well situated to note how the practices of various sports can evolve over time and may be differently practiced from one location to the next. These include variations in rules, organizations, practice and performances (Dyck, 2000).

For the last two decades anthropologists such as Dyck (1997, 2000, 2004, 2012, 2015) Archetti (1998, 1999, 2003), Sands (1999), Coleman & Kohn (2007), Downey (2005, 2005b, 2010, 2011), and Besnier & Brownwell (2012) have been contributing to the development of a

distinctive anthropology of sport. Their efforts have not gone unrecognized: recently the American Anthropological Association (AAA) posted online a set of papers dedicated to the topic of sport (Besnier, 2014)⁴.

While anthropologists may have come relatively late to the conversation of sport, their work has received a certain amount of attention in the broader interdisciplinary field of sport studies. And there is a wealth of literature available in other disciplines for anthropologists to draw and build on. For anthropology, a discipline that places itself within interdisciplinary discussions and converses across many related fields, there are many possibilities for interdisciplinary collaborations in studying sport in society and culture. These collaborations can work to reconceptualize how sport is constructed and produced, as well as to reformulate disciplinary understandings of sport through incorporating culturally relative perspectives. These contributions will be important both in constructing a more culturally sensitive perspective on sport and in understanding how sports are used for political ends. Anthropologists must therefore transcend disciplinary boundaries to be truly effective in rendering an holistic account of sport, and for that reason I now turn my attention to some of the more prevalent discussions of sport in sociology, a field very close to anthropology, but nonetheless distinct in certain important ways.

Compared to Sociology (& other disciplines)

Sociology as a discipline has paid more attention to sport than has anthropology. Largely fueled by a reinvigoration of theories of social body (Mauss, 1973; Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1980; BS Turner, 1984, 1992; Lock, 1993; Cregan, 2006), the sociology of sport today has a strong following. Sociology has always been more interested in examining sport in modern society than about anthropology's treatment of sport in Indigenous and Native cultures. Sociology had also delved much earlier and much more fully into sport than had anthropology, and there are more sport sociologists at work than anthropologists of sport. However, anthropologists approach sport with a different set of methodological and theoretical tools (such as quantitative research, census, and theories of the body). Anthropology has brought qualitative methods, cross-cultural comparison and questions of contextualization to the discussion of sport (Dyck, 2015). There are more sport sociologists at work than anthropologists of sport, and the work of the latter has a number of potential contributions to make to the broader interdisciplinary study of sport.

⁴ <http://www.aaanopenanthro.org/Vol-2-No-2-Sport.cfm>.

Sociological works on sport, however, are in many cases comparable to anthropological works, and can be useful. For example the discussion of sport in Wacquant's *Body & Soul* (2004), a richly crafted ethnography about the sociologist's embodied transformation while learning the pugilistic art in a "black neighborhood" boxing gym of Chicago's South Side, is very similar to Downey's *Learning Capoeira* (2005), in which the anthropologist describes learning the Brazilian "martial art", dance, sport and acquiring new techniques of the body for use in his everyday life through his new training. Gruneau and Whitson's (1993) sociological treatment of hockey, Canadian culture and the NHL, outlines many of the macro level developments in the history of hockey's professionalization as it related to Canadian identity. As such, it is an extremely useful book to any academic researching hockey within the context of Canada.

I have drawn on any and all material available outside of anthropology for my discussion of hockey. However, my thesis still endeavours to address discussions within the anthropology of sport.

Hockey in Anthropological Literature

Anthropologists have been reserved in addressing hockey and there exist only a few anthropological works that critically examine Canada's national pastime, which is interesting given the many social institutions (the Canadian Government), businesses (Tim Horton's, Canadian Tire, the NHL), and media that declare hockey to be an intrinsic part of Canadian culture (Dyck, 2003, 2007). For a discipline concerned with all things related to culture and the critical analysis of how institutional power structures society this dearth appears shortsighted. Or perhaps there is too much to study and not enough anthropologists to go around. However, there are a few anthropological pieces that look at hockey more critically in novel, revealing and even imaginative ways.

In his article looking at how amateur hockey is played by participants in the "Sunday Morning Hockey League" at the Perth Community Center in the 1980's and how it is distinct from other forms of hockey, David Turner (1992) contrasts the version he and the "lads" play to that of other local elite teams ("The Gentleman's League", "The Geritol League" and "Junior A and B") and the professional National Hockey League. He argues that "[t]he difference between Sunday Morning Hockey and other brands of hockey is that it absolutely refuses to allow

opposition to emerge” (D Turner, 1992; 83). It achieves this feat by making players on teams (“Red and Green Sweaters”) interchangeable, in that on any given week a player may be assigned to either one or the other team. Because the players have a common understanding that they are playing the game for the benefit of everyone on the ice, not simply their own team’s success, stronger players ease up on weaker players, and older players are given more room to play and opportunities to handle the puck. As well, players who are particularly aggressive or determined in their play are given more space so as to minimize conflict. And finally, if the score is too far unbalanced, players are “lent” or “traded” for the remainder of the game and Turner is not even sure if those in charge are actually keeping score (D Turner, 1992). By all accounts efforts are made to keep games and series “tight” (meaning that scores are never too drastically lopsided) and ensure the most amount of fun for the greatest number of participants. Turner sees the success of the league as being tied up in the transient nature of sweater affiliation. The fact that on any given day and competition, all players might at some point potentially be teammates allows for a greater level of respect, camaraderie and a decrease in a “win by any means” mentality thereby lowering the risk of injury. He goes on to argue that such an approach could be adopted at a community, provincial, national and international level between persons and groups. While Turner’s wide-ranging ambition for this form of hockey is unlikely to be achieved, his example offers useful insight into how conflict resolution might be achieved through breaking down unnecessary barriers between opposing sides. David Turner (1992) states that there is a place for unrelenting competition within forms of hockey such as that found in the NHL and elite leagues, but that ethos should be left in the high performance arena and not transported into everyday life and amateur recreation.

David Turner’s (1992) article is a rare anthropological contribution in that it takes an in-depth look at what most participants in the sport would label “beer league” hockey. It also goes into the locker room, a place from which outsiders (non-players) are excluded, and a place most insiders do not speak about. As Dyck (2000) argues, there is a lot to be learned by investigating the variance of institutional organizations, rules and regulations that exist within a single sport. Dyck (2000) discusses hockey specifically as a template for understanding differences within any sport, noting that as a sport, hockey can vary immensely at levels ranging from shinny (pick-up hockey) to amateur to professional leagues, and the comparison of forms is revealing of the social norms and values embedded in those forms. Seemingly small rule changes, such as

prohibiting slapshots, body checking and the calling of offsides, change playing styles significantly and are all very important in shaping the meanings embedded in sports participation.

In another article, Dyck (2007) discusses how sport is used to constitute representations of what it is to be Canadian, stating that “[w]ithin Canada, as in many other nations, participation and contemplation of sporting activity has become a powerful vehicle for defining and celebrating nationhood” (Dyck, 2007; 109). Dyck (2007) argues that pairing sport with nationalist sentiments proves to be problematic because it defines “Canadians” as distinct from “immigrants” on the basis of participation in a specific sport culture (Dyck, 2007). The chapter then goes on to discuss how hockey came to be represented as a key part of a Canadian national character. Dyck (2007: 123) succinctly notes that:

Sports are frequently burdened with explicit and implicit meanings and ideological values, both in terms of preferred and prohibited practices and practitioners. Sports tend to be enthusiastically partaken of and loyally supported. But they are not much reflected upon.

In view of the social importance of sport, it is important for anthropologists to critically consider how sport is deployed by institutions to influence sentiments of ‘us’ and ‘them’ through aligning some sports (but not others) with Canadian national identity, and ask who and what it privileges.

Socio-Cultural Aspects of Sport

Sport cannot be separated from the historical, socio-cultural, and political contexts in which it is played, because it is shaped by these institutions and processes. However, sport presents a distinctive type of social space in life that has often been referred to as a subculture (Blanchard, 1999) or ritual (Rowe, 2008), or as having its own cultural values and norms, sometimes distinct from the larger culture in which it is practiced. Sport is affected by social institutions and can reproduce cultural norms, but can also be resistant to, and influence, these larger structures.

Through the unique liminal space and sociality of sport, individuals/groups can shape their own meanings and understandings of what they are doing outside of the pressures and constraints they are exposed to in everyday life and society. It also provides an opportunity for producing collective meaning through team and group sports that may not be available to these

individuals outside of that context. Employees are subject to the demands of their bosses, family members to the requirements of their families, and citizens to the strictures of the state. While sports and other embodied movements (such as dance or bodybuilding) can oftentimes closely resemble work, those engaged in the leisure activity may still perceive it as an activity distinctly different from work (Kohn 2007). Unlike work, which may yield very few satisfying results and commendations, sport encourages success with more immediate recognition. Sport can be a vehicle for identity construction: individuals receive great satisfaction from participating in sport (something they may not otherwise gain in their everyday lives) and through dedicated commitment athletic identities are formed.

Sociality often represents an important component of, and motivation for, engagement in sport. Not only are people engaging in an activity embedded in their larger social lives and society, but they are also engaging socially with teammates, spectators and others in attendance (referees, judges, mascots, etc.). Embodied knowledge and identity play a central role in the anthropological evaluations of sport, as I will discuss later in this chapter, and no investigation of sport is complete without a close inspection of techniques of the body. However, there are also many observable social interactions that are not as closely tied to embodied activities, such as conversations in dressing rooms, on the field/ice/pool/gymnasium, and after games in parking lots or bars. So although sport should be recognized as an activity of interest for understanding embodiment, it is equally an interesting activity for observing less physically inclined social practices. The strength of sport is that it readily offers the two, and allows for a closer look at what people do as well as what they say.

In this regard, anthropologists researching sport have often focused their analysis and theorization on the body, while deemphasizing the social aspects inherent in sport. Ethnographers such as Downey and Wacquant have focused on individual rather than team sports (Downey, 2005; Wacquant 2004). While these works certainly inform our understanding of the social context, relationships and embodiment involved in individual sports activities (which also include group and social aspects) they do not speak to the social arrangements found in team sports. Dyck (2012), in his discussion of children's sport practices, discusses how the field of children's sport encompasses many varying interactions: beyond the dynamics of team membership, it includes the interplay between all interested parties from parents to government bureaucrats.

Each sport has its own forms of sociality, taboos and implicit rules, which play out in social interaction amongst teammates, opponents, and a myriad other key participants (referees, spectators, judges, etc.). Kane & Tucker's (2007) discussion of adventure kayak tourists provides a good example of the significance and distinctiveness of the different social frameworks through which sport may be enacted. Between kayak trips, tourists would discuss prior adventures and achievements in their sport as a form of sociality. They spoke about the kayak trips that held great importance and cultural value within the world of kayaking, something that outsiders to the sport would be unaware of. This group identified themselves as "just a bunch of kayakers", and these prior pursuits were viewed as a valuable form of social discourse within their group interactions. Other forms of cultural capital, such as those provided by work and class status, were viewed as far less valuable than that imparted by kayaking. As well, Kohn (2007) in her discussion of Aikido and disciplining of the body, acknowledges that the specific intensity and exertion of practicing the "martial art" usually leads to practitioners drinking beer together afterwards at a local bar to relax from their leisure pursuit. The body has its place within the understanding of social interactions, and so too does culture exert itself and inscribe the body.

Social Interaction in Hockey

Teams are essential social components of hockey, not solely for reasons of competition but also for reasons of sociality. At professional levels, the idea of team might be more geared towards performance and winning games, and participation may have less to do with "fun" and sociability than salaried professionals might care to acknowledge even though they consistently refer to it in interviews. A professional hockey team is a business franchise and as such does not have only their players' happiness and well being in mind. At the amateur and recreational levels, a socially cohesive team is fundamental to a positive experience, expression, enjoyment and a continued commitment to the group. A bad atmosphere can ruin any hockey team, regardless of their success on ice. Ultimately it is the enjoyment of the experience that is essential to amateur hockey. As well, there is a connection between on-ice performance and social interaction within the team. Outstanding performers are sometimes given a bit more social leeway than their less talented teammates while players who are well liked within the room are usually given some leeway on the ice. Teams that develop a positive sociability are prone to

performing better as a group in the game, all else being equal. Teams that play well together are also less likely to experience animosity between players. There is, therefore, some degree of interplay between what people do in sport and how they socialize in sport, so consideration should be given to both.

Embodiment

Anthropological considerations of the body were inspired by concepts pioneered by Marcel Mauss (1973) concerning the embodiment of social values within bodily practices. Indeed, it was Mauss' concepts of *techniques of the body* that foregrounded much of the later work by Foucault on the disciplining of the body, as well as of Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* (Dyck & Archetti, 2003). Since then the body and embodiment have been considered in a variety of different ways within anthropology—ways in which the body is inscribed with culture and ways in which the body is inscribing on culture. This research has included the cultural politics of body size and appetite (Gremillion, 2005; Renzaho, 2003), how culture forms and informs the senses (Classen, 1993; Howes & Classen, 2013), female circumcision (Ahmadu, 2000), reproductive and sexual bodies (Wentzell & Inhorn, 2011; Marshall & Katz, 2002), and gendered bodies (Denham, 2008; Dworkin, 2001).

For anthropology the body has been viewed as the person's "primary tool" (Moody, 1872: 152) and, as such, the most useful instrument for constructing, displaying and emulating culture. Bodies have the ability to encapsulate culture through practice, adornments, physical size and shape, and many other culturally specific ways. Biologically similar bodies vary from one location and time to another depending on variations in cultural practices and traditions. It is even possible to surmise that some of what is lost in cultural translation through verbal description and communication can be found by observing the body and its treatment. Embodiment has been written about in the context of sport, remaining a central concept to much theorization about the meanings and manifestations of leisure, recreation and sport (Dyck & Archetti, 2003; Coleman & Kohn, 2007). Theories of the body and embodiment as the "existential ground of culture and self" are pertinent to contemporary studies of sport, in that the practices involved in sport have the ability to imprint our bodies with meaning and cultural knowledge (Csordas, 1990: in Csordas 1994: 4). By directing our anthropological gaze towards the body we direct it towards the cultural norms and values embodied in actual practice.

According to Mauss (1973), everyday bodily practices are shaped by socio-cultural norms, values and distinctions. These practices include all our techniques of the body, from the mundane act of walking to the more specialized acts found in work, child rearing, and sport. There is much overlap between the norms and values embodied in sports practice and those of other aspects of social life. As I will outline in greater detail in the next section, through his discussion of “throwing like a Brazilian” Downey (2010) shows just how influential cultural practices can be in shaping our very biological foundation.

Within the anthropology of sport the concept of embodiment has been used variously to understand different social and cultural phenomena, such as nationalism (Wulff, 2003; Krauss, 2003; Kelly, 2006), transnationalism (Carter, 2008, 2011) gender (Wieschialek, 2003; Ronsbo, 2003), discipline (Kohn 2003, 2006, 2007), and disability (DP Howe 2011; DP Howe & Jones, 2006). Sporting techniques of the body have been shown to embody, for practitioners and spectators alike, specific aspects of identity.

Downey’s *Learning Capoeira (2005) & Other Works*

During the last two decades Greg Downey has published a number of anthropological works about the practice of Brazilian Capoeira. Downey describes in rich ethnographic detail the embodied practices that he learned as he practiced Capoeira. He also connects his theoretical concepts of embodiment and phenomenology to the empirical sciences, specifically neurology (Downey, 2002, 2005, 2010, 2010b). Some critics have voiced concern that Downey’s work may be leading down a path of biological determinism (Dyck, 2015). However, through his discussion of “throwing like a Brazilian” Downey (2010) shows in fact the reverse: that culture can shape biology as much as biology can shape culture.

Downey’s assertion that “[O]ur bodies structure what we perceive” (Downey, 2005: 31), acknowledges that our biology also has an effect on culture and society. And this points to a more phenomenological analysis, in which we make sense of the world through our senses. Our understanding of body and mind, culture and society, has for a long time rested on a foundation of Cartesian duality, in which these concepts were viewed at the opposite ends of a spectrum, or as being representative of two things that cannot exist with the other. In Western philosophies this has established many time-honored dichotomies that have become entrenched in how people make sense of the world. However these dichotomies have been shown to be false in many cases

and instead, concepts such as body and mind, and nature and society are in fact constitutive of each other to some degree. The brain, which contains the mind, is part of the body and is affected by physiological changes; society is not separate from or outside of nature, but is instead intricately intertwined with it. As well, concepts such as continuity and change, which may appear to be opposites actually are never completely separated nor do they operate independently of one another. There is rarely something that is completely changed or completely continuous; instead it is usually an *mélange* of the two. Ultimately, dialectic theoretical interpretations provide interesting ways to understand what have for a long time been considered opposing forces. Dialectics provide a way to see the nature and outcome of the back and forth interaction between two seemingly opposite concepts.

Presenting the body as more than merely biological processes, conducive to scientific experiment and analysis, such as the volumes edited by Sands & Sands (2010) concerning the evolution of the human body and culture from a bio-cultural perspective, and instead as something that is equally (and sometimes arguably completely) cultural has reflected the diminishing tendency to invoke a Cartesian duality (Csordas, 1994). “The moving bodies of performers, which could be scientifically described and categorized in kinesiological terms, are just as likely to be identified in terms of stereotypical images of gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, religion or nationality” (Dyck & Archetti, 2003: 16).

Phenomenology

I agree with Samudra’s (2008) discussion of the limits of presenting a thick description of techniques of the body through textual accounts. Written accounts of embodied practices often remain inaccessible and problematic reads; they simply do not transfer well to the written medium. However, I would disagree that accounts of the body are scarce in interviews, and I find that athletes can be very reflective about the sport they practice. Samudra’s participant observation examines the “Chinese Indonesian self-defense and health movement system” of White Crane Silat (2008: 665), arguing that researchers should pay greater attention to somatic modes of experience and engage in “thick participation”, enabling them to “develop a broader ethnology of kinesthetic culture” (678). The author encourages researchers not to avoid participating in embodied cultural practices on the basis that experience is subjective because such participation can still provide useful data. The description that Samudra (2008) advocates in

her article is one level of embodied experience above the level of completely objective thick description (such as left foot moves right while hands gradually move forward in an arc etc.), and below unnecessarily encumbering symbolic representation (such as describing a hockey player shooting as a symbol of Canadian nationalism). Also, using insider terms can be useful in showing how complex movements are captured and given specific terminology. It also shows a level of comfort within a group of the embodied practice in question, in that all participants understand what is specifically being discussed while using these terms.

In the ethnographic chapters that follow, I attempt to elaborate on the engagement of the senses within the context of the arena. The senses are not the focus of analysis, yet they will be incorporated as frequently as possible in descriptions of events because it is through the senses that we experience and perceive the world (Downey, 2010; Howes & Classen 2013). For the benefit of the reader I deploy this emphasis to give a richer description of the scenes, while also acknowledging that it is too lengthy an exercise to describe every detail of even the sensation of skating within such a limited space. So the senses and embodied experiences are rarely the focus of in-depth analysis except when they relate directly to experience of continuity/change throughout the life course. Instead, I have elected to focus on players' discussion of how aging affects their capacities and experiences of playing hockey

Injury & Risk

Another important aspect of many sports is the embodied experience of pain and the possibility of injury. There is always an inherent risk involved when participating in embodied sports practices, regardless of the level of their physicality. As instances of physical contact (including even aggressive and intensely directed forms of body contact) rise, so do the chances of sports-related injury. As P. David Howe (2004) shows in his ethnography on pain, injury and risk in the professionalization of sport, each sport develops a specific habitus through which embodied experiences of pain and injury are mediated. His ethnographic work in three contexts (a Welsh rugby club, elite distance runners, and the Paralympics) shows how the athletes in these different sports deal with pain and injury in distinct ways. Howe (2004) notes that as commitment and involvement in sport rises, so do the chances of injury and the chance of playing with injuries, which in turn increases the risk of incurring secondary injuries. Sports played as leisure pursuits should be less likely to lead to serious and recurring injury because, unlike professional sports,

participation does not involve financial remuneration. Financial remuneration raises the stakes and hence the possibility of injury. However, he does note that the expansion and institutionalization of sports medicine has also encouraged amateurs to seek out more specialized aid – for example from osteopaths, massage therapists and athletic therapists – in recovering from injuries.

Like their professional counterparts, amateur athletes work out, train and diet to optimize their performance in the sport they practice. In hockey, which has long celebrated players who can endure the pain of injury to continue playing, participants are less likely to declare that they are in pain and injured. Hockey is a physically intense sport and even in the version played by most amateurs, which prohibits body checking, there remain many ways in which players can injure themselves. As well, even though body checking may be against the rules of the game, there is always a bit of room for leeway, and to a degree bumping, pushing and shoving are always part of the game. So players do get injured, and bruises and small bumps are still a regular occurrence for most amateur players including those featured in my own study.

How adult amateur hockey players experience, adapt and play through injury is very interesting because it shows how these individuals approach their bodies in specific ways at different ages. It also trains our attention on how players have changed their playing style over the years to adapt to the bodily changes associated with aging. At different levels of play and at different ages the ways pain and injury are understood vary greatly. By comparing discourses on pain and injury we gain a better understanding of how different sports affect the body uniquely and how these changes relate to playing at different ages and the adaptation to aging.

Embodiment in Hockey

Adult amateur hockey offers an interesting case for thinking about concepts of embodiment because it is a physically rigorous sport, because it involves players from a wide range of ages, and because the majority of the participants have a long personal history of playing hockey since childhood. These players have varying definitions of hockey and how it should be played, and they express these opinions through their evaluations of specific plays and individual players—on the ice, on the bench, and in the locker room. From these utterances we can grasp an understanding of what is valued in hockey. Though there is much variety found within these

evaluations it is still possible to glean a more general understanding of what individual teams and players recognize as important.

As well, observing the embodied practices of players during the game and how they conduct themselves in respect to the rules, social mores and discourses surrounding amateur hockey offers the opportunity to compare what is said to what is done on the ice. Hockey is a very fast sport that allows for little forethought or reflection on one's actions during play; instead, it is intention-oriented and impulsive, and based on a foundation of prior established embodied knowledge. Only when players are on the bench or between moments of play can they truly have time to think about what they are doing. From the action on the ice it is possible to gain an unspoken understanding of the meaning of the game for those involved beyond the ideas they have constructed outside of the play. Many contradictions abound in hockey, such as players who say hockey is a game played for fun but, once on the ice, go around thrashing anyone who gets in their way. Or, those that say they want to win, but move lackadaisically on their skates.

The perspective that I have adopted from the anthropology of sport incorporates both the social interactions found within the context of hockey, especially as it fits within individual's larger social life, as well as the embodied aspects of the sport. Accepting both social and embodied practices as a form of cultural discourse about adult amateur hockey allows for a more holistic rendering of what is actually transpiring. Both contribute to the players' perception of age and aging as it relates to the life course.

Sports & Life Course

The life course provides a unique perspective through which to look at sport. For the adult amateur hockey players who participated in my study, hockey was a sport they had been playing for most of their lives. Through their lives they had accumulated a vast array of knowledge about, and experience of, the game. By focusing on the continued but changing nature of their involvement with hockey over the course of their lives, it is possible to theorize how they negotiate a non-essential and leisure-oriented aspects of their lives.

It is rare to be able to track this kind of leisure activity over time, especially one that includes such a distinct socio-cultural and embodied dynamic. Observances of individuals, groups or cohorts negotiating more essential social institutions, such as kinship and work, are far more

plentiful because more people are participating in these processes than are participating in recreational sport. By focusing on adult amateur hockey, instead of starting with a widespread social phenomenon we begin with a less common, non-essential practice and try to understand how it fits within the larger context of everyday life. Playing amateur hockey is a choice and therefore highlights how individuals negotiate the various pressures of continuity and change throughout the life course to maintain their voluntary participation in an activity.

Throughout the life course individuals undergo both socio-cultural and physical changes, and because hockey incorporates both these aspects within its embodied practice, it is a prime choice for speaking not simply to one domain, but to both. Amateur hockey allows us to theorize about both the changes of the mind/body and of social circumstances, and their interplay. For neither is truly separate, and to understand the aging process and the life course all aspects of continuity and change must be considered together.

The Life Course

The notion of the life course has become an established perspective within the social sciences, including anthropology. Theories on the life course attempt to understand and explain how people experience age, aging, and life from beginning to end. For a long time, disciplines such as anthropology posited that the life ‘cycle’ was a sequence of stages through which individuals moved. By observing the social and cultural institutions through which the individual progressed it was thought possible to track their position within a specific social structure, as well as evidence of cultural reproduction. The life ‘cycle’ was viewed as moving in one direction from beginning to end without much variety, and the variety found there was explained away instead of explored as the range of possibilities enabled by individual life course trajectories.

While many of these ideas are now considered outdated, “the life stage model in its strong form is still widely taught in anthropology, even if it is not necessarily believed” (Johnson-Hanks, 2002: 866). Instead of viewing the life ‘cycle’ as a sequence of stages through which age groups naturally progress throughout their lives, anthropologists are now challenging these assumptions, revealing that the life course – as opposed to the life cycle – is anything but a predetermined straight line with little room for variety, determinism, and/or agency (Hockey & James 2003). Not only has it been shown that individuals may follow vastly different paths throughout the course of their lives, but also that social institutions themselves are far less

deterministic of the outcomes, and are often affected by individual choices. Instead we find that identity, the mind/body, social institutions, rituals, culture, and all age-based categories are in a constant dialectic between continuity and change.

The life course is today likely to be viewed as far less predictable and linear than it was once thought to be, and the order, frequency and duration (along with any other temporal considerations) of life events are considered far less deterministic of individual action. This shift in focus towards a perspective that more highly values self-determination has required anthropologists to reevaluate their understanding of theories of the life course and aging (Johnson-Hanks, 2002; Hockey & James, 2003).

Vital Conjunctions (Trajectories and Transitions)

Regardless of whether “social and economic institutions collaborate to construct exactly such stages, marked by authorized transition... [t]he fact that vital life events are rarely coherent, clear in direction, or fixed in outcome dramatically limits the usefulness of the life cycle” (Johnson-Hanks, 2002: 865). Anthropology may have pioneered concepts of the life cycle, beginning with van Gennep’s *Les Rites de Passage* (1909) (as cited by Hanks-Johnson, 2002: 866), but such approaches to explaining cultural reproduction have now been found to be less useful than before. Johnson-Hanks clearly demonstrates the limitations of an overly deterministic and linear view of the life cycle in her discussion of motherhood and childbirth in Cameroon. For Beti women, there is no inevitable correlation between the timing and order of life events, such as childbearing, marriage, work, school and the social norms embedded in these institutions. Therefore, the many ethnographies that have employed a model of life cycle based on fertility as the measure of maturation are essentializing the experience of these women. “If life stages are coherent, universal, and ordered, then they do not exist among the Beti” (Johnson-Hanks, 2002: 869).

Rather than a strict adherence to life cycle models, Johnson-Hanks (2002) advocates focusing on “vital conjunctions”, which are ‘vital events’ in the life course that may have serious impacts upon the trajectories of the individual’s life course that become apparent during times of transition. As Johnson-Hanks puts it, “Vital conjunctions are experiential knots during which potential futures are under debate and up for grabs” (2002: 872). She believes they are not

limited to the Beti, but also pertains to other cases such as college graduates right after they finished their degrees or adults approaching retirement. Instead of adhering to strict phases and life cycles, focusing instead on “vital conjunctures”, trajectories and transitions, anthropologists are able to ask a different set of questions that will provide a more nuanced understanding of the life course. Vital conjunctures arise when institutional or individual aspirations come to the fore, and by comparing those instances we can gain a better understanding of how continuity and change through the life course are navigated. Focusing on transitions and trajectories also highlights the tension over time between the dialectics of continuity and change, an aspect that is central to understanding how and why amateur hockey players fit participation in this recreational sport into their everyday lives.

Time Work across the Life Course

In *The Textures of Time* (2011), Michael G. Flaherty argues that people are quite reflexive and creative when manipulating time, or what he calls “time work” or “time play”. Flaherty argues that individuals are not victims at the mercy of the hands of time; rather, they employ many “agentic” practices in their experience of temporal existence. Arguing against a structuralist perspective of temporal experience, Flaherty seems to find “agentic” practices everywhere in the negotiation of duration, frequency, sequence, timing and allocation of time and events. However, in concluding, he takes a more modulated stance in arguing that “[t]he distinction between determinism and self-determination is a false dichotomy, and its perpetuation makes for a lingering sense of incongruity across the social science... Agency and order are not antithetical forces” (Flaherty, 2011: 149-150). His understanding sustains the concept that structure and agency are not polar opposites along a Cartesian plane but, instead, that they are mutually dependent, and interactive. In other words, structure allows for agency and agency in turn exists within some form of structure. This dialectic is helpful in understanding how time is negotiated throughout the life course and how it affects and produces meaning through the decisions of how to spend that time.

Flaherty (2012) later applies his theory of time-work across the life course to show how temporal agency and structure affect individuals throughout their lives. His main argument is again that overly rigid temporal norms and structures that were once theorized within the life cycle model need to be abandoned and new understandings need to be formulated to better

explain the life course. In other words Flaherty is arguing that scholars need to attribute more agency to actors throughout the life course and to put less emphasis on how time and age structures society. He notes that theorists (including Elder and O’Rand (1995), Hitlin and Elder (2007) in Flaherty, 2012) have had trouble reconciling social structures that affect the life course with the appearance of agentic practices found alongside them, stating that, “Despite the proclaimed inclusion of agency, there are still ‘social forces’, and they still have ‘consequences’ for the life course. In this formulation, agency remains unassimilated — neither fully conceptualized nor operationalized” (Flaherty, 2012: 241). In his treatment of time-work through the life course, Flaherty sees both our resistance to and compliance with the forces of social structures as a form of agency, in that even when we choose to comply it is still a form of self-determination and an expression of our agency.

Clearly, Flaherty (2011, 2012) emphasizes the role of agency in affecting social structures and not the other way around, and he also conflates agency with the self, a manoeuvre that does not sit well as it would equate society/culture with structure. Flaherty’s (2011) argument essentializes the role of self and society, and reifies the Cartesian duality that anthropologists have been trying to overcome since the recognition of the biased fallibility of concepts such as the “Other”. A more moderate stance would view both self and society as involving a dialectic between agency and structure. However, regardless of some of his more far-reaching theoretical claims, many of Flaherty’s observations of the negotiation of time through the life course are very useful.

Through the life course we do have the choice in many cases to negotiate our time or engage in “time work”. There are many instances in which we can decide what we want to do with our time, for how long, and so on, and the decisions we make will ultimately affect the shape of our life course. However, when we are children our guardians make many choices for us, and beyond those early years “[m]ost of us are entangled in a web of social relationships that make temporal demands on our behavior” (Flaherty, 2012: 249) and therefore as much agency as we may exercise, our decisions and “time work” must still be contextualized and understood within this larger “web” of social relations. Flaherty (2011, 2012) seems to downplay the importance of these social relationships in his assessment of how people come to these decisions about the use of their time, overlooking how people plan and negotiate time restrictions together, as couples, parents, families and communities.

As well, there are aspects of time that pose limitations on our agency, no matter how hard we may try to exceed them. Time is a social construction and, as such, it can be manipulated, negotiated, and worked on, but as of yet we cannot transgress the scientific laws of temporality. What we are left with is the ability to alter our perception of time in strategic ways, which can be taken to great lengths, but is still limited.

Flaherty's contribution is that he argues against the view that greater agency in society has led to a greater variety of pathways throughout the life course. Although people may have more opportunities now for "time work" than ever before, this does not explain compliance versus variation in life choices, because both are potential results of agency. "Agency often involves choosing to comply with mores and folkways" (Flaherty, 2012: 251).

Embodying the Life Course (Hockey & James 2003)

In *Social Identities across the Life Course* (2003), Hockey and James provide an extensive look at the life course from many angles with the intention of answering the question of how we know we are aging. What they conclude is that if...

...individual identity can only make sense in relation to social identity then the reverse is also true. Social identities only come into being through their embodiment or animation by *individuals*. Thus "the social is the field upon which the individual and the collective meet and meld" (Jenkins, 1996: 17). We therefore come to know we are ageing through our embodiment. And, in the social, this experience conjoins with ideological and economic structures (Hockey & James 2003: 134 original emphasis).

Unlike other theories that empower social structures, life stages, cohort groups and the like, Hockey & James (2003) place an emphasis on how embodied experience plays a role in perceptions of age through the life course.

"In the process of age identification there is an ongoing tri-partite relationship between social environment, human agency and the body. Indeed, this is the processual form through which, over the life course, we come to know that we are ageing and this is how we take on age-based identities" (Hockey & James, 2003: 135). Recognizing that there are multiple forces at play in constructing how age is perceived and experienced allows anthropologists to see it as a more dynamic process. Age is felt in a myriad of ways that are affected by individual, collective

and social forces. By observing the interplay of these many analytic levels it is possible to go beyond “a structure-based conception of age-based identity therefore, which gives rise to timeless, empty categories, this notion of ageing as embodied — rather than biologically driven — acknowledges the dynamic, processual and creative nature of everyday experience of growing up and growing old” (Hockey & James, 2003: 136).

Wentzell’s (2013) study of an erectile dysfunction clinic in Mexico is quite instructive as to how discourses concerning the body are tied to age, aging, intergenerational relations, and change and continuity. The author discusses with patients at the clinic how “machismo” has changed during their lifetime and as compared to their parents’ generation. The author also asks how “machismo” has translated to the following generation. In analyzing these life histories, Wentzell argues:

Nancy Scherper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987) have proposed a “three-body” model for understanding how such interactions shape the contexts and contents of people’s lives and physical bodies. Scherper-Hughes and Lock argue that in order to escape the reductive and inaccurate understandings of mind and body or nature and nurture as separate, it is important to understand how bodies and embodiment (the experience of having a particular body in a particular context) are shaped by multiple levels of society. They suggest combining three perspectives to understand embodiment: 1) attention to the “body-self”, or people’s lived and felt experiences of having a body; 2) attention to the “social body”, or the way the broader structural forces shape human interaction on the social level; and 3) the “body politic”, or the ways that social and political control shape human interaction (Wentzell 2013: 68).

It is important to not lose sight of the body in trying to understand how we experience aging and age. And I believe that the tripartite focus on the body at different analytical levels is key to examining how the life course is not simply lived, but embodied.

Continuity/Change through the Life Course

As Hockey & James (2003) stipulate in the conclusion to their book on the life course, drawing on Giddens’ (1991) attribution of identity to the status of a project, self-identity is “continuous across time —never abandoned or neglected — yet, as a focus for reflexive effort, it paradoxically involves *change*” (Hockey & James 2003: 203, original emphasis). This model of identity is “predicated upon both continuity *and* mutability — the capacity to adapt to changing circumstances in order to create a coherent and durable individual/social identity” (Hockey & James 2003: 203, original emphasis). They go on to hypothesize that perhaps working on the self

through managing change while maintaining a sense of continuity is becoming a refined embodied and mental practice (Hockey & James, 2003). Again, they place special emphasis on how identity is embodied and that the praxis of continuity/change is most readily felt, known and experienced through specific actions and practices (Hockey & James, 2003).

We primarily experience aging through the mind/body, and therefore it is through our continuing/changing (cap)abilities, practices and techniques of the body that we predominantly realize the effects of age/time. Appearance can also be a factor in age-based evaluations of identity but, unlike the memory of capabilities and performance, it is far less stark a contrast to the past because it is not felt by the individual and can more easily be altered. It is easier to update a wardrobe than it is to mitigate the physical changes associated with age. Changes in appearance seem more gradual compared to the more instantaneous realization of a lack of bodily capability. The changes affect the individual differently and because of the more gradual onset of an aging appearance, individuals find changes in capability closer to the fore of their experience.

Changes to the body due to age are felt through the embodied practices specific to the person or group, and it is therefore possible to see how such practices shape the perception of age. For participants in a demanding physical practice such as hockey or rugby, these perceptions of bodily change are going to be different from those of swimmers or golfers, and perhaps even further removed from those of more sedentary activities such as reading or writing. A meaningful contribution to life course theory would be to compile and contrast multiple and divergent ways of experiencing age(ing) based on practice-based categories. However, sports and leisure activities as they relate to the life course are rarely researched; instead, more inclusive categories, such as family, work and social life prevail in such models. What is interesting about amateur athletics, sport and leisure is that it is frequently less institutionalized and controlled than other aspects of life, such as work, which has perhaps contributed to its relatively low profile within certain bodies of literature.

In summary, the fashion in which people engage in these activities is telling of how they negotiate continuity and change throughout the life course because their participation in such activities is voluntary and hence more expressive of their agency. As well, sports in particular blend both social and physical aspects into the use of leisure time, thereby highlighting

continuity and change in a more holistic manner than simply one or the other, making sport a significant site for understanding the dynamic process of the life course.

CHAPTER 1 – THE HOCKEY GAME

Introduction

The following chapter takes an in-depth look at the teams, captains and leagues that were the focus of my research. It takes into account some of the structural functions that are necessary for organizing an amateur hockey league in Montreal, along with some of the responsibilities and roles that captains fill. Finally there is a discussion of the game of hockey itself accompanied by a vignette of how a complete hockey game transpires from start to finish. The purpose of this chapter is to establish a basis for discussing how my interlocutors experienced their age and aging through both the social and physical aspects of hockey. This chapter is meant to help the reader become familiar with some aspects of amateur hockey that may not be common knowledge to even spectators of hockey. The focus in the chapter in its entirety is directed mostly towards individual experience, and does not over emphasize the structure of hockey leagues and teams. Team dynamics will be discussed at longer length throughout the thesis, however the inner workings of the league are too far removed from the focus of this thesis to warrant detailed discussion.

The Teams

The three teams I played for over the 2013-14 season were: the Hustlers, the Cyclones and the Bulls. In the following I will quickly describe each team separately. The Cyclones and the Bulls played in the Consortium league and the Hustlers played in the Western Hockey League (WHL). I had previously played two seasons with the Cyclones and Bulls and had just joined the Hustlers after their goalie had quit for personal reasons. My relationship with all three teams originated in amateur hockey, through being introduced to them by people I had already played with. Being a goalie allowed me to join as many teams as there are days in the week because that position is always in great demand, however playing on three teams would be considered by most amateurs as substantial. Had I been a player there is a good chance that I would not have been able to play on any of these teams, let alone all three.

The Hustlers

The Hustlers were a team of about ten players who came from the Notre-Dame-de-Grace area in Montreal. Their Captain Gotti had started the team about three years prior because he and some friends wanted to get back into hockey. He sported number 69. Their jerseys were as old as the team, they were black with red and white stripes on the sleeves and around the waist, and sported a distinct logo of a masked “hit man” on the front. They had yet to win a championship in the WHL, the only league they had played in until I joined in 2013.

The median age was 27 and the average age was approximately 26. The oldest player was 31 and the youngest was 23. All of the players on the team were male. Most of the players were discernibly white, but may have had mixed ancestry. There were players of Russian, German, Irish and Italian descent. All but Archie and Gill were anglophones, and while the aforementioned grew up primarily speaking French first they had a strong mastery of English. There were at least three players who self-identified as Jewish, while the others were nominally Christian. The majority of players had some form of post-secondary education, and all were employed at the time in either blue or white-collar jobs. Only two of the players on the team were married and both had one child each. Daric had four children and was unmarried.

The Cyclones

The Cyclones were a team put together by Yatesy and some other players in the early nineties to start a team from a group of interested “spare” players that had no team to join at the time, as all the other teams in the Consortium were full. Yatesy was the co-Captain along with St. Remi for the 2013-14 season. The Cyclones’ jerseys were orange with black and white stripes on the arms. They had just been recently purchased in 2012. The logo was of a Cyclone on the front with the name written underneath.

The average age on the Cyclones was approximately 37; I was one of the youngest players at 29. The oldest player was Dane at 44. All the players on the team were male and mostly white, though again there was a mix of national backgrounds, such as German, Ukrainian, Persian and Egyptian. The team was composed almost entirely of anglophones except for EM, who was a francophone with a high degree of fluency in English. The majority of them had university degrees and worked in a variety of jobs, from teaching to engineering. All of them

were middle-class. There was a mix of single and married players, and Dane, EM, St. Remi and others had children.

The Bulls

The Bulls were a team put together by Paul, Donnie and a handful of business students over 30 years ago. They started as two teams, the Bulls a fun team, and the Bullseyes a competitive high caliber team for tournaments. The Bullseyes folded long ago while the Bulls continue year after year under the co-captaincy of their two remaining original members. They obtained new jerseys for the 2013-14 season, which were white with grey and black stripes on the arms and waist. They displayed the picture of an iconic video game character on the front and the word Bull\$ with a "\$" for an "s" in the name to commemorate their roots in business. They have existed longer than the league in which they play today, the Consortium.

The average age on the team was upwards of 45 years old. There were three players over 50 and only one player under 30. The team had one female player, Kristy, and the rest were male, though she would often invite other women to play the occasional game with the Bulls. They were all white and middle-class. Kristy and one other player were francophone, the rest were English-speakers. All the players had completed some form of post-secondary education, there were also graduate students and a PhD candidate. Most of them were in finance or engineering and had career jobs, though some of the players worked as skilled laborers. At least half of the team was married with children.

The Captains

The role of the team captain, manager and/or organizer is a very important one and entails responsibilities beyond those of regular players. Usually these multiple roles are filled by one person who is the lynch pin that holds the team together. Because the captain has the final word on most matters concerning the team (though teams are described by many I spoke to as working like a democracy), including who will be part of the team and who will not, he is closer to all players on the team than most other members. The captains of the three teams I played with were: Gotti of the Hustlers; Yatesy and St. Remi of the Cyclones; and Paul of the Bulls (with Donnie as co-Captain, substituting when necessary). The Cyclones and the Bulls divided the

duties between two of their players, which may have made it easier to orchestrate, as both sets of captains got along well.

The more mechanical aspects of a captain's job are tasks such as filling water bottles, bringing pucks for warm-up, and filling out score sheets. They also need to keep an open line of communication with referees during the game to discuss penalties and expulsions, as well as infractions that are not called or are missed by the officiating referees. They also need to oversee their players' conduct towards referees and staff so that no unnecessary issues arise that may harm their team's chances of winning.

For a team to thrive, captains must undertake a variety of roles, many of which are about negotiating continuity and change for those involved. Teams of ten players must be organized and registered year after year, and changes may have to be made when people quit or have been asked to leave the team. Appropriate "subs"⁵ and "spares"⁶ that fit the constitution of the team have to be found and registered, and made to pay their league fees. Captains also have to discuss and decide which "subs" will eventually become "regulars"⁷ on a team. Captains also have the unfortunate responsibility of speaking with players who are being asked not to return, a responsibility which has arisen a few times over the last two years on the Cyclones, Bulls and Hustlers.

Captains may also have to settle disputes between teammates if the players cannot manage to do so themselves. Because arguments can impinge on performance during a game, the captain is tasked with maintaining order on the bench and in the room. He is also responsible for setting line changes and working fluidly with players during games to create the best line combinations. Captains manage people, time and momentum. They try to rally their players when the game starts going the other team's way. They lead their teams through the ups and downs of the game, they try to make it an enjoyable experience for all, while trying to balance the perspectives and needs of different players. They reprimand unacceptable behavior. They always make sure that someone is bringing the beer and, if that person forgets, he gets penalized and is required to bring more beer to the next match.

⁵ A "sub" refers to a player who is substituting for a missing teammate on a given night.

⁶ See "subs".

⁷ A "regular" refers to a player that is officially part of the team and has paid for the entire season and is not just sparing for a game. Players refer to themselves sometimes as "regulars" in such and such a league.

Captains negotiate timeslots, arena fees and league cost. They try to balance the team's budget and make sure everyone pays their dues. Gotti carried around a Moleskin notebook, noting when members paid, and collected the funds before and after games. Captains also work hard to find a suitable league for their team, because leagues can vary markedly in playing style based on their specific rules and the caliber of the participating teams. Captains lead their teams on and off the ice, and sometimes in the bar.

For teams to continue playing they have to find the right place to play, which can entail changing leagues many times: no small feat as ice time at arenas is a scarce commodity in Montreal, especially those reasonably early times after working hours. Start times between 18:30 and 21:00 during the week and most times on weekends are some of the hardest to secure because they are so desirable for adult players with jobs.

Captains take the responsibility onto themselves to fulfill all these requirements and to mediate between the team and the league. Sometimes this can be successful, such as when Gotti had the Hustlers transfer into a more suitable division; or when Kristy presented the Consortium with a request that they reduce the amount of contact and violence in that league, something that changed that league permanently, a change greatly appreciated by many of the Bulls and Hustlers. However, requests can also be denied, such as when time allotted to Consortium games was reduced from 80 minutes to 60 minutes even though almost all the Captains tried to appeal to the league administration.

Captains are charged with many tasks, but they all have to do with negotiating the specifics of change and continuation within the league(s) and with their team. Their job first and foremost is to maintain the team, both within the structure of the league and within the team itself. As circumstances change, captains are the prime stakeholders in the continuation of the team. They care about their team's continued existence, about maintaining an enjoyable atmosphere and satisfying experience, and—if their team is successful—about preserving a winning record.

The Leagues

I played in two leagues for the 2013-14 season during which I did my research: the WHL (with the Hustlers); and the Consortium hockey league (with the Bulls and Cyclones). Each league was unique and operated in a slightly different way, but the essential service they both provided was

much the same, mainly providing ice time for teams within a structured league. The leagues organized referees and scorekeepers for the game, kept statistics regularly updated on their websites, separated teams into divisions based on caliber, collected fees, arranged ice time with arenas, and dealt with issues as these would arise. The leagues were also the highest level of disciplining body: any issues of suspensions or expulsions such as disputes between teams were handled by the league administration after the referees on the ice had ruled on them. Although they would negotiate with the team captains, ultimately the league organizers also decided on the rules. They also mediated between the arena staff and the teams, such as the time that the Hustlers were reminded that smoking within the arenas was illegal; and the time that the Cyclones were reminded that players such as the Locks brothers had to vacate their dressing room 30 minutes after their game to allow the cleaners to prepare for the next team. Although it never happened in any game I played, I suppose that the league would also be involved if police or other authorities intervened in a game. And, finally, the leagues are in charge of providing and handing out the championship trophies at the end of the season to the winners.

There was some controversy surrounding the WHL. Players speculated that the league was gleaming large profits from the hockey that they provided to teams like the Hustlers. The WHL was running a nine division league and charging players approximately \$700 each for a season of hockey, or roughly \$8500 per team, for about 25 games. Gotti has reviewed their revenue many times in the dressing room aloud and is convinced that the WHL is making large profits; although he would prefer a different arrangement, he says that the Hustlers have little choice in where they play. He once negotiated a lower price with this league, further re-enforcing his belief that there was a substantial profit margin. There was on-going speculation in the Hustlers' room that the WHL was making a lot of money from the team, with some discontented players even refusing to pay. In one amusing instance a player told Gotti that he had "fucked over" the WHL by not paying \$200 dollars of his last season's fees, only to have Gotti not so politely remind him that the only person he was "fucking over" was his own captain because Gotti was ultimately responsible for the entire amount. The Consortium worked far differently: teams registered as a whole, but each individual player was required to pay their season league fees at the arena. When players are late or miss payment, the matter is handled internally by the team and then the captains are required to sort the matter out with the league administration. In

general, the Captains of the Bulls and Cyclones and many players described the league fees as “very reasonable”.

The structure of the league as an institution plays a very interesting role in how participation in hockey changes and continues, and how teams negotiate change and maneuver within and between the divisions. However, the league structure has far less relevance to whether individuals continue to participate in hockey through their particular life course. There is very little direct contact between individual players and the league, except in rare circumstances.

Hockey

“Sometimes it takes a lot of hard work to have a little bit of fun.”

- Paul (Bulls Captain in an interview)

The game of hockey itself is defined by its ebbs and flows, its stops and starts, its change and continuity. Teams fight to protect the puck, to sustain their lead, to maintain momentum, to preserve their energy and they persevere, ensuring the eventual win. Goalies freeze the puck, halting play in an attempt to change the direction of the game. However, teams also have to be adaptive and change when the game is not going in their favor. They shift the momentum by stealing the puck from their opponents, they change lines quickly, they modify their playing style, they alter line pairings to adapt to their opponents, they transition up and down ice, and they incorporate novel innovation into their playing styles.

In a season, teams battle to maintain their standings and eventually their spot in the playoffs. For those teams that do not maintain a good enough record their season is cut short. The team can resume again next season, but the break is effective. The playoffs themselves are a contest of team preservation both on and off the ice, and the team that maintains leads and wins games is eventually rewarded for their ability to preserve their winning streak longer than any other. This requires maintaining composure and self-discipline, but also the ability to change and adapt to situations they encounter along the way. Winning is an effective way to preserve a team: everyone loves to win, and winning teams stay together longer. Teams that consistently lose fall apart after a short time, discontinued due to flagging participation. There is only one champion team per season, so teams must work hard to change or modify if they wish to continue being competitive with the other teams in their leagues.

Saturday, February 8th, 2014 (Game Time: 18:30-20:00)

**Cyclones vs. The Big Shots
Consortium Arena**

Night was descending on the city and it was already getting rather dark by the time I arrived at the Consortium Arena. Snow fell softly in large flakes and the temperature was somewhere around -10°C , the seemingly iconic temperature of winter and hockey in Canada. Although the Habs (Montreal Canadiens) would be playing the Carolina Hurricanes on this same evening, and our game would interfere with our watching the telecast, we would be able to enjoy it later: the local francophone *RDS* television station always replays an “express” version of the game, skipping over the uneventful portions of the match, and condensing it to fit the sixty-minute timeslot. Canadiens games that fall on amateur hockey game nights are always a topic of discussion in the dressing room.

Getting ready for games is not as simple as it may appear. There are many tasks, both large and small, requiring time, energy and forethought, which each player must complete on the day of the game in order to be able to play. There are the more common undertakings all players must consider, such as transportation to and from the arena, and organizing a full set of hockey equipment; and the more specialized responsibilities of managers/captains and the like, such as deciding on “forward lines” and “defensive pairings”, and filling out score sheets. All this participants do to continue to play the game they love.

The minutes seem to disappear quickly between the time when players leave for hockey and their arrival at the arena because they often focus on the upcoming game, their thoughts on the impending clash of sticks and blades. I had left around ten minutes to six that evening because I had to go to my garage and get my equipment, then drive to the arena. At the same time all around Montreal my teammates were going through their respective routines, making sure bags were packed, sticks were ready at the door (two at least in case one breaks), taping them if necessary, and trying to maintain their composure because they were always excited to hit the ice.

That night when I arrived at the arena, that iconic Canadian setting preserved in the imaginations of many hockey players and celebrated in national folklore, the parking lot was absolutely packed with cars. Due to the fact that the arena shares a parking lot with a sports

complex and a gymnasium that is often used for a variety of events from galas to dances and sports, guessing whether or not there will be a parking space is always a gamble.

Unfortunately I had to park quite far from the arena and lug my hockey bag full of heavy, but crucial, protective goalie equipment a number of blocks. By the time I reached the entrance of the arena I was ready to call it a night. Like many players I have a routine I like to follow before a game. Many players try to eat hours (usually three or four) before the game so that their food is properly digested and reserved as energy for the game to come. Dane likes to snack on some fresh fruit, even though he knows pasta would probably be a better choice. St. Remi will eat souvlaki moments before the game, and sometimes thinks it shows in his sluggish performance. But usually, the choice of meal is pasta and water like Paul and others eat. That afternoon I had eaten around 15:30, and I thought that I might well have already expended many of those calories on my march to the arena. Players muse aloud that they probably expend thousands of calories in such strenuous pre-game activities when they haven't even yet begun to play. Some players sweat even lacing up their skates.

Nonetheless, I went through those doors as I always had, relieved to have survived the trek and ready to play. Players mentally prepare for hockey long before the actual game. Hockey players anticipate playing a game of hockey; there is a pre-game build-up, a growing momentum.

On average players participate in one or two games of hockey a week but some can play as many as five. Some players, of varying ages, describe simply losing the sense of joy they derive from hockey when they play it too frequently. Most regular players, however, agree that once per week throughout the winter is the absolute minimum they require to preserve a reasonable caliber of play. Players "feel it" when they miss a few weeks of hockey and they describe having to "get the rust out", "regain a step" and even "get back into shape". Players "feel it" in their "game" when they have not been on the ice for weeks, and they also feel it through the physical condition of their body. They many times describe feeling slower, or "missing a step".

Many players look forward to upcoming games during the week with great excitement and forethought. This is especially true when the game "counts", meaning that it is an important game, either against a rival, for important standings within their division, or a playoff or championship game. For some players every game is important and they always feel the lead-up intensely. These are some of the players who would say they "live for hockey" or "live for the

game”, and convey the impression that hockey, for them, is an entire lifestyle. For others, the lead up to the game starts shortly before the puck drops. For every player, however, once on the ice, nothing else seems to matter as much as the game.

Participation is inextricably tied to arranging the practicalities of everyday routines to create opportunities for playing. Organized recreational hockey is, therefore, by no means an impromptu occurrence. Amateur players must arrange and organize many variables of time, energy and resources to participate in a game of hockey. Being able to negotiate changing circumstances during the week is a valuable asset.

* * *

When I got to the room it was very quiet. There were not many people there. The ones who had arrived were all grumbling about the parking situation. But for the exceptionally lucky few, most had had to walk a distance of two or three blocks. On this particular night everyone was rather somber and the conversations were limited to “hi”s and “hello”s. I found myself an open spot and spread out my bag and pads amongst all the others. Leather, foams, clips, clasps, pads, laces and other hockey paraphernalia littered the rubberized floor. Everyone was sitting down, getting suited up to play, and I briefly caught up with St. Remi, Jack, Yatesy and the others. Our talk was limited: we didn’t venture into the more usual rambunctious pre-game banter. Due to the extra time it took to park we all had to get ready quickly so as not to be penalized (a delay of game penalty of 2 minutes is levied on teams that are not on the ice at the time the game must begin). My equipment felt warm and familiar that night. Though it had spent the week in my garage, it wasn’t a frigid week and my pads were defrosted, in a manner of speaking, before I put them on. Everyone is very used to getting ready and every routine is individual. The individual player has carefully crafted the process of armoring his or her hockey body over years of experimenting and experience, and each has their preference. Players have their heads down often putting on their lower body equipment and continue conversations as they work, speaking to the people beside or across from them. No one pays attention to how the other person is steadily getting ready, except to evaluate whether they will be the last one out the door. Players also exchange clear tape, stick tape, and a “Y” (or skate sharpening device) if someone has one.

Changing even one small aspect of this ritual of adornment is felt throughout the entire experience. The player can feel a misplaced pad or new skates during the game until it eventually becomes normalized over time, such as one week when Ted had forgotten his long underwear and commented, “ Man, isn’t it crazy the way if you change one small thing you feel it the entire game?” Many times players comment on “breaking in”⁸ new skates.

* * *

Hockey is a game played mainly in an environment of hard surfaces, including the ice, boards, goal posts, puck, sticks and players’ hard plastic equipment. These surfaces combined with the speed of hockey make protective equipment of great importance, especially in leagues that tolerate “contact” and “checking”⁹. Throughout a season players are continually commenting on their equipment in the dressing room. They discuss what works for them and what has failed. Each has accumulated a great deal of knowledge from personal experience, which they share with their teammates in room discussions.

Equipment constantly requires maintenance and occasional repairs for them to endure the rigors of the game, and players must also attend to these tasks, preparing equipment before the game and packing their hockey bags to transport it manageably. (Goaltenders usually take this preparation and packing to the level of exceptional performance art.) Players must unpack or “air out” their equipment after games to allow the soaked-in sweat to evaporate from deep within their nylon-covered foam cores. This usually requires a large, empty, uninhabited, and well-ventilated room such as a garage, because hockey equipment acquires a distinctly unpleasant smell, the likes of which is tolerable only to hockey players for whom it summons up memories and sentimental nostalgia for the arena. Within the concrete, wood, and steel of arenas all across Montreal this particularly pungent reek lingers in the cold refrigerated air. Once on entering our room after a game, a non-hockey playing friend of a teammate recoiled with a look of disgust pinching her nose without having even stepped three feet inside.

There are also players who joke about their preference for containing and quarantining this odiferous essence of hockey by trapping it within their hockey bag and allowing it to fester

⁸ “Breaking in” equipment refers to softening the material through use thereby giving it a more formed and “natural” feel. Mostly this is referred to concerning skates.

⁹ Hockey is inevitably to some degree a contact sport given the very way it is played.

unimpeded, then to release it once a week to the amusement or repulsion of their teammates. Those who play many games a week during the winter routinely don wet cold equipment and skates frozen solid, which go through a process of drying and getting soaked again during the game. Some players such as St. Remi think it is good luck not to wash their equipment all season. Some extend this grimy superstition to include their sweat-saturated underwear. However, there are exceptions such as Yatesy, the length and cleanliness of whose routine is the subject of frequent comment by the Cyclones. He brings a carpet to stand on while he changes and his equipment is suspiciously odorless.

* * *

The Lock brothers (Nat & Sean) showed up somewhat late, as they usually did, followed closely by Frederick our “finesse player”¹⁰. I discreetly asked Nat if he had remembered to bring the money he owed me for the goalie leg pads that I had sold him a few days earlier. Nat being a hockey friend of mine, I had sold the pads to him relatively cheaply, which is a common practice amongst players who know each other. However, Nat said, “I just realized I had to bring you the money the minute I heard your voice.” The wily expression on his face upon opening the locker room door, his half-mischievous smile and the tone of his voice all suggested otherwise. Sean and others thought it was priceless and summarily poked fun at Nat for the rest of the evening concerning the funds in question, and a range of topics such as his feather-light, pompadorian hairstyle. People giving each other a “hard time”, or lightheartedly joking and jesting— is part of the room dynamic that constitutes the sociality among amateur hockey players.

Then one of Rick’s laces broke and he asked if anyone had a spare lace he could borrow. More laughter. “Who has one skate lace to spare?” Luckily, St. Remi had a set of unopened laces he passed to Rick across the room. Rick asked, “Are they waxed?” Rick prefers the “big soft laces, not the waxed kind.” “Beggars can’t be choosers,” St. Remi reminded him.

We all piled out of the locker room single file in a hurry, making sure to give our ID cards to St. Remi or Yatesy (the Cyclones’ co-captains). The other team was not out of their locker room yet, and the refs were nowhere to be found either. I joined up with my teammates on

¹⁰ “Finesse players” are those with a high level of skill and talent at the passing, shooting and stick handling. They exude grace and style, and are associated less with rough physicality. Finesse players are often described as having “soft hands” or an acute sense of the game.

the ice. Yatesy and Rick were already warming up, shooting pucks at the net, which they had set up moments ago after the Zamboni had passed. I skated over to my net and put my water bottle on top and started “skating up” my crease, back and forth, both to warm up my legs a bit and to take the bumps out of the freshly zambonied ice, so that I would not catch a skate edge at an inappropriate time during game play.

Warming Up

A hockey warm-up is similar to an orchestra tuning their instruments before a performance. They sound oddly out of sync, yet somehow still convey the impression that they are soon going to play in harmony. It is the slaying of unruly temperament and strings, the honing of skill before the real show begins, it is the last chance to feel and truly be ready. Nothing counts at this point, but everything that will count weighs constantly on the mind. Hockey is about to be played, music is about to be made: the main event is about to begin.

Players engage in a variety of warm-up routines, from practicing passing and shooting to stretching and warming up muscles, skating and fooling around. There are aspects of the routines professionals use to warm up before games, but amateur warm-ups are far less organized and structured. Players do not warm up as a team, but instead at their own pace, using various exercises in any order they choose. Most have developed a specific routine: after watching players over several games it is possible to ascertain the design of their individual warm-ups, even though these designs may not be apparent even to their teammates because these routines are performed without much scrutiny or surveillance. Others will warm up in ways that can, and will, change from one game to the next. And some players choose to simply stand by the players’ bench and discuss strategy and the upcoming game, not partaking in a physical warm-up at all.

One typical warm-up formation is to have players skate towards the goalie, receive a pass from a player in one of the two corners of the ice and shoot on the goalie, then circle back to repeat the action. Players skate in, one after the other in a continuous stream.

It also helps a goaltender to take a few players’ warm-up shots to get a feel for the puck while making saves. Some players understand that these shots should not truly test the goalie, but some take the opportunity to “wire” shots as hard as possible, which can be dangerous. Before most games with the Cyclones, I take a few shots from either Dane from the “point” or Frederick from below the “hash marks”. After each warm-up they ask me, “Was that okay?” or “You feel

good?” On this particular evening I was comfortable, and the shots I took from the team made me feel confident. Although my right hip was still hurting from an ongoing injury, I was ready to play.

By this time, the other goalie had made his way onto the ice and joined his team for a little warm-up and a few shots. He was dressed all in red. The Lock brothers talked with the refs, making light-hearted jokes and generally fooling around as they always did. The timekeeper put 15:00 minutes on the scoreboard; the refs corralled the players to their benches and organized their starting five players into position with whistles tweets and arm gestures. The ref at center ice signaled to both goalies to make sure he and I were ready, and then he whistled, drawing both centermen towards him for the dropping of the puck. The game had begun. Hockey is a game of conflict between opposing forces and every moment of action is centered on the tension between two teams. Hockey is many times referred to as “battles”, “fights” and in other aggressive ways because what is happening on the ice is two conflicting sides resolving themselves. A serious conflict that escalates will result in rupture, a “mercy rule”¹¹, and/or fisticuffs. Regularly however the tension is resolved through teamwork and play.

The Game

Even though the Big Shots were getting a lot of shots, and hard ones, they were having trouble making passes in our zone, and Dane, EM, Jared, and the others knew that if they kept the shooters to the outside and let me see the shot, we could “Let them have that all day,” as Dane would often say. The first period was action-filled; the play went back and forth very quickly. The other team was coming in hard on us, but we turned the play around on them with effective counter attacks, making interceptions and moving cleanly up the ice. Our forwards, St. Remi, Yatesy, Frederick, the Lock brothers and Rick were passing very well that night, and were maintaining possession of the puck. The puck would go from “tape to tape”¹². Frederick was many times at the center of offensive plays and he was really “clicking”¹³ with St. Remi. Within the first ten minutes we scored three resounding goals. Each was a well-scored goal, nothing

¹¹ In both leagues I played a “mercy rule” ended the game if one team was ahead by 10 goals at any time during the game.

¹² Passes that go from the passer’s stick’s tape uninterrupted to the intended receivers stick’s tape.

¹³ “Clicking” refers to players playing well together.

deflected, and no “garbage”¹⁴ goals. The momentum had shifted in our favor. We pushed back their successive advances to preserve our zone, turning the other team back on their heels. The game saw penalties on either side as the referees tried not to let the game get too “chippy”¹⁵ and out of hand. The referees were not dictating the game; instead they were allowing it to continue without too much unnecessary interruption.

Near the end of the first period, I kicked the puck out with my left leg off a standard shot, producing a juicy rebound that one of the Big Shots jumped on. He did not get a clean shot off—which I had anticipated he would—but the puck fluttered over my left shoulder into the net. The period finished 3-1. The whistle blew and we retreated to our respective benches.

In between periods, players have the opportunity for a 60-second break in which to gather at their bench, after which they exchange ends for the next period. During this short respite, I took the time to go to the defencemen to tell them they were doing a good job, then I went to the forwards and said, “Keep up the good work.” No one else was really talking because they were all catching their breath, drinking water or Gatorade and trying to preserve their energy. Playing hockey can make your lungs burn, your entire body break into a sweat and fill your muscles with lactic acid from the intensity. The end of the period had not been easily fought: the Big Shots were catching up to us on plays and starting to find their passing. We had to keep our composure and stay focused.

The ref whistled. I skated over to the opposite net, my new home for a period, and hit the posts for luck. Both teams lined up; and the game was once again underway.

The puck dropped, and the momentum of the game changed. Early on in the second period, there were penalty calls on both sides and the play moved at a more desperate pace, back and forth frantically as our opponents tried to catch up. The Big Shots were beginning to play their game and get better scoring chances. Within the first two minutes they scored on a quick “bang bang”¹⁶ play. The Big Shots’ player in possession of the puck behind our net “centered” it

¹⁴ These are goals that are judged by players to not be of a high quality, usually the goals such as those scored off of haphazard deflection and/or lucky bounces.

¹⁵ Refers to hacking and slashing the opponent’s body and stick with their stick.

¹⁶ A play in which one player passes to another very quickly and just as quickly the receiving player shoots and scores. It refers to the two banging sounds produced in rapid succession by the sticks hitting the puck.

to a teammate streaking in from the slot, “unmanned”¹⁷ by one of our players. The pass and shot were so fast that the puck was in the net before anyone could react.

The score was then 3-2. Our lead was vanishing. A “one-goal game”¹⁸ is never decisively won until the last seconds drain from the clock and this is especially true in amateur hockey. Games are volatile and can change in an instant. A bad play and a team can find its lead eclipsed within minutes, all that hard work lost and their chances razed in mere moments. In the game of hockey, it can take only a few seconds to score a quick goal. And amateur hockey is far less predictable than its professional counterpart. Players and teams need to be able to adapt to the changing play. When opponents begin incorporating new tactics a team needs to know how to react.

The opponent’s goalie started playing much better as well. We were still getting our chances, but he was making strong saves and consistently covering up the rebound, thereby giving his team a chance to come back. Then, on another badly controlled rebound, they chipped at the puck and it rolled up my chest protector and arm, and trickled into the net as I fell over, despite the fact that both my defencemen were doing their job. We finished out the period severely deflated. Our lead gone, we had to once again play harder and score a goal to win. It is easier to preserve a lead than to build one— at least that is what Scotty Bowman (the most winningest coach in NHL history) said. Much as in life, it is easier to preserve the status quo than establish one.

We all skated over to the bench. The guys looked dilapidated and deflated, as if they were holding onto their exhausted bodies by a thread. They were tired, worn down by the pace of the game and their inability to convert their energetic efforts into a lead in points. No one was talking, so I felt I had to say something to keep the spirit alive. I said, “Look, we are in this game still. Let’s win the period....” “Ya, we just need to stay on ‘em, guys. Keep pressuring them,” chimed in Yatesy. Frederick offered some advice to the forwards, “Just keep shooting. This guy’s [the Big Shots’ goalie] giving up a lot of rebounds,” he said glancing towards the opponents bench. I skated over to the defencemen and told them to pay attention to the rebounds and not the man trying to screen the shot in front of the net because the screen was not affecting

¹⁷ “Unmanned” refers to when a player is not covered by an opponent and is “open” to receive a pass from a teammate.

¹⁸ A “one-goal game” refers to a game in which the difference of the score is only one goal. (Example: 1-0, 2-1, 3-2 etc...)

my ability to stop the puck. Dale agreed that that was how they had scored two of the three goals on us. I kept thinking to myself, “Win the period. Win the game.” Sometimes a small break like this between periods can change the momentum of a game and affect the players’ strategy towards their opponents. It gives them a moment to quickly appraise how things have gone thus far and how to continue/change their tactics in the following period.

Within the first minute of the period the Big Shots’ forwards came streaking down into our zone in formation, passing the puck into our territory, cycling¹⁹ and moving it well. The left-winger made a pass to their centerman in the high slot. He shot, falling to one knee. I kicked out my right leg and “Boom” made the stop, then blocked the rebound again, and again on the right pad: three successive shots, three successive saves. The guys were cheering from the bench, and hitting their sticks on the inside of the boards. The puck popped out and was loose for one long agonizing fraction of a second, as if frozen, floating in space and time. Then it all came rushing back to the speed of normal perception. Yatesy swooped back from up front, picked up the puck, and the rapid pace of the game resumed full throttle. Moving quickly up the boards with his technically accentuated stride, he built up speed. On his left side St. Remi was supporting him, waiting for the pass, or the shot. Yatesy passed it to St. Remi who shot “top cheese,”²⁰ beating the goalie over his glove. The score: 4-3.

In a departure from usual practice, after the goal we scored the guys came over and congratulated me on the saves I had made. Usually players will celebrate a goal amongst themselves, jumping on top of each other and giving high-fives.

A moment like that, a good save, a good play, a strong penalty kill, can change the momentum, which can win a game for a team. Hockey games are like dramas with three acts, and they can take you on a whirlwind of a tale throughout their course. And, it is part of the unpredictability of the game that makes it fun to play. Otherwise games would be a repetitious practice in banality. Instead, emotions and passions can run high. There are also lows and lulls when things are simply not “clicking”, when the game is slow and doesn’t move, but hockey has constant inertia. At one moment, players may appear remorseful because they are behind the

¹⁹ “Cycling” means to pass (or move) the puck from one teammate to the next, while all those involved are continually moving and repositioning themselves. It is described as such because it often times appears to move in a cyclical motion.

²⁰ “Top cheese” is used to describe a shot that is placed in the absolute upper part of the net. It is sometimes also referred to as “up-stairs” or “roof-daddy”.

other team by three goals. Two minutes later, after scoring two goals, those same dejected players burst with renewed energy and life. Good players and teams know how to maintain their composure, remain responsive to the tempo of the game and change their strategic plans accordingly.

The Big Shots were on their heels, scrambling to keep up with us. We had reversed the tide of the game and were now dictating the play. When he finally got another scoring opportunity St. Remi made the play flawlessly, putting us ahead 5-3. And we finished the game by adding an open net goal. The final score was Cyclones 6 – Big Shots 3.

The game closed with the time running out on the play clock. It was over, and we had persevered for the win. The buzzer sounded and the referees whistled to mark/indicate the end of the game. Our teams had been well matched and both teams had their chances to win. The adrenaline and momentum had run high. At the end of the game both sets of players skated over to their teammates and goaltender, and congratulated them on a game well played.

After the vast majority of amateur hockey games, players will line up one-by-one at center ice and shake hands, or bump gloves, with the opposite team. The line usually, but not always, starts with the goalies. In passing, players usually utter, “Good game,” or, “*Bon match*,” or sometimes nothing at all. Some players break the code and instead continue the rivalry of the game, with threatening or curt remarks. The Consortium, WHL, and other such leagues usually view this as poor sportsmanship, and officials and league organizers are expected to keep such incidents to a minimum. Once the game has ended, players are supposed to end their competition: their opponents are no longer foes, but merely fellow lovers of the game. Though some matches end on a more heated note, and fights and verbal arguments have been known to ensue, the expectation is, as expressed in a common phrase in hockey, “What happens on the ice stays on the ice.”

No team likes to lose; all of them want to win. What could have been days or weeks of mental and material (equipment, transportation etc.) preparation seems all for naught in the dying seconds of any game to any team on the losing end. A win can keep players on a high all night and the following morning, while a loss can bring about just as prolonged an effect, but one of malaise and remorse. It is depressing to lose. After being defeated, in the dressing room players

discuss the loss and what could have been: what if that ‘post’²¹ had been a goal; what if we hadn’t shot wide, or given away the puck, or let in a goal? The winning side, equally, discusses the game, but they discuss all the moments of success and analyze how the game was won. Everyone was all smiles that night in the Cyclones’ room; we had reason to celebrate because we had come back in the final frame and beat out the other team when it counted. It was our determination and resolve that finally led to our victory.

In the room the Lock brothers and I joked with St. Remi that he had to score all those goals because Bill, one of our forwards, a “sniper”²² with a fierce slap shot, had been absent that night, and that Remi had had to make up for what Bill would have scored. “You have to be the superstar tonight.” A player asked what our record was, and someone answered, “It’s 7-1-2, or something.” We all agreed that was pretty good. We had had a very successful regular season the previous year, but we were eliminated in the first round of the playoffs. This year we were resolved not to focus on finishing first in our division, but to win the championship. This was a prospect that we as a team could probably not have envisioned two and a half years prior, when I joined the Cyclones. But now we were a different team. Former players had left and new talented ones had replaced them. We were now concentrating on how we played during the games and not merely on what the final result would be. We had begun to pass more with the leadership and talent Frederick had provided us. We were winning games as a team.

Ironically, Rick and I would be playing against each other the following night, so we discussed our individual teams.²³ Rick is Egyptian, and plays on a team with a large Arab contingent, which is rare but not unheard of in hockey, especially in multicultural Montreal. I talked a bit about the Hustlers, and he told me that their reputation for physical and aggressive play preceded them. I told him that I had only just joined them at the beginning of the season but that I had yet to witness anything to support that claim. We wished each other good luck in the following evening’s match. I looked forward to seeing Rick play. He is a good forward winger and had played an excellent game that night. He had rushed the puck up along the boards many

²¹ When a player refers to a “post” they are actually referring to a shot taken that hit the post and did not enter the net, not the physical post itself.

²² A “sniper” is a specific sort of player, one that has a very strong and accurate shot, but may not have other skills such as passing or stick handling to match.

²³ As mentioned earlier, some hockey players play multiple games per week; because teams commonly only play once per week, players may be playing on more than one team in different divisions or leagues.

times, his head down in determination, ready to pass the puck off to a supporting forward should the opportunity arise. We had seen Rick working on his stick handling and he was showing signs of improvement. He is also a “clean” player, and does not resort to hooking, slashing, or jabbing players in the corners.

As always the Lock brothers were talking amongst themselves about a broad range of subjects, which took them both philosophically and physically well into the night. They are always the last ones to shower and leave, even with Yatesy’s lengthy showering times. The Locks easily spend a half-hour in the room after every game just hanging out.

On the way out the door Rick asked Dane and me why we didn’t change some players on the Bulls and become a Division 3 team, or a stronger Division 4 team. Dane mentioned that we had made the finals in the last two consecutive seasons, and said, “What would we do, kick them off so that we can win the finals?” Dane remarked how some of the “weaker” players on the Bulls are the most dedicated. He laughed about what he had just said, but with an air of knowing truth.

Conclusion

As we can see the game of hockey itself is engrained with continuity and change. There are many aspects of both preparation and playing that require maintenance and also repair. Players are required to be able to attend to these elements and they go to great lengths to do so. The anticipation of the upcoming game shows how much time and effort are involved in the undertaking, as well as how much players look forward to an upcoming match. Preparation takes forethought and planning, because things do not simply come about by themselves. Players are invested in their participation and they put their disposable time, energy and resources towards playing on game night. During the game players must also have a capacity to adapt to changing circumstances in order to continue to play effectively against their opponents. In recounting the game between the Cyclones and the Big Shots I have tried to give as much of a “feel” for the game as is possible in a written account, as I have tried to thickly describe some of the specific (and perhaps unknown) elements that go into participation on any given night. This section has been meant both to introduce the reader to the game itself and also to be a foundation for the chapters to follow.

The sections on Captains and the Leagues were meant to show some of the negotiation of continuity and change between the teams and the structure of organized amateur hockey within which they play. They spoke to some of the social elements that exist in hockey leagues and how things get organized. In the coming chapter we will turn our attention to the social aspects of adult amateur hockey closer to the ground, looking at how players fit hockey into their lives, the sociality of a team, and how teams and players change and continue to play hockey through the life course.

CHAPTER 2 – THE HOCKEY SOCIAL

Introduction

Having now discussed some of the more technical aspects of how the game is played and some of the more intricate and necessary requirements of leagues, captains, and the players, let us now turn our attention to these individuals' everyday lives: what they do, what social relationships they have, their families and friends, and how they negotiate time to fit hockey into their much broader and more complex everyday lives. Regardless of how similar the players might be in how they play hockey, and socialize, with their team, there are astounding differences between their individual personal everyday lives. It is interesting, then, to examine the ways in which different individuals negotiate their time and energy to be able to fulfill all of their social roles and responsibilities. How do they continue to play hockey if it is such a strenuous and time-consuming activity? What does it mean to each of them to be part of a team? What is the social side of hockey? What does that form of sociality provide participants? How does participation change throughout the life course? And, how do players' roles on the team change with age?

Everyday Life:

“Family Night” – March 15th, 2014

As it happened, this would be a very special night for the Bulls because the stands were filled with many family and friends who had come out to watch the game. The turnout had not been organized, but had just materialized coincidentally. There were at least 30 or 40 spectators. St. Remi's wife, daughter and some other family members came (he mentioned that the others were from his wife's family, but not the nature of their specific relationship). There were also EM's wife and two sons (ages six and eight at the time), Dane's wife, Josh's father, and a contingent of my own family (my sister, brother-in-law, two nephews, and mother). I could not help but dub that game “Family Night” due to all the unexpected appearances by relatives.

In the room we were all getting dressed when St. Remi walked in with a little “helper” in tow: his four-year-old daughter Gemma. She was dressed in tiny pink snow pants with

suspenders, had curly blonde hair coming out from the sides of her pink tuque and was shy but determined to help her daddy get into his gear while mommy waited with the stroller in the stands. Everyone was acting silly, making faces at her and talking in baby voices. She was having no part of it and produced a very earnest scowl when others tried to approach her, eventually burying her face in her daddy's jeans. St. Remi encouraged her to be sociable with us, but she was still very young and preferred to focus on him. Kenji (St. Remi's brother) was also there and she would gravitate to him as well. EM's children (ages 6 and 8) were running around in the stands blowing a horn, much to the consternation of their mother whom EM said had a bit of trouble with them when they watched his games, waiting to see their father. He had taught them how to play hockey over the last two years, and it must have been odd to them to watch their father play instead of the other way around. He had attended all of their hockey games as assistant coach and talked fondly of improvements in their play. Josh's father had graying hair and looked a bit like Jon Voight. He sat alone but got very involved in the game and you could hear him cheering on his son every time Josh touched the puck.

For all the family members that had come to enjoy the game, ironically the Bulls had a "short bench"²⁴ that day, which was why Kenji was subing for us. Many of the Bulls saw Kenji as something of a "ringer"²⁵, so he came out to play with us often when we were short on players. Paul, Bob, Palmer and Donnie were absent. Apparently, one of Paul's children had a birthday party that day. And, as we all knew, Palmer had broken his hand a couple of weeks previously and had finally resigned himself to having it looked at after he had played two additional games, leaving his hand unattended to heal "naturally", as he put it. We were a little worried that, if they missed any more games, some of our teammates would be ineligible for the playoffs. Paul, even though he was our captain, had missed quite a few games due to family responsibilities. Bob had just gotten out of back surgery (unrelated to hockey) and Palmer's hand might not have healed by playoff time. Dane and others spoke that night about how the year before we had suffered in the playoffs because we lacked players, and even though we were

²⁴ A short bench refers to not having enough extra players on the bench to make sufficient changes. This can handicap a team and remove their ability to remain competitive, especially near the end of the match. This is usually regarded to be having somewhere around two or three players on the bench (or seven or eight players total).

²⁵ A "ringer" refers to a "sub" or "spare" that is a very good hockey player, usually of a higher caliber than many of the best players of the team he is subbing for.

probably at that point in third place in the league, if we had a “short bench” in the playoffs we would not have very much success.

Also, there were at least a few Bulls that were still hung over from the previous night’s festivities and were visibly lethargic in their movements. There were many grunts and groans while the team suited up. Jeter explained, “Ohhh, I feel it today, buddy. I usually don’t drink this much. I haven’t slept in two nights basically.” “Ya, it’s been bad,” Don said with downcast red eyes. “Oh and we’re a short bench...” Jeter grumbled despairingly. They all agreed that they were going to be slow tonight and that their best strategy was to pace themselves. For a goalie this means very clearly: “You’re going to work tonight.”

Life does not simply pause when you step into the arena. Many times it may appear that nothing else matters except chasing down that puck and that everyday life is suspended, but the two are never completely separated and there is constant crossover. Just as the high of a big win follows you out into the hours off the ice, so the hangover from a social night follows you onto it. Just as some players cannot make it to the game because of familial responsibilities and events, so some families find time to come to watch their family member play. The injuries of everyday life and hockey affect the same body. Life and hockey are always interconnected. The physical and social realities are inescapable.

When the players stepped onto the ice young voices burst into small cheers, and St. Remi and others had a little more energy to their step in warm-up and the game that night. They faced forward, concentrated, acted more stoically, and generally tried to put on a good show. Before the game started there was a little huddle at the bench and an unspoken agreement amongst the Bulls: let’s show our crowd what we can do. EM’s boys trumpeted with their horn every time the Bulls scored a goal or stopped their opponents. There was an unusual speed in the play: players chased down pucks and pushed a little bit harder in the corners against their opponents. The power plays were intense moments in which the Bulls dictated the tempo of play; the goals were spectacular. They were playing inspired hockey. Kenji set up Josh on our first goal with a perfectly placed pass that Josh buried in the net with a vicious one-timer slap shot. And you could hear Josh’s father jump out of his seat cheering.

Our second goal slid under the goalie on a nice rush. And St. Remi scored the game-winning goal with four minutes left to play, displaying a beautiful touch of finesse, pulling the puck back off a rebound and backhanding it “upstairs” on the sprawling goalie. Little Gemma

was talking to her mother and pointing at her dad and uncle when they scored, and St. Remi pointed back and exclaimed “Did you see that?” to which she nodded in great approval.

I held the fort in the remaining moments, stopping a breakaway that St. Remi told me later, “I was praying at the bench that didn’t go in.” Such an overwhelming joy it was that I stomped my skates on the ice with the final buzzer as the frantic play around our net deadened. We all threw our arms up in delight and hugged each other just outside of my crease. Our fans stood and applauded our performance as we looked up at them with elation.

The players eventually got off the ice and retreated to their respective rooms. Those with family there gave a wink to their significant other or stopped for a few words. Those with younger family members there stopped to play “daddy” or “uncle” for a few moments, while the children pawed and played with their enormous equipment. High fives and hugs were exchanged, sweaty hands and cheeks were repulsed with giggles, and everyone was smiling. Then all the small faces stopped, mouths dropped, and every young person’s eyes drifted over tall padded shoulders and boards to the Zamboni (or “Amboni”, as little children are prone to calling it). Having just watched his uncle play, my nephew asked, “Can you come and watch me play? At my arena?” “Of course I will.” He was delighted. Then he presented me with a Tupperware of cookies, which I promised to share with my team. The referee, noticing the children, stopped at the stands on his way off the ice and mentioned that he had just gotten his daughter into Mites hockey on the South Shore, and that it was great to expose children to the sport at that age. He had a Quebecois accent and his ref’s jersey was adorned with many different patches, like a boy scout’s uniform. He gave a puck to my nephews, which ignited fireworks in their eyes as he proceeded on to the referee dressing rooms beyond.

St. Remi waved goodbye to his wife Tamara as she left, pushing their daughter’s stroller. St. Remi and I were the last team members who had stayed talking in the stands, and when we arrived the changing room was in a state of half undress. Everyone was talking loudly inside, regaling each other with replays. Cherry Baum smiles filled the room. St. Remi and I trampled over open bags to our places and sat down. And then the self-congratulations amongst teammates began: “What a terrific game.” “You played like an animal!” “You’ve improved so much from last year.” Cookies were passed around the room. Kenji and St. Remi took two because they

wanted to bring some to Gemma, and they were given a pass²⁶. Adam also took two, without an assist²⁷. Kenji and Josh were congratulated on their amazing one-timer play, something that when executed properly is aesthetically pleasing to the observer, sensuously pleasing to the participants. Kristy, even though she was happy with her puck control that night, explained in her analytical style, “I couldn’t do anything tonight. I wasn’t able to make or receive any passes.” She showed me how she would present herself to receive a pass on her stick. “It doesn’t help when a pass is over here,” she said, pointing to the space between her stick and her feet, what would be called a pass in the feet, or a short pass. A short pass can be difficult and uncomfortable to receive properly while maintaining skating speed. Kristy had changed stick length after successfully using a friend’s shorter stick, but thought after her performance in the game that perhaps her stick was too short. A small change of stick had caused a big change in feeling.

Dane talked about how much he had enjoyed watching Carey Price²⁸ in the Olympics. With a twinkle in his eye and a jump in his step he left the room quickly. He had had a good game and now, on a high, he was going out with his wife for her birthday. Sometimes nothing can make a player happier than playing a good game in front of those he or she loves.

* * *

A week earlier, an hour before a game, Dane and I had talked together in a nearby café. Dane had sat with his body very tightly together on his bar stool, arms crossed and with an air of seriousness. Although he knew me from hockey we had never met outside that context and it was an unfamiliar encounter. He had seemed enthusiastic about talking with me when we had discussed it in the dressing room the previous week; however, his hunched shoulders and stiff demeanor told a different story. After we talked for a while his posture relaxed, his arms became animated, and he reverted to the smiling Dane I knew from hockey.

Dane is a 44-year-old man of medium height and build. He has salt and pepper hair that he sometimes dyes a blondish tinge, and a young face, which is usually tanned. Dane is a very

²⁶ The taking of extra cookies for Gemma was condoned.

²⁷ Adam ate two cookies without help (and without asking).

²⁸ Carey Price was the goaltender for the Montreal Canadiens. He was drafted in 2005 and was playing with them as of the completion of this thesis in 2015.

casual guy, with a slender gait, but a solid upper frame. On that Saturday late noon in the spring of 2014 when we met, he was dressed in a polo shirt and jeans and in the locker room he would dress much the same, usually sporting a hat or jacket of the Miami Dolphins: his favorite NFL franchise.

He is married, and is a father of two girls. His daughters play soccer and he speaks about them with great pride in his voice. He smiles and laughs easily when he speaks of his wife. She can be seen in the stands occasionally, usually during the playoffs, looking on as her husband and his band of merry mates glide across the frozen indoor pond. Once, after a game in which she had graced us with her presence in those thoughtlessly designed, hemorrhoid-inducing excuses for seats in the stands of the Consortium, Dane had told me that “Jeter really likes my wife, I mean really, he loves her!” and had laughed.

When Dane spoke about his job as a nurse he did so with humility. But he was very generous in his compliments about my fascination with anthropology, and he said with a spark in his eyes that he had wanted to be a journalist but had never finished his journalism degree at university because he had to attend to an ailing family member. He became quiet and withdrawn when he said this. Dane had children at a young age and because of the time required to rear and raise his first daughter, he had a very busy schedule.

Jordie: You have just the one daughter?

Dane: I have a 19 year old too. She’s involved in soccer and she can skate, but never got her into hockey. I have to be honest, when you are playing Consortium or...it’s a big commitment and when you have a kid in hockey weekends...we can see through our teammate Paul, he can miss a lot of games and that has a relation to that. You’re with...you have to be there for your kid and sports. I’m kind of dreading the hockey. I am looking forward to it, but I know the commitment it’s going to take. Fortunately I still like playing. Missing games bothers me immensely. Usually it’s in the morning, so... we’re playing at 4. We’re at 4, so I guess for EM, he said he’s out. Probably something with that. That’s life, I mean...

J: So how does hockey fit into your life, your job, family commitments and stuff like that?

D: It’s tough, ya know, but I have an understanding wife. She says, “I would rather you go and play hockey than be hanging out at the bar or something with your friends.” I know it’s important, she knows it’s important. She recognizes physical activity’s important, she’s very understanding, ya know, just “don’t get

hurt.” Ya know, it’s pretty smooth. I don’t play in the summer, I had to give that up due to the soccer with the family, it’s too much. Both daughters are pretty much intercity, elite level, so...so it’s almost a 4-night-a-week commitment. Playing hockey is hard, very hard. So I give up my summer. I used to play 3 on 3 all the time but... So now it’s Bulls and Cyclones [Dane plays on both teams], September to May...

J: Do you do any other activities besides hockey?

D: I used to golf. But you know summer is really, ya know, taking up a lot of my time. I coach soccer. Ya, I coach. O my gosh. Practices, it’s, ya know, 4 nights a week, so it’s... Now my eldest has her license so it should be better. She plays for Montreal University²⁹ right now. She’s in Child Studies, she wants to be a child psychologist, or social worker.

Later...

J: What are the moments you remember in hockey through the years?

D: Hockey moments would be meeting you guys, meeting great guys, like yourself. Lots of great friends, even from my early days, they still ask, “You remember that?”

J: Do you still have friends like that? Or is it more just playing hockey?

D: Ya, pretty much...it’s not as social as much... You know it’s hard with the family. My wife is Italian, just her side. She has brothers and sisters. We even say sometimes, “We have no friends, it’s just your family.” So in fact they are at my house right now. Oh my god.

The Demands of the Game

Hockey players lead very busy and full lives, they have jobs, families, friends, and they participate in a variety of activities apart from amateur hockey. This may seem like a truism because most adult Canadians lead very busy lives. However, it is important to state here because carving out time for hockey can be challenging.

Ice time is not the only consideration. Like individuals who participate in any leisure or sports activity, hockey players must factor in extra time for transportation, conversation, meals and drinks (sports-related and social), and other factors. Many players on the Hustlers voiced weekly displeasure at having to play late Sunday night games in an arena that was a twenty-

²⁹ Pseudonym for a University.

minute drive from their homes, because either they could not enjoy a beer and “hang out” with their friends after the game or they would be exhausted at the beginning of the week, with little chance of “catching up” on their sleep. Players on the Bulls and Cyclones that had families usually crammed their games in between many other competing social and familial activities, leaving little time for socializing.

Family

Players spoke of family as being important. They were involved with their children and partners, and were invested in the lives of their family members. Similarly, players who managed to sustain their involvement in an amateur hockey team had families that understood and respected how important hockey was to them.

If there is one thing that the players on my three teams emphasized it was how amazing their partners were in providing them with the free time each week to go out and play hockey. And, recognizing this, they spoke of how they always tried to return the favor in kind by providing free time for their partners to participate in outside activities as well. EM spoke very enthusiastically of his wife’s workout regime and her participation in fitness competitions, Jean’s Facebook is full of pictures of him and his partner playing volleyball together, and St. Remi said that even though his wife did not have an activity per se he tried to give her the opportunity for free time just to relax from life’s stresses.

Paul showed his dedication to the Bulls when his wife was almost due to deliver a baby. He brought a pager to the bench so that he could play, but get to the hospital in time for the baby’s birth. Many times the events in one’s life cannot be simply penciled into a schedule: they are forced to fit, negotiated, and settled by compromise among family members.

These moments in time, especially the birth of a child or entry into marriage, are vital conjunctures (Johnson-Hanks) in one’s life course that can alter social roles and responsibilities in an instant. They are times that mark an individual’s growth through the life course. As I have previously alluded to, it is less the age of an individual that alters their life course and more specifically the new roles and responsibilities they take on that change how much time they have and what they can do. This is evident in contrasting Daric, who is 31, but has four children and had to quit hockey, and Yatesy, who is almost 40, but is single, without children, and plays hockey at least twice a week. The players on my teams have all learned to balance hockey with

family, but next year may well bring a new life-changing event such as a new child, a new relationship, or a new job. At any moment the very precarious tower of their lives can come toppling down, but for the moment they make it work. Individuals are required to constantly negotiate the nature of their participation in hockey so as to allow for everyday life to continue smoothly through the course of these changes.

Time Negotiation

One night after a game we had won 1–0 over our rivals, the Ace Holes, a number of the Bulls came together to have a few beers in the arena parking lot, and then went to a local bar lounge to celebrate Jeter's 38th birthday. Donnie and I had a chance to talk a little bit about scheduling and how he has continued to play hockey at 55 years old. He told me how his wife and he work out their schedules at home:

Donnie: "She understands how important hockey is to me, so she makes sure that we can fit it into our schedule. But ya, if it wasn't a scheduled game, like I have hockey on Thursday or Saturday at 7 o'clock, I wouldn't be able to play. But since I know ahead of time it's like, I have hockey then, so we'll plan the other stuff around it."

Jordie: "So if it was like shinny hockey you think it wouldn't work? Just getting together with some guys to play?"

D: "Ya right, like we're gonna get everyone together at an outdoor rink at the same time [laughs]. There's no way twenty guys are gonna get that together. No, my wife let's me play because it's scheduled. Like look, I gotta play, it's on the schedule. If it wasn't, no way."

Donnie understood and explained to me in no uncertain terms that partners would be much more accepting of hockey playing if games were organized, scheduled ahead of time, and required commitment from their significant other.

All the players I interviewed and/or with whom I played, said that they loved hockey; however, they ranked hockey as less important than work, family, and other social commitments. So hockey must be fitted around a sometimes overflowing schedule.

The level of an individual's participation and commitment is affected less by his age than by his changing social roles and responsibilities. As players acquire more important and

demanding employment, or marry and have children, they have less flexibility in undertaking, and fulfilling their commitment to, a full series of games. The number and complexity of players' commitments, however, do generally increase with age. Through the life course, these changes affect players' continuity in participation in hockey, if changes are too drastic they can lead to rupture, which constitutes quitting hockey.

Of the players I interviewed, the younger ones had fewer commitments to attend to, or their commitments were not as time consuming and non-negotiable, including work and social endeavors. Bohemyth, who was 27 at the time of our season together, said, "Nothing will keep me from playing." Gotti (28), captain of the Hustlers, had his first child during that same season, a boy named Tyler, and he was beginning to understand that family commitments were going to place pressure on his membership in the team, and that he might be looking for different things in hockey. By the end of the season, however, he was no longer complaining of being tired from a lack of sleep, and was beginning to improve his ability to organize his time. Daric, who was 31 during the 2013-14 season, was an exception to his teammates in that he already had four children. The following year, however, he would not return to play with the Hustlers, and I gathered from the joking amongst his former teammates, that he had dropped out to spend more time with his children.

Most of the players who were in their 30s and 40s when I met them had more strict time commitments, including long-term relationships, marriages, young children, broadening social requirements, and careers. Yatesy, who was 39 at the time of our interview, having neither wife nor children, was able to play as much hockey as he pleased because it did not interfere with his job, which was his only primary commitment outside of hockey. St. Remi, on the other hand, who was 35, had a wife and young daughter, and was expecting another child soon, had to quit playing in a Monday Night League when his wife gave birth to their first child, Gemma. Yatesy continued to play years after St. Remi had quit that league, and evidently had no qualms about reminding St. Remi that he was "getting old" with this fact, though ironically (which I am sure was not lost on either of them) Yatesy was four years older than him.

Players who are 45 years and older had careers, large families, and many other social commitments. Hockey became for them a weekly indulgence, which required considerable negotiation of time and participation. These people described their incredibly busy lives week after week in the dressing room: children's birthday parties, anniversaries, activities, piano

lessons, skating practices, family dinners, delayed work projects, deadlines, and so on. And, every week they would remind me and the other younger players that “It’ll happen to you” as Paul would so eloquently put it. Those still playing league hockey at this point in their lives had evidently become experts in negotiating their time and energy.

Hockey was very important to those I talked with over the course of the season, and on all three teams each player asserted without hesitation that they loved hockey. However, each also recognized that hockey was not the totality of their life and that they had a variety of competing priorities. The younger players, such as the Hustlers, considered hockey of central importance to their lives and said they would refuse to give it up under any circumstances, unlike the players on the Cyclones and Bulls, who had a much higher average age and were much more commonly married with children.

Work

Team members were construction workers, teachers, lawyers, day-traders, financial consultants, engineers, thespians, students, nurses, an osteopath, a club bouncer and so on. Work for all was a necessity of life that took precedence over hockey, although sometimes it was negotiable, such as when Sean, a teacher, left work early for a game, or when players called in sick to work so that they could play. More common, however, were the times that players were said to have “bailed” on a game because they had work commitments. Most teammates accepted these developments without question because they were all in similar situations.

Work was often a topic of discussion in the dressing room and in the interviews I conducted. Very few players spoke with passion about their work, preferring instead to talk about their social or leisure lives, or family. Work was described as the antithesis of play, something that limited the practice of sport and had to be considered in managing time and energy on game nights.

As a general rule, as the age of the players increased, so did their commitment to their jobs. Many of the older players, such as Paul and Don, understood that they needed to remain employed because they had a family that depended on their income for survival and that, at a certain age, finding new employment is not a pleasant idea, nor is it always a viable one.

Some players, in fact, had been forced to quit hockey altogether due to the pressures of work, or a move for reasons of employment. Palmer, who had just finished his degree, moved to

Alberta near the end of the 2013-14 season to be a paramedic and was unable to continue to play with the Bulls, though he would fly into Montreal to see his family and friends, and would play occasionally. Daren had to quit the Hustlers at the end of the 2013-14 season to live on the West Coast to follow his dream of becoming a professional volleyball player.

The bottom line is that amateur hockey is a leisure pursuit; participation is not financially lucrative. Instead, hockey demands time, money, and energy. As players say, “I pay to play, I’m not paid to play.” Work must take priority.

Sociality in Hockey:

“Win or Lose, We still Booze” – Hustlers St. Patrick’s Day 2014 (March 16th)

On Saturday March 8th 2015, Bohemyth had a house party and invited all the Hustlers over.

There were plenty of drinking and other activities going on that night, which lasted into the early morning when the police showed up to shut the party down. Fortunately for Bohemyth, and the merry men and women who made it to the end of the festivities, he lived above a local Irish pub and therefore noise was an acceptable occurrence on any given night—but not at 7 a.m. when the authorities arrived demanding the music be turned off, and those remaining dispersed. Bohemyth found this all very amusing as he recounted the story to his fellow teammates before the game the day afterwards: “I literally went to bed at eight this morning and woke up right before the game!” Many others chimed in voicing similar experiences. Almost everyone was bleary-eyed and hung over. Apparently, the previous day someone’s wife had brought cookies to the party, which had given most of the team diarrhea. TJ and Eli were both victims and had to urgently make use of the facilities many times, which is no easy task for a player who is trying to get into his equipment and then play a game of hockey. No one was one hundred percent: they were still feeling the effects of some of the party favors. Yet conversation was light and playful; many were smiling and laughing. No one was being too serious about the game to come. I was sitting next to Bohemyth, across from TJ who was singing made-up English shanties and jigs about the Hustlers hockey team, with lyrics that were as lewd as he could devise. We had no lock for our room that night, so we put our valuables (such as keys, wallets, cell phones) in a helmet bag to store at our bench. We piled out into the hall, just in time to wait for the Zamboni to finish its

turns. We seemed ready, but we were not. We looked out of sync from the very beginning of our warm-up. Passes were missing their mark and drifting down to our opponent's end. Our skating and shooting were erratic and disorganized. It appeared as though each of us was in his own bubble and looking down at the ice instead of up at the action, as he should have been.

The game did not see much improvement, and we ended up losing 4-0. Each goal was off some sort of weird bounce, and our party-stricken forwards were missing passes, turning over the puck, and not getting quality chances. On the bench the guys were “chirping”³⁰ each other, yelling about shift length and who should be doing what, and getting frustrated with each other. We were loud enough that anyone in the arena would have heard the dissent. The opponents expanded their lead and this led to more penalties born of our team's frustration and lack of composure, and increased yapping. TJ, because he was such a nice guy on the ice, even got invited to join the other team by one of their players. Between periods at the bench players were pointing fingers at each other and blaming each other for bad plays. Their faces looked white and sickly, they had red eyes and the bags underneath to match. We couldn't rally. In the remaining minutes of the game, down by too many goals to come back, we got “chippy.”³¹ Sticks started finding ribs, and our players were pushing and shoving more in the corners, as we played with desperation, trying to crack the other goalie's shutout. With only a couple of minutes left to play, the bench had quieted down and players gazed forlornly across the immense visual distance of the white ice ahead of them, not following the play, essentially all thinking what Eli had said to me before one of the last face-offs: “I can't wait for this game to be over.” No one was able to conceal their displeasure with the game. For the Hustlers, who had just come off a nine-game winning streak, it was a bad loss.

We filled the room with apologies as we all tumbled back into our spots, kicking bags out of the way and throwing sweaty leather gloves onto the floor. “You can tell everyone is coming down off of drugs 'cause we're all apologizing,” observed TJ, who was still “shitting himself”, as he put it. “We gotta play more heads-up hockey. This is a team we could have easily beat,” said Gotti frankly to his troops. “I felt like every shift I did nothing,” said Bohemyth regretfully. “Larivière was the only one in position and got a quality shot,” offered Telli. “We maybe had two good shots all game!” Bohemyth was wincing and holding his side. “I can't believe my

³⁰ “Chirping” refers to verbally antagonizing.

³¹ Refers to when the play gets more physical and exchanges of stick checks a little more frequent.

hip hurts. What, am I getting old?” But a few weeks prior he had laughed at an opponent who had called him an “old man” during a heated on ice skirmish.

Gotti and a few others shared a few additional beers in the parking lot outside after many of the team had already departed. Gotti was talking about his social life and family: “Ya, we’re trying to have a second, but wait if you can, ’cause once you do it’s all over. It changes things.” He was worried about the following week’s game, as were many others. “We’re in trouble next week. It’s St. Patty’s Day... I will try to get our game cancelled.” He mused that if he couldn’t, “We should get designated drivers and have a Hustlers’ drunk game [He laughed his distinct laugh]. We should get a Hummer limo and all show up together.” The game was not cancelled...

St. Patrick’s Day Game

We played the Oilers that night at the Martin Lapointe Arena at 21:00 hrs. It had been a sunny day, as many dreadful St. Patty’s Days have been. Good weather meant the “church” would be filled, and the team would be on full parade. Our changing room smelled not simply of stinking hockey equipment, but of Vick’s Vapo-Rub, fresh skunky marijuana, booze, beer, and the like. The Hustlers’ faces were all brightly haggard, not hung over, but wide-awake drunk—“the worst kind of drunk.” They could easily be heard down the hall, laughing and joking, and any teammate entering the door was welcomed with cheers. LaRivière stooped through the door, eyes bright red, lugging his bag half-backwards, and swaying. “Oh man, I am drunk!” he declared, easing himself into a spot. Bohemyth and Albert burst into the room wearing green and white Irish-themed hats and four-leaf clover, green-tinted sunglasses. They had just come from the Parade, where they had been toasting festively. They were jumping up and down and getting rowdy, and everyone was cheering on the spectacle, hooting and hollering. Some were drinking beers. Bohemyth was upset about an incident that had taken place at the parade and said someone would be getting beat up that night. A “D-man”³² I knew from the local skate shop was with us, subbing for someone who could not make it to the game: “I just got off the couch now. I was watching the Habs and having a couple beers. I’m always the guy they call last minute to sub. The score was 2-0 Habs, but it’s Tokarski in nets [He looked at me knowingly].”

TJ showed up late. He was wearing a tight polo shirt, as usual, and sported a beaming smile: “I just finished the home show. It’s like the biggest time of the year for me. Now I’m done

³² A “D-man” is hockey parlance for a defenseman.

for like the rest of the year. I don't have to do shi-it!" Then, laughing, he looked around: "This is the first time I'm the only one who's not drunk."

When we got out on the ice everyone performed reasonably well in their warm-up routines, and their passes were hitting the mark. Gotti went over to the refs and said, "Give us a chance, guys, we're hammered." They all laughed together and we started collecting our warm-up pucks in the bucket. Gotti told us, "Ok, guys, the game plan basically is to survive this game."

The puck drops. Their centreman wins the faceoff. Moving the puck forward, he dekes once, he dekes twice, he dekes three times, and passing both defencemen. When he's in the clear, he dekes the goalie, he goes backhand, and lifts the puck high into the net. All in less than six seconds. This moment was an omen of things to come. (fieldnotes)

Later Gotti told me, "That may have been the fastest goal ever scored in the league." The opposing team scored two more goals within a few minutes. The first period ended 5-1. The Hustlers were not doing their name justice. We looked as though we were not moving at all. We lost every battle for the puck, and some players were having trouble even skating in their condition. Bohemyth had a bout of about 30 seconds in which he lost the ability to skate. The bench looked on and laughed as he tried time after time to regain his balance, but failed to right himself. He was flailing like a fish out of water. Some onlookers thought that maybe he had his skate guards on or had tape stuck under his skate. Eventually, he clambered onto the bench for a change. Both he and Albert eventually got ejected from the game for general nonsense, appearing later rink-side wearing their lower body equipment but shirtless, drinking beers and cheering on their team regardless of their dismal performance.

We played so poorly that eventually many of the players simply started to chat casually with the Oilers and the intensity of our play completely disintegrated. TJ had one great goal in which he went "end-to-end"³³ with the puck and scored on a nifty backhand over the shoulder of the goalie, but aside from that one redeeming moment we did not play nice hockey that day. "That's what happens when I'm the only one sober," TJ said with delight after the game.

³³ When a player carries the puck from one end of the ice to the other and scores. Also referred to as "coast-to-coast".

“I can’t wait for this game to end,” Eli said, uttering exactly the same words as he had the week before. We had lost 10-2, in a game that the ref had jokingly said to us, “You would have lost 35-0 if it wasn’t for your goalie.” As if that was any consolation.

After the game nobody was really upset or complaining about the game, but no one stuck around for very long. Many of us seemed confused and out of sorts, turning in circles many times looking for pieces of equipment. Bohemyth hung around longer than usual, and we discussed his girlfriend and the parade. TJ also took his time, talked with me about the home show, and what it was he did in his job.

The sub D-man and I finished the last of the beers in the parking lot before heading home ourselves. He said, “Call me any time to play. That way I can get out of dinner with my in-laws.” Both of us laughed, said our goodbyes, and went our separate ways.

The following night I was supposed to play in the “MNL”³⁴. I called and cancelled. I was not in the mood to play any more hockey that week.

“Win or lose, we still booze. Hustlers hockey baby.” – Albert, after the game.

Sociality in Hockey

There is a social aspect to amateur hockey leagues that players and all insiders know well: the partying, drinking, and letting loose that takes place mainly after, but occasionally before and during, amateur hockey games. This aspect of amateur hockey ranges from the more tranquil practices of enjoying a well deserved post-game beer in an attempt to “replenish electrolytes” as one player put it, to those that border on the absurd and more closely resemble an all-night stag party. The latter variety can include large quantities of beer and liquor, as well as illegal drugs (specifically marijuana), and the occasional trip to the local strip club (I have heard this aspect discussed, but I never observed the practice). In most cases, however, players indulge in a beer or two to decompress after the large adrenaline rush of the game and let the body relax. There is no beer as sweet as the one after a well-played game.

With or without drinking, socializing is a major component in amateur hockey. Players have the chance to talk in the room, on the bench and often after the game in the parking lot. And, it is one of the aspects of amateur hockey many players enjoy. Although a hockey team may be started by a group of close friends, over time, as people quit or are asked to leave, others

³⁴ Monday Night League (MNL), an amateur hockey beer league.

come in as substitutes, or because of life changes start to drift away from their old friends, the hockey team changes into a loose association of people who meet one another only once a week, to share in a game they all love. These relationships are definable as “hockey friendships” and they usually do not extend outside of the arena walls, however this is not always the case and sometimes budding friendships find their origin in amateur leagues. Players will usually refer to a teammate in casual conversation as a “hockey buddy”. However, this particular type of social group, physically intense, working hard together to achieve a common goal, and outside of the constraints of the individual’s “real” life, allows for a high-spirited freedom that many of the players can find nowhere else.

The Locker Room

The hockey locker room is not merely somewhere to suit up; it is a place where hockey players talk. For many of these players, there is no other place in their lives where they can speak so frankly or without encountering the censoriousness of others. Hockey rooms are particularly noisy. Pockets of conversations explode into uproarious laughter, and even those keeping to themselves and focusing on getting prepared are not free from being bombarded with questions, nor is it particularly easy to *not* overhear conversations. There is little to no privacy in the hockey locker room, so personal issues that are not meant to be public knowledge are rarely raised. Any information that is aired in a hockey locker room is open to the entire team, but there is an unwritten rule that all that information stays within the context of the room, amongst the members of the team.

There is also room for everyone: within the locker room, to greater or lesser degree, every player has a say in what is discussed and what is tolerated or not as a topic of discussion. More than that, it is a place where “everything and anything goes”. Adults can turn into pranksters, esteemed professors, philosophers, and/or worldly on any given subject of discourse. They can be silly, talk like juveniles, business people, or can express their feelings as heartfelt parents.

Another very important aspect of the locker room dynamic: nobody wants the mood to become too serious. I have never seen an adult amateur hockey player cry, but I have seen every player grin at least, and I am sure that most have laughed almost uncontrollably at one point or another. On the Cyclones, the Bulls and the Hustlers it is a common feature of any locker room

conversation, given a rousing night, that half the room will be convulsed in giggles. Players tell jokes like a group of comedians on stage trying to outdo one another. The vast majority of jokes are ageist and sexist, though I have never heard any racist jokes.

The Bench

Before a game, Dane and I began talking about some of the dynamics of communication during the game, and how players interact with each other on the bench during the game:

Dane: “Ya there is. I have to be like a policeman sometimes. Hahaha. Between a few teammates, especially on the Bulls, one of them is our defence partner, who maybe doesn't like one of our forwards. I always have to try and keep them calm and diffuse the situations. Little things like that and we now how our team runs too. We have some guys who are taking 5-minute shifts, try and diffuse that! Sometimes I feel like a father, I think Paul is the same way. We are the elder guys. And you got to kind of... You don't want it deteriorating to the point where guys are fighting and arguing and for the most part, I think it's a positive ya know experience. And for the weaker players it's... ya but you miss a lot of dynamics.”

Me: “Does it make a difference when I communicate with you guys on the bench?”

Dane: “Oh ya definitely. No no no. I think we hear more than people say. We say, oh we can't hear, but even from the bench sometimes you can hear little things. I think it's huge, especially for a goalie. We can be screening you or not covering somebody. Sometimes we need a little look up. But ughh, overall it's positive. The bench is funny, we laugh at each other, if you can laugh at yourself then that's half the battle. I definitely laugh at myself. I mean we are all going to make mistakes, they make mistakes in the NHL so... you know, you just gotta... I like to win though. Oh ya.”

This small conversation is quite telling of the dynamics that exist between players and how they interact on the bench. Dane here views himself and some of the more senior players, such as Paul, as being responsible for the atmosphere on the bench, players' shift lengths, and how some players interact. He describes it jokingly as policing. However, it is true that some effort is required to provide all players on a team with their desired hockey experience. Among other conflicting reasons, players come to games to play for enjoyment or to make the score, to have social fun or to win, or to stay on the ice as long as possible. Accommodating all these desires can require some intervention on the part of elder players, as Dane so clearly explains. The

positive experience of most on any given night is no accident; players understand that each person is there for some specific and individual reason(s), and there is a conscious effort to make it fun for all.

As for the Hustlers, who are all relatively the same age, and thus do not have senior players, the responsibility of making sure players are conducting themselves properly on the bench falls to Gotti, the captain. There have been incidents when players got into “chirping” arguments amongst themselves, and Gotti could be heard trying to calm everyone down and get his players to control their tempers.

On one occasion EM and I had the chance to talk about the social atmosphere of the Cyclones:

Me: “So you're going to continue to play?”

EM: “Well ya, that's what I like now, playing with you guys, the Cyclones, cause it's the same guys all the time and you kinda get comfortable I guess, I don't know. It's one of the best seasons I had in a long time. We had a couple other games where we had a.... [*trails off*]. But you know you're asking me also about what I like about the sport now. You know now the way I am in the dressing room I like to be around guys that joke, that's why I'm always interested in what you and Nat and Sean, and you and St. Remi, say. It's always nonsense, but it's like it's relaxed, it's uhhh...”

I recounted to EM the conversation that the Bulls had had before one of our games. I told him how it all started when St. Remi began to talk about his work as a manager of an aeronautical engineering team in a research and development company, and how he had been tasked with hiring a new secretary earlier that day. He joked that he had mentioned to one applicant that he was playing hockey later that day and she was very surprised because she thought he was sixty years old. St. Remi is 35. The room was howling and hollering at his story because age and its physical appearance are always a source of humor among the Bulls, especially since there is such a large age difference between the youngest and oldest players. The banter veered into a discussion about dating women, and one of the players proposed the rule that the youngest woman a man could date should be half his age, plus seven. Thus, a 40-year-old man could date a woman no younger than 27 years old. Dating anyone younger would be socially unacceptable. EM laughed with me as I described that conversation in the dressing room. So I asked him if he

felt there was a difference between how people socialized in hockey versus other sports and activities.

EM: “You know I play hockey and soccer. We never scream at each other in hockey. But in soccer, I been playing with these guys a long time and we scream at each other on the field. Sometimes they like scream at you when you make a mistake. I'm pretty good in soccer, so I will not usually get screamed at, but even me I'll yell at some of the other players on my own team for some reason—I don't know why. But in hockey I couldn't do that. I couldn't do that, not even to Donnie. He's another guy, even just on the...you don't see it on the bench, but we're joking around sometimes, it's cool, I like that.”

Me: “What is the dynamic on the bench?”

EM: “Oh man, it's so relaxed. People pick on St. Remi, they make fun of the shot he misses, or Nat. Nat, Sean, St. Remi—those are the guys that usually talk on the bench. Sometimes I'll just add oil to the fire... It's like I really like having the Lock brothers, because they bring something else to the team. They joke around a lot, and you know a guy like Bill, who is pretty serious, and before the Locks joined the team, Bill was really just to himself, huh. I remember he brought one of his friends—he was a bit of an asshole you know, he would take long shifts and hog the puck—and they would play together, and I would remember, fuck and then he...I think it was Dale or St. Remi and he told them off. It was one of the players. I don't know what happened—I just remember him getting mad at them. And I just remember thinking, “Man what happened?!” That's never happened before. But the Lock brothers kinda changed that—with the clapping and everything. He jokes with them now. I never saw him joke before the Lock brothers joined the team.”

Joking about Age

The older people who play amateur hockey are the first to joke about their age and the aging process with their younger teammates. The hockey players I have observed have no problem laughing at themselves, their mistakes on the ice, and their physical attributes. Some players joke about their beer gut, some about how they skate on their ankles, and many about their increasing age. There are no finer examples of this tendency than Paul and Donnie, and though other older players on the Bulls may joke about their age, none do it as consistently or as eloquently as these two 50-year olds.

It is not uncommon to hear Paul speak about how the ladies love his platinum blond hair, even though it would be more accurately described as an un-dyed white with some grey. His flair for the comedic makes it hilarious. He also likes to joke about how much Viagra he now uses and how much pornography he watches, his favorite Internet site being Xhamster. Paul is a very wise older man, in my opinion: he keeps up the spirit of the team with his extreme sense of humor, but when things are serious you can definitely see his demeanor change. Paul has described his very busy everyday life to me. I believe he uses his humour in the dressing room as a way to divert attention from the seriousness of life and just unwind with his hockey friends.

Donnie is very similar in this respect and, as the other only remaining founding member of the Bulls, has a sense of humor almost identical to Paul's own. When Paul was speaking to Donnie about his doctoral thesis, I could tell that Donnie had a very serious side to him too, but when he plays hockey all that is on hold. Donnie's jokes tend to be crude; he is definitely the contradiction to the rule that older hockey players are more mature.

Donnie cannot skate very well for this level of hockey, and does not score many goals, but he is funny, light-hearted, and generally just a good guy. He always speaks well of others and knows that sometimes in tight games he has to sit out a few shifts to make room for stronger players to be on the ice. Everyone who knows Donnie is always impressed that he continues to play.³⁵ The Bulls feel that they would not be the same team without Donnie, and regardless of his comparative lack of skill we all laugh after every game about how we seem to somehow squeak out wins against much younger, faster, and more talented teams. Sometimes this forces Paul to remind us: "Ok boys we're getting too far ahead in the standings. We have to lose the next few games so the other teams don't see us coming." Despite including older and weaker players, in the last three years the Bulls have gone to the finals twice, both times giving the other team a "run for their money". The Bulls are the epitome of the "underdog": every year we figure we will only win a handful of games and have no chance at the cup, and every year we find ourselves a goal away from winning it all.

The Hustlers, a much younger team, do not joke about age very much. Instead, on occasion when our opponents have called players on the Hustlers old during the game, my teammates have laughed at the fact that they were called old at all, or even taken offense. Using

³⁵ Donnie was 55 at the time of my fieldwork.

ageist derogatory insults can be a form of “chirping”, but it is very ineffectual. Older players do not care and laugh it off, and younger players think their opponents are acting stupidly.

Care

Amateur league teams and teammates support each other, they back each other up, and they definitely care about each other. There may be the occasional dispute amongst hockey friends, as there is with all relationships. However, most differences are put aside when it comes time to face off against an opponent on the ice. Players also care about each other’s personal lives and will inquire about topics they have previously discussed. Many times players will ask about a hockey friend’s status in the room if they are absent.

It is the nature of hockey itself that encourages supporting a teammate. When a player gets the puck and starts streaking up the ice, his teammates are expected to follow him and position themselves to receive a pass, or pick up the loose puck if it is lost. If a defenceman moves the puck up the ice and moves out of his defensive position a forward should drop back to that spot and back him up. Players are viewed poorly if they play a selfish game, or try to play an individual style of game. Players complain about teammates who take shifts that are too long, do not pass the puck, or do not “back check”³⁶, more often than they ever comment on a poor play. Players care about the success of the team, and the success of the team is dependent on individuals supporting each other.

Old Teaching Young

The lives of the players on the three teams changed over time and they described these changes to their teammates in relation to participation in hockey, in a way that they could relate to and understand. It is how players communicate about life to each other, through the shared experience of living life with hockey. It is the ability to preserve some aspect of themselves through all the years. Hockey is a vehicle for communication between men and women about how hockey is part of life and how life changes. The older players are giving implicit instructions to younger players on how to fit hockey into their lives. Older players are explaining, in jest, how to integrate hockey into the life course. For the amateur players in

³⁶ “Back checking” is when a forward player skates back to the defensive zone to track down the opponents with possession of the puck

Montréal there is a knowledge that exists on how to live a hockey life, passed down through the generations in the dressing room.

“See you next year?”: Continuity & Change on a Hockey Team

An adult amateur hockey team survives through the commitment of its players over the years. If players choose to join another team or quit hockey altogether, teams have to find “regular” replacements, and because every team is different, and potential players also look for a variety of characteristics in their choice of what team to play for, it can be an arduous task. Sometimes there is little choice involved, but for many players, especially the more talented ones, there are always teams that would welcome them. Sometimes knowing the right person can get you into a team, and sometimes your choice of team is simply serendipitous.

The three teams that I played with throughout the 2013-14 season had been together for varying lengths of time. The Hustlers, the most recently formed of the three teams, had played together for two years and was a team composed largely of the players that founded it. The Cyclones, on the other hand, had been a team for almost two decades and there were only two original members who still played, one being Yatesy. And finally, the Bulls were a team that had been around for almost three decades and similarly had only two original players, Donnie and Paul. What is of interest is that each of the teams had their own distinct, although implicit, reasons for playing hockey, and their own distinct atmosphere in the room. This “team personality” shows clearly in their choice of participants, the course of their history, and their game style.

The Cyclones are a team that is interested in competition. Those who play on the team and have remained members are concerned with winning games. The other teams are not as concerned with winning: it occupies far less of their conversation time and is less of a factor in their relationships. Most of the players on the Cyclones are not close friends; they do not participate in many extra-hockey social activities together. They meet once a week to play hockey competitively and win.

The Bulls are a team with an ethos of fun and inclusive participation. They like to win, but the result is far less important to them than enjoying the action. Sociality in the room, on the bench and on the ice is geared towards having fun and playing well together. Like all hockey players the Bull team members can sometimes become emotional and competitive, and there are

individual players who are competitive; but for most of the season players focus on enjoying themselves. In the locker room, where the Cyclones would talk about stats and the game, Bulls would joke about everyday life and a variety of subjects.

The Hustlers are the most interesting case looking towards the future. The team is the youngest of the three, with the youngest average age and the highest number of original members. The team ethos is unclear, and I believe that this lack of a collective team identity explains much of the arguing and disagreements that take place almost on a weekly basis. The players are closely connected socially; however, good friends do not always make a harmonious and successful team. Some players are there to have a good time, some are there just to “get in a good skate”, others are there foremost to win. Gotti, the team manager, coach, captain, and founder, had been working hard to craft a team ethos that melded the drives and motivations of as many of his teammates as possible, while simultaneously trying to create a team that he was proud of. The reason why it had been difficult to solidify this elusive team ethos was because not all of these separate aims could equally be met. The problem led to conflict on the team.

The best players are not always the best people to have in the locker room, and the people in the locker room with the highest social capital sometimes cannot skate. There are many degrees of sociability and skill that exist within a single hockey team, but team cohesion rests on those aspects being in some degree of equilibrium. The reasons why people want to play and how they play have to be similar for a team to develop an identity. Without that there is usually internal conflict or change. This can come in the form of players being “kicked off” teams, or fights breaking out between teammates on the bench and in the room. Over the years a team is forged by the commitment of its members to their ethos and the process renews itself every year with the opening of the new season. All players discuss their decision to return to the team in their final end-of-season games together. Here is the story of how the season ended for the three teams I played with and how the players of each team left before the summer break.

Three Final Acts

Hustlers

March 30th, 2015

The room was lively with idle conversation. The guys were pumping each other up by talking about how they were going to have a good game. It was the first game of the playoffs and we had

to win two games to go to the finals. Even though we had struggled in the second half of the season starting the week before the St. Patrick's Day debacle, we had won our last game and were excited about competing in the playoffs. After all, we had gone on a nine-game winning streak before the "Christmas break" and after that we were very confident, even though we had moved up two divisions that season (from division 8 to 6) and the competition was far stiffer than before. We also had an extra-full squad: all the players had shown up for that game and we had a surplus of players on the bench. Terrence was there, even though he had missed almost all our games due to work commitments and a predilection for partying. (He had even once showed up to play with a woman and ended up drinking with her in the stands and going out to party somewhere, having not played at all.) All counted, there were nine forwards and five defencemen, four more players than usual. Everyone was catching up with all the hockey friends they may not have seen in a while. But as the game neared the conversation shifted from everyday socializing to strategy, lines and ranking (someone mentioned we had finished first in the regular season). Gotti addressed everyone saying, "Okay guys, quick shifts. Let's have fresh legs out there every time. If you get tired, get off. Let's change at every whistle." Then Bohemyth started organizing the lines, negotiating with the forwards as to who would play with whom and, as usual, trying to make "evenly strengthened"³⁷ lines. TJ hit people on the shoulder and yelled into their caged masks, telling them that they looked good as they got ready to make their way to the ice. On the ice, we got ready to play and in the distance of my mind³⁸ my teammates got in a circle, chanted "Hustlers" on the count of three and hit their sticks on the ice numerous times. Bohemyth skated over to the net and tapped my pads: "Let's have a good game, big guy."

The Hustlers did exactly what they had planned in the locker room before the game, and they dominated the play throughout the first two periods. It was 3-0 for us before the Expos scored. Everyone played very disciplined hockey and we did not have any penalties until the last period, when tempers flared on the other team and resulted in our players taking retaliation penalties. But our defence was solid and the other team achieved nothing with these power play opportunities. The game ended 4-1. Our entire team jumped off the bench at the end of the game in celebration. We all bumped heads and gloves, and hugged each other, jumping up and down.

³⁷ Not an actual word, but part of regular hockey parlance.

³⁸ Because I was taking a moment to let my thoughts wonder, as a way of clearing my mind of the distractions of everyday life that can interfere with my concentration, before the game.

We lined up to shake hands, but our opponents were visibly seething at having lost and didn't put much enthusiasm into this ritualized show of good sportsmanship. In the room later on, many commented on the handshake and Dustin said, "If they didn't want to shake hands they shouldn't have fucking lined up." Someone else concurred, saying, "Ya, they were poor losers."

In the locker room Terrence broke open the case of 12 ribbon beers in dramatic fashion and tossed them to players around the room. When things settled, everyone raised a can and toasted our victory. "This beer tastes so fucking sweet," Daric said to grunts of affirmation. Conversations about the game broke out in every corner and the feeling that we could win the finals was amplified until it was palpable. The energy amongst the players was much more positive than it had been in earlier weeks and no one was yelling at anyone else except to tell them how well they had played.

Even though it was a big victory no one stuck around too long. The beer disappeared quickly within the large team. We talked a little about the next game and Gotti said, "We gotta stay outta the box." Then Archie took off outside to smoke and head home. It was a Sunday evening, and even though we had enjoyed a big win, Monday morning would come quickly, as usual.

What happened the following day, no one could have prepared us for. Posted on the Hustler's social networking page was a discussion about how we had been disqualified from last night's game. Because a player is required to play a minimum of six games in the regular season to qualify for the playoffs, Terrence had been ineligible to play and due to that we had been stripped of all the goals we had scored and had now lost the game 1-0, instead of winning 4-1³⁹. I am not quite sure exactly what ensued because the dialogue on the site was eventually deleted, but there had been a lot of finger-pointing and aggression targeted at the Expos. They were referred to as "poor sports", "bitches", "assholes" and "pussies" for having raised the question to the league as to the eligibility of our roster. They had probably done so because they had seen so many more players show up than usual. The Hustlers did not take much responsibility themselves in the matter, but instead saw it as having been "ratted out" or "snitched on". In the end, we would play our next playoff game knowing that only an 8-0 victory would give us even a minute chance of making the finals. Essentially, all hope of winning the cup was lost.

³⁹ In hockey, the winning team's score always comes first.

In the following days Gotti apologized to many of the players for the oversight, and anger continued to flare over the actions of the other team. Terrence's actions were not openly questioned on the social networking site, but one has to wonder what sort of conversations individual teammates might have had with him. Everyone was feeling very resentful. The success of our season had effectively been stolen from us all due to a technicality. In the next game we showed early promise, but ended up losing 6-5. The Hustlers' season was over.

Cyclones

The Cyclones' regular season had also been very strong and they had also finished in first place in their division. We had had some road bumps along the way, but had survived the addition of new teammates and a rocky adaptation period, and had ended up stronger than before. We had played well in the playoffs as well, and many players on the team felt that we could not be beaten. Frederick had been a huge addition to our team. Our defence, having played with each other over years, had the art down to a fine science. St. Remi always provided us with plenty of offense and our other consistently strong forwards (the Locks, Bill and Rick) were a force to be reckoned with.

After watching a few games as a spectator, Yatesy told me, "I don't think the Cyclones have ever looked better. Their passing is just...sweet! I mean, the other team doesn't even look like they're doing anything." His arm was still in the sling, and I asked him quite a few times after games how he felt about this. He lamented, "Well, I hope you guys win, but at the same time it's really gonna suck if you do and I'm not on the ice. I mean, c'mon." Yatesy followed us to the end, and on April 27th, 2014 he was in the Consortium Arena in the stands along with a plethora of friends and family of the players.

In the semi-finals a week earlier, it went to seven shooters in a shoot-out before Jean finally scored to end the game, delivering a win for the Cyclones. Everyone described it as the best game of our season and a sign that we were going to win the series. The Cyclones had made it to the finals and had won the first game of a two-game series, in which the first team to gain three points won.⁴⁰ All we had to do now was tie or win the final game. On meeting me at the door as we entered from the parking lot Dane told me, "It's gonna be a long day, big guy."

⁴⁰ A win was worth two points, a tie garnered both teams a point, and a loss, zero points. If both teams had two points after two games there was a deciding "mini game" that lasted 15 minutes stop-time. If that did not decide the

Even though the other team scored a goal on me that, having been disallowed, seriously ignited their frustration, there was no question as to who was going to win. With ten minutes left, the Tippers scored to tie the game two all. It was a bad goal that brought us to the lowest point of our game. Afterwards, Frederick simply skated over to meet us around the crease and said, “We have ten minutes to get it back. We’ll score, don’t worry.” Minutes later he powered the puck through a group of opponents on sheer willpower, made his way to the front of the net, and ripped a shot over the goalie’s shoulder. Our entire team started jumping around and screaming fierce yelps of joy. The guys on the ice were all hugging and patting Frederick furiously on the back. He had done it. We had done it. The other team then pulled their goalie, and we scored the open net to seal the game. With 13 seconds left, the refs merely ran the clock. Pure elation.

The trophy was presented and we all took a turn holding it and standing next to it for photographs. I skated over and gave the game puck to Yatesy because we had dedicated our wins to him. He came onto the ice to join us wearing his orange Cyclones jersey still in his sling for the team photo. Tired but happy, we laughed and acted silly. Dane was especially happy. Our family and friends who had watched came down to greet and congratulate us, and we exchanged hugs and kisses. The Cyclones were champions.

Bulls

The Bulls were also playing on April 27th, 2014 in the Consortium Arena, directly after the Cyclones. Their division was following the same format as that of the Cyclones, but the Bulls had lost their first game, 5-0. The second bout was against the Ace Holes, the Bulls’ fierce and friendly rivals. Having just won a trophy together 20 minutes before, some of the Cyclone players prepared to line up once more, but this time, against one another: the Lock brothers would be playing for the Ace Holes; Dane, EM, St. Remi and I would be playing for the Bulls. There was no animosity between us, but a good humored, competitive friendship. Our team members who were done for the day showered and got changed to leave, while those of us who were playing the next game tried to cool down, maybe change into a clean dry undershirt, and

outcome, there would be five-minute “sudden-death”⁴⁰ overtime. If no one scored during those five minutes, the winner was decided by a shoot-out. How a shoot-out works is that three players shoot on the goalie and whichever team has the greatest number of goals wins. If the teams are tied after a shootout then there will be a “sudden-death” shootout. Whoever scores last on their turn to shoot wins.

quench our thirst with a sports drink. We gathered up our bags and transported them to the new locker room.

The Ace Holes were a much younger team and there had been many group emails exchanged between the Lock brothers and some of the Bulls' players, joking about age. At one point, the Ace Holes called the Bulls "graying old wizards" and the Bulls retorted that actually no one had gray hair on the team: Paul had white hair, and two more players were only balding. And, Dane added that his hair was technically colored and not gray, but blond. So we all sat together joking, about to play against each other. Nat said he was going to score on me because he knew my secret, which he called "dirty goals"⁴¹.

Paul was delivering a speech to the Bulls when we arrived. With his wrinkled, but youthful, smile and manner he said, "We have them right where we want 'em. We have to use our old age to trick them into thinking that they can beat us and then 'Wham!'" He slammed his fist into his open hand. "We can win this game." Dane was saying he still felt he had a game in him and that he had the energy. Donnie was there too, even though he had suffered a rib injury in the semi-final game. "I might play a shift or two," he said hesitantly. "You have to be there, Donnie. You're the heart and soul of the Bulls," Paul urged. Jeter was sitting quietly in the corner, stoically preparing for the Bulls' biggest match-up to date. Once he was out on the ice he passed the puck to Dane with a determined demeanor. St. Remi and EM stretched but took it easy warming up while Bob, Paul, Donnie, Kristy and the rest skated around.

The Bulls fought hard and we won the first game in a tight battle that ended 3-2. However, a mini-game would be required to decide who would be the champions that day. In the end, the Ace Holes scored on a shot that barely made it to the net and the Bulls could not muster the strength to pull back even. Both teams were so tired by that time that they were hardly skating, but their goal sent the Holes into an ecstatic frenzy of activity, as we ploughed on, dejected. In the remaining five minutes of the game, nothing was working and finally, with a minute left, I left my net for the bench so that we could put on an extra attacker. We had been in this situation before and had scored, but this time nothing worked: the time ran out and we had lost the game. We had to wait for a pause in the celebration of the Ace Holes to shake their hands and then we made our way to the dressing room with our heads hung low. It is demoralizing to

⁴¹ A "dirty goal" is a goal that is not very aesthetically pleasing and comes off of a broken play or haphazardly.

have gone such a distance just to have your hopes dashed at the moment when the prize is within your grasp.

Family members and friends looked down at the Bulls from the stands, mirroring their look of disappointment. The trophy was brought out, but was being presented to the wrong team. Their team had lost. Some fans came down from the stands and tried to talk to those they had come to watch, but were brushed off or given remorseful looks. The season was over. We had not won, and there was no going back.

In the locker room, everyone was in relatively good spirits considering the loss. Jeter and Bob were smiling, and Paul was saying, "If we just could have made it to the overtime, I'm sure we would've won." Jason looked especially upset by the loss. Our emotions were scattered and it would take time to reconcile ourselves to the loss. We talked about the positive and negative aspects of the game. I apologized for allowing the second goal and St. Remi said, "We had our chances. We all made mistakes, just your mistakes are that much more important. Don't blame yourself." We also talked about what a great season it had been and recounted some of the highlights. "For a team with an average age of 45, playing against a team that are all younger than Palmer [29], we did really well." Then someone spoke up and said, "Hey, we're not that old! Only Don, Donnie and Paul are over 50." And a funny discussion about age broke out.

In the parking lot five or six of us came together at Don's car for a beer before heading home for the last time of the season, and we discussed the following year. Everyone was upset but also eager to know who from the team would be returning. The Bulls had enjoyed a great season and the group was concerned that, with the championship loss and the age of some of the players, many would not return the following fall. Everyone was asked, "See you next year?" And most agreed: the Bulls would be back.

The Summer

The way the season ended for the teams was very telling of what sort of social unit each constituted. The Cyclones were more concerned with winning than other aspects of the game and won the championship. The Bulls were a team based on inclusivity, they shook off the championship loss and all but Palmer returned the following year and that was only because he moved to Alberta. The Hustlers who were the youngest team, lacked some experience playing in

organized leagues and were still sorting out what they were collectively looking for in hockey, were eliminated due to a technicality.

Over the summer I did not see any of the Bulls. We were all really busy with other aspects of our lives, and we all needed the break. I played hockey with a couple of the Cyclones in a summer league organized by Dale and we often went out afterwards to the local bar, especially while the Habs were still in the playoffs. As for the Hustlers, they joined a summer beer league because, as Gotti put it, “I’m fed up of playing WHL—it’s chippy and scrappy. I don’t wanna worry about getting hurt every game.” The Hustlers were re-considering what they wanted from playing amateur hockey. Gotti hoped that, by fall, he would have found a less competitive and more enjoyable league for his team to join. And, over the summer months the Hustlers developed more of a team identity, and drank more than ever after their games on warm summer Friday nights. The following season all three teams would be together again, with only a few roster changes.

All three teams were changing to greater and lesser degrees so as to be able to continue playing hockey in a way they decided was most appropriate for them. It was the changes that were made by the individual players and the team as a group that allowed them to continue on as such. As well, continuing as a team allowed them to change what they were looking for in a hockey league without too much disruption. If any of the teams had completely folded it might have been difficult for many of the members to organize themselves to find new teams. In the end, it was the balance of change and continuity from one season to the next that allowed them to grow as a team.

CHAPTER 3 – THE HOCKEY BODY

Introduction

The idea that the body is not simply a biological object, but is also socially and culturally produced has become an increasingly important tenet in anthropology and sociology . How societies view bodies, the cultural norms and values that are attached to different bodies (and the actions of those bodies), and the practices associated with specific places and times also affects how the body is inscribed with meaning. All of this is to say that what one does with the body and social constructions of the body are never completely separate (Mauss 1973; Turner 1992; Bourdieu 1978; Foucault 1979; Csordas 1994).

Therefore, it is not just that hockey affects the physiological body itself, making it stronger, hurting it, or injuring it, but also that how people feel and express their bodies is mediated by how those bodies are represented both in general cultural discourses as well as in more specific vernaculars such as on the dressing room bench before and after a hockey game. When players say they feel good after hockey this may be a description of an embodied feeling they receive from the sport. When players say they are beginning to feel slow on the ice, this is based on comparison to others they play with, and can also be informed by discourse about their play amongst teammates.

The physical aspect of hockey, the actual playing of the game, is the essence of that activity. Without the physical aspect hockey just would not be hockey. There can be many changes to what that physical component looks like, but once it is removed then we are talking about something else. So watching a handful of games may look very different - older players are slower, female players play their own distinct game, and professional and amateur versions look far different - but they all could recognizably be viewed with the rubric of hockey. Unlike the social aspect, the physical aspect of hockey is essential. One can imagine that a young child playing shinny alone is still playing hockey.

Hockey in the leagues I observed and in which I participated was very tough and rigorous; there was a lot of physical contact, accidents and the occasional body checking. Injuries were common place in these leagues, and though the vast majority were not serious, these small

bumps and bruises put pressure on the body. The pressures on the body to sustain levels of performance and from the wear and tear of the game were felt more acutely with age. Players would describe how as they aged they felt they were slower, weaker, more prone to injury and altogether not as young and strong as they once were. The pressures of the ageing body would require that they either change their practices or quit. Changing their game would resolve some of those tensions between the aging body and playing hockey, and so would quitting, but because those, I played with, loved hockey so much quitting was not an option they wanted to consider until it was absolutely necessary. Some players refused to adapt to their changing physical circumstances, continuing to play as if they were not ageing. This style of play could and would lead to injury, which if severe enough would resolve the issue for the player because they simply would not be able to play again. However, many injuries served as signposts to players that it was time to change, or that the next injury could be their last.

In the following chapter I will discuss issues surrounding the body as it ages in relation to playing hockey. Throughout, I hope to show how the body, like the competing demands of everyday life described in the previous chapter, exerts pressure on players as they age and affects their participation in hockey. As well, beyond simply being a physical game that my interlocutors love, hockey is also a game they describe as providing them with many physical benefits, such as weight loss, cardiovascular strength and stress relief, and these will be discussed as well. For just as age (and everyday life) may pressure the body and require change, so also does participation in hockey mitigate some of the pressures of everyday life and an ageing body. Finally, I will discuss how these people have learned to adapt their changing bodies to new circumstances and also how they have learned to play a more age appropriate and “intelligent” style of hockey over the course of their long term involvement in this sport.

The Physical Benefits of Hockey

Throughout the season in the dressing room and in interviews players would often speak of how playing hockey benefitted their body. The most common phrase uttered was “it keeps me in shape” or “it keeps me healthy” and spoke to how players believed that playing hockey kept them in good general health. Some players even claimed that hockey kept them from getting sick and that playing could cure their illnesses, such as cold. As well, some players believed that if they quit hockey they would gain weight, because hockey was such a good way to expend

calories. And finally, some players described how hockey allowed them to alleviate some of the stress accumulated through everyday life, one that was regularly described as otherwise sedentary. They believed that the physical nature of the game allowed them to use their body in a way that was largely not available to them in their other everyday routines, thereby releasing some of the stress they could not rid themselves of otherwise.

“It keeps me healthy”: General Health Benefits

Jason once said after a Bulls game: “I don’t feel old when I play. I feel old when I stop playing.” And he continued: “When you get back on the ice, you realize how much you’ve lost.” In this conversation what he meant by lost was his physical fitness. When they return to the game from a prolonged hiatus, players will often note their realization that they have lost some of their strength, endurance and stamina. Many players joke in the room that hockey is the only “real” workout they get every week, that without it their weight and stomachs would balloon and that hockey is “the best workout”. And these statements attest to how they view the other aspects of their lives as more sedentary in nature. Even though their lives are not completely sedentary, and some of them work out to stay fit, and participate in other physical activities. Paul will often say, “It [hockey] keeps me healthy. It keeps me young.” Paul’s comments reflect the perceived physical and social benefits of playing hockey. Playing a game that is reminiscent of one’s youth can make a person feel younger again, as though they are returning to that age. And, combining this with the physical benefits of any sport such as hockey, can impart the sensation that one is instilling vigour in both body and mind.

In spite of this sensation, there is evidence that suggests that players who engage in intense activity once or twice a week in an otherwise sedentary lifestyle may be inflicting damage on their bodies. In other words, they may be exposing themselves to risk rather than getting fit.

Playing Sick

This point is somewhat controversial because it is not agreed upon by many of the people who play hockey and would also seemingly go against common sense. However, there are people

who believe that you can “sweat out” a cold or other minor illness and that playing hockey regularly can stave away disease and viruses. Those I interviewed more commonly believed the latter statement and it was linked to the preventions associated with a generally fit and healthy body. As to the former belief, I would have to note that as a goalie I have to play sick sometimes and I have found that if the illness I have is not too advanced that I feel generally better when I get off the ice. Hence whether or not playing ill would actually be recommended by expert medical advice, this represents one of the ways in which players perceive their continued participation in hockey as benefiting them in their everyday life. It may be the adrenalin rush that temporarily staves off the symptoms of the cold for a little while, or the quickening of the circulation of blood cells, however multiple players agreed that they felt a sensation of relief from sickness during and after playing hockey.

“I know I would gain those 20-30 pounds no problem”: Expending Calories

The idea that if someone stopped playing hockey they would gain extra weight was also frequently spoken about amongst teammates in the room. Many times people would grab their bellies and say that they could not let it get any bigger and that hockey was the only thing keeping off an extra 20 or 30 pounds of fat. St. Remi would often make this joke, as well as Yatesy and others. When Yatesy got injured and had to take an extended break he described his body as “fat” and “disgusting” and said that it was going to take him a while to get back in shape, especially if he “kept eating all these cakes”. Bud, a player from the Monday Night League, also told me, “I could comfortably put on an extra 30 pounds if I stopped playing.” All of these players are in visibly good physical fitness, none of them has a protruding belly, and they have average or above average fitness levels. However, this is not *par hazard* and most players work hard to keep their fitness levels high because that translates onto on-ice success, and players are acutely aware of their bodies because at least once a week they play a game they makes them realize exactly what shape they are in. This constant engagement in a sport allows them to compare how they feel from one week to the next and also what they are physically capable of given their respective levels of fitness.

As they grew older, players tended to work harder to sustain their playing fitness. While younger players would emphasize that hockey was what kept them in shape, older players would recount how they now had to work out to be able to play hockey. Of course, there were younger

players such as Bohemyth that said they worked out to be stronger hockey players, but for the players in their 40s and 50s working out was not meant to improve performance beyond an acceptable standard, but was seen as a means to raise their fitness so that they could maintain an acceptable standard of play. Otherwise they would be forced to play a lower caliber of hockey, or quit the sport altogether. As their bodies changed with age, all players had to incorporate new workout regimes and forms of exercise to prolong their participation in hockey. Once again appropriate adaptation was required on the part of the player to deal with a change due to age. These changes enabled players to continue performing.

Hockey as a Pressure Valve – Stress Relief

St. Remi and I went for hamburgers after one of our games and we got to speak about what sort of benefits and rewards hockey can provide. Though the hour was very late by then and we were both exhausted we began talking about how hockey can be a great way to relieve stress.

Jordie: “So you still enjoy playing?”

St. Remi: “Of course, that’s why I barely miss any games, I make it a point to go, cause I enjoy it, it’s a stress reliever. It’s fun ya know, it’s exciting to go. It’s the only time of the day where you don’t have to worry about, you’re not thinking five days in advance, six days in advance. You know, it’s like what am I going to eat today? What am I going to eat tomorrow? Projects. Parts are going to be due in a month and they’re late and there’s no way. The design isn’t even made yet. It’s like you just step on the ice... [allows for dramatic silence] and the biggest concern is, okay what are the lines! (laughs) And that usually solves itself in a minute, so... It’s kinda like the mental aspect of it, maybe I’m not an NHL player, but it’s very low on the mental and more on the physical. It’s the only thing I do that is like that. So... it kinda gives your brain a timeout.”

J: “I definitely feel like that myself, because I’m in school and everything else. Is it your job that is the real mental drain?”

SR: “Well, my job: project manager. I don’t control anything, I have to motivate people to their jobs, because I am just a manager, project manager, but I don’t manage any people, I don’t control any people and I don’t have anything over their heads. Like I can’t control their salaries, or I don’t control their bonuses, I don’t have any kind of IOUs. I don’t have any kind of that stuff, so it’s kind of like me coming over to you and saying, “Hey Jody [he always mispronounces my name], uhhh, I’m gonna sweet talk you into shoveling me driveway” (laughs). And then you’re gonna say, “What’s in it for me?” Well, I will tell you good job after you’re done, cause that’s all I got. So, that’s why my job is very stressful that

way, cause all I have to do is sweet talk. And when the job doesn't go as planned, well it's always my ass on the line. Cause I'm the front guy. You know, so the director... I leave a jar of Vaseline on the shelf (laughs)."

J: "Do you do other activities to relieve stress?"

SR: "Rebuild cars if I have a chance, like I do all the work on my cars. That's another thing like you get into it and the thought process just goes right down and you don't have to think as much anymore, so it's less demanding. You feel good, you know. It reminds you that you're still alive. Cause I am a very, you know, sort of hands-on guy sort of person. And, too bad that most hands-on applications don't pay. It's too bad because I would probably take something that's more hands-on. But at the same time, if it's hands on, how long can you do those hands-on things for? So at some point something is going to give. At some point something could happen you know. So I had to make a choice between hands-on and something more book smart. So I took engineering. Something that's less hard on your body but at times it takes a toll and you wanna do other things. Even if it's hockey, mechanics, just cutting the grass. It's a good stress reliever. Unless you have a kid on your arm and you're pushing with the other hand. Ya right."

J: "So do you try and get that 'physical outlet' because you don't get it at your job?"

SR: "Exactly. At least at the old job I was always on my feet, I was always traveling and I'd always be on the job site, inspecting things, looking at things, but uhh... It's not the same anymore. It's okay though, I'm not giving it up. Hockey that is [...] That's another thing I like to substitute, on vacation I like to go scuba diving. It's very peaceful. Quiet. The least you do the better. Cause to conserve air and stuff like that. I got my license in the St. Lawrence, but I got my second license in Thailand, so I have an advanced license. So, but uhh definitely down South is better, it's warmer."

For many of the people on my teams, hockey is a way to relieve the stress of everyday life and "blow off some steam." In interviews when I asked players what they liked about hockey, many of them responded that it was a place where they could put aside the stresses of everyday life, or at least stop thinking about them, and just play. Hockey requires a participant's full attention on the ice, and it is such a fast game that any lapse in thought and reaction can lead to a poor performance. .

Individuals go to the arena to take a break from other domains of their everyday lives. Social standards and expectations of comportment are not upheld within the arena walls. The rest of life does not disappear, but is put on hold for a couple of hours. It breaks up the pressures of

everyday life and allows people to return to their lives with recharged energy. Without the opportunity to work out some of the stress on the ice perhaps everyday life would become overwhelming and would lead to even greater tension. A change of scenery also helps break up the monotony of the week and supports continuity through life's changes. Sometimes like St. Remi, people feel a sense of powerlessness in their jobs, but playing hockey can provide them with a much greater sense of immediate achievement. Life projects can span many months and even years, while being on the ice progress can be seen immediately through a good play, a goal or a win. As Paul has told me, "It is hard to constants in life, but hockey is one of those rare things."

Hockey Intelligence

In the parking lot after a game that the Hustlers had lost in early February 2015, a few of the players stuck around guzzling down the beers and discussing what had transpired that had led us to defeat. TJ, Gotti, Telli, Dustin and I were standing outside of the Pierrefonds Arena on that cold winter's night when the topic of "hockey IQ" and "hockey intelligence" came up.

Basically what these two interchangeable terms refer to is embodied hockey knowledge. One acquires such knowledge through formal or informal training over the course of years of playing the sport. The participants in my study had acquired basic hockey skills when they were very young, starting around the age of 4-8 years old. These embodied skills were the foundation of the more complex embodied knowledge a player accumulates over time. They include skating, shooting, passing, stick-handling and "deking"⁴². Embodied hockey skills and hockey intelligence are not the same, however, and they do not necessarily develop together or at the same rate. Some players with a lot of skill just do not have an "eye" for the game, and many players who are not especially skilled can still read the play very well. All players have an intimate knowledge of their bodies, some more than others; they know what they are capable of and they know what their weak points are.

Once basic skills are embodied through repetitious practice (a method emphasized at the youth level) players begin to develop a style of game play, and eventually reproduce, change and produce original moves and maneuvers. Also, because amateur level hockey is of a moderate

⁴² One of the few original words developed in hockey, deking refers to stick handling and using a decoy maneuver to pass your opponent on the ice while maintaining possession of the puck.

caliber, players learn, imitate, and experiment on a far more regular basis because they have not reached the extent of their abilities, and because they do not have a coach that sanctions such play. They may not be creating moves that have never been seen in hockey before such as is usually reserved to professionals and prodigies, but they are attempting moves they have never executed before far more regularly than players of much higher elite calibers because there is not a structure in place that sanctions such experimentation. Elites have coaches, owners and a whole institutional set-up in place with the singular goal of winning games. In amateur hockey teammates may get frustrated at players who single-mindedly want to practice new moves during a game, but their livelihoods and careers are not dependant on performance. Each player develops a style of playing that he or she has tried, tested and proved to work for him or her, but players continue to change their style as they learn.

Players, such as Dustin, who have had formal elite and semi-professional stints in their younger developmental years usually display a greater proclivity toward intelligent hockey. Though this intelligence is represented through a more disciplined hockey, which incorporates far less ingenuity and imagination, replacing it instead with organization and structure. Many Hustlers described him as having a great “sense for the game” and great “hockey IQ”.

Dustin saw a deficiency in his team’s hockey knowledge, but did not believe that the Hustlers were unskilled, or lacked the motivation to win. Instead, he believed we lost games because the individuals did not know how to play together as a team, which is the bedrock of disciplined elite hockey. The Hustlers were composed mostly of players who were still young, and they had yet to learn correct team positioning, passing and how to move the puck efficiently. Instead they played what Gotti and others termed a “shinny” type of hockey, which focused on individuality, maintaining possession of the puck (rather than passing), and physical strength, agility, and speed rather than the finesse of playmaking.

When speaking about Daric, Dustin said, “I don’t understand him. It’s amazing how he gets through so many players. It’s like you don’t expect it and then bam, there he is making a move past two guys. Hahaha. He makes up for his lack of hockey knowledge. And he gets some real opportunities. But some people on our team don’t even know how to shoot. They need to practice.” And, many of the Hustlers, including Daric, would agree with this assessment. In fact, many look to Dustin for knowledge on such matters and highly value his opinion based on his

experience in higher levels of hockey because they know that what Dustin understands can make their team more successful.

After that particular game, we were lamenting a loss, and Gotti and others agreed, “We shouldn’t be proud of our play. Too many people were trying to play an individual game, and we’re not going to win many that way.” Albert was “hogging”⁴³ the puck too much during that game and it had effectively killed our offensive chances. He had taken a few weeks off and therefore probably was a bit rusty, but many were hoping that he would get on the same page as the rest of the team and start passing more. Not only is hockey knowledge acquired through time, but time away from the rink can degrade some of the embodied practices a player has previously developed.

What players usually mean by “hockey intelligence” is having a great sense of the movement and timing of the game, being able to envision where the play is moving, and connecting passes without turning to look. A refined hockey IQ is the ability to visualize, without looking, where players are and are not on the ice and the ability to predict where they will move. This ability allows a player to place passes perfectly on the tape of teammates’ sticks and skate into open ice. Hockey is very much a game of timing and space management. Open space allows a player to build skating momentum and move the puck forward towards the opponent’s goal unobstructed.

Many players speak of hockey intelligence as developing with age, and recognize that they were not as discerning when they were younger. They also describe it as a process of maturation. Some of these developments are based on age, a changing body and its abilities, while others are less age-dependant and are a product of elite hockey training. Players described themselves as becoming smarter hockey players over time and said that they understood the game better than they had before.

When asked if any of these changes were due to age some of the older players discussed how they have adapted their playing style to suit their older bodies. Paul explained that he is not as young as he used to be and therefore needs to be smarter about deciding whether to chase down opponents in possession of the puck.

⁴³ “Hogging” refers to a player that is not passing the puck, but trying to maintain sole possession.

Even players as young as Bohemyth (27) and Gotti (28) believed that if they had had their present hockey knowledge when they were younger that it would have made a huge difference to how they would have played then, and that maybe, with that knowledge, they could have gone into elite hockey.

Players such as Dale, who started playing hockey later in life than most of my participants, are always learning new skills because they had never established the basic foundation, so they have many little bits of hockey skills and knowledge to learn. Equally Kristy also started playing hockey later than most, and has had professional training sessions to help her catch up.

Older players such as Paul, Dane, Don and Jason have all learned to play the game differently than they used to when younger and have developed an age-specific hockey knowledge that is linked to their bodies' capabilities. As the body ages players have to adapt to the changes in their physical abilities. Manny described this process as having to learn to play a smarter style of hockey, a style that is not geared completely towards performance, but also takes frailty into consideration. Some 30 and 40 years old players such as St. Remi, Yatesy and Jean are also starting to consider how to adjust the way they play to their bodies' changes with age.

Talking with Paul

In an interview that took place in a West Island family restaurant, Paul and I talked about how age changes the way a person plays hockey and how older players play differently from younger players. Paul was very reflective about his embodied practices and I believe that his words shed a great deal of light on how older players approach the game differently as they begin to feel the effects of age:

Paul: Over the summer I felt myself struggling, I mean really struggling. Like I was not fast enough. I wasn't able to keep up. The guys in their 40s were flying. So I go in the shower and I look at myself and I think of those older guys who were flying and I'll tell ya there's only one single difference and it's about 30 pounds. So what I did this summer is I told myself look you have two choices. You can either play [waitress interrupts]... you can either go and play with older guys who are not in great shape like you or you can keep playing here where you love playing cause it's a decent caliber but you gotta do something about your fitness. And so I said, "What's it gonna be?" I said this to myself, "What do you want?" Don't keep playing here, you can't keep up you're not an elite in this

league. So I said, "Let's try it." So... I dropped ten pounds plus dry-land training and sure enough those ten pounds brought me to where I wanna be. And I was very impressed and I thought, "If ten pounds does that, what about 30 pounds?" Then my wife looks at me and says, "Do you have cancer?!" (laughs into a chuckle) "Why are you losing so much weight?!" So interesting experiment with me and hockey this summer. So how badly do you want it? It's what it comes down to. You want to play at this level? You want to play at this caliber? Well, you gotta do something about it cause you ain't getting any younger.

Jordie: What did you do exactly?

P: Changed my diet. Cutting out fat and sugar. Eating less stuff I love to eat. And upped my walking. I've probably told you this before but I've trained for hockey tournaments, I've trained walking and I've trained running, and there's no difference. Which is bizarre. It's just if you walk enough your leg strength increases just as much as when you run. You're just not getting the cardio, but if you play enough hockey you're already getting the cardio, so it's all about leg strength and leg endurance. So I just increased the amount I was walking and I got the leg strength to play an hour and a half.

J: No gym time or anything?

P: No. no. I kept that the same, just increased the leg work.

J: So you do go to the gym already?

P: Ya ya. That's just so I don't get injured badly when I'm playing. What I've learned is the osteopath is your best friend (grins from ear to ear). As I've gotten older playing hockey my osteopath has become my best friend.

J: And how often do you go to the osteo?

P: I go, I go for every major injury. Anytime where I get hit, or I fall and I go, "Oh boy that's going to hurt tomorrow." And when tomorrow comes it really hurts and I'm limping or I'm hunched over I'm off to the osteopath. I need to be straightened out. Something has gone crooked in my body.

J: I go see Kristy, she's great.

P: Jeter goes to see her and he loves her so... I recommend a good osteopath to anybody planning hockey at any age.

J: Any recent injuries?

P: Last year I had two bad injuries umm umm. I got slew-footed and I fell on my tailbone and that was unbelievably painful. And that knocked me out for a coupla

weeks. And once again trip to the osteopath. Just to make sure everything would straighten out and I would heal properly. So tailbone injury. And it was a slew foot. I was wresting for the puck with a defenceman and he just got his skate behind my skates and I just went down. Unexpectedly, very quickly. So there was that injury and I also had a collision, with a player, where it was a last second uh, where I just saw him at the last second where we collided. And this is a typical injury that I tend to have. And what happened with that injury I hit the ice and I think my head hit the ice a little bit, because when I got up to skate to the bench I felt weak. I felt weak a little bit. And I knew something was wrong. I wasn't weak because I was tired from my shift, I was weak because I had been injured. So, so again. A couple of weeks off, a trip to the osteopath, just to make sure everything was in line with my neck, uhh. I may have had a mild concussion but I don't think so. So again, I got it straightened out and uh, that one took about a month to get back to my regular self. So, collisions, falling and there's, each decade that goes by you pay, you pay more for them. That's all it is. When I was in my forties I would have collisions and fall and I would recover within a day or two. Now that I'm in my fifties it's weeks. It's weeks of recovery. It's no longer days. Like weeks. Now when I get into that collision or I fall or something it's, "Oh boy, this is going to take weeks to recover." I'm not just going to feel this tomorrow, I am going to feel this for two or three weeks. So, that's where the osteopath becomes so important, because the osteopath helps you accelerate back to health.

J: How old are you now?

P: 52. 52.

J: How about regular wear and tear on the body? Not injuries.

P: Well, my knees have been more and more sensitive every year. I can feel it in my knees. I feel a little bit of pain when I pivot the wrong way. A turn that isn't as smooth as it should've been. I feel it in my knees. Lots of fatigue in my back muscles. I feel my back, the fatigue of playing. I try to mitigate that with lots of sit-ups. Uh, my osteopath gave me a fantastic exercise that I absolutely love that really helps. It tightens up your tummy and your lower back, the muscles we seem really to need to play. So... again my osteopath is my best friend she keeps me playing. So uh, ya knees, back, uh, I have to be careful what I eat when I play, before and after the game. I found that if I have too much coffee I uh get a headache, uh. I've that uh drinking after the game now uh is really tough. I find that my arteries aren't as flexible as they used to be, so I'm pumping a lot of blood if I go and... if I find that if I have alcohol after the game it dilates my arteries even more, so now there's even more blood pumping up to my brain, so that gives me headaches as well. So I have to be careful what I consume before and after the game. It's become very important. I tend to stick to water before and after and watch my coffee consumption that day, I only have coffee in the morning and I won't touch it in the afternoon cause if I am playing hockey that night. So, there's been dietary changes that I've had, that have to have been made. In the old days it

used to be twelve donuts and a case of beer before and after the game. Those days are gone! For me!

J: Do you have that one after hockey beer?

P: No, not anymore. Before though, I loved it. But I started to get the headaches and I said, "It's just not worth it." When you have to go to work the next day, it's just not worth it.

J: Have you adjusted your game on ice in anyway? Or has it been more the aspects surrounding hockey?

P: Yup, yup. I concentrate more on positional hockey. Because I don't have the speed to catch up if I make a mistake. So positional hockey becomes more important for me. I don't drive the net the way I used to, cause that's just asking for trouble. So I'll, I'll move in – if I'm alone on the goalie obviously I'm driving the net – but I'm one-on-two or one-on-one, I'll try to use the defenceman to take a screened shot. I'm not going to try and push my way in there and roll the goalie because I'm the one who's going to take the brunt of that. I try to avoid that. I can't do it anymore against a good quality defenceman. Like if there's an older guy like me as the defenceman I can do something but if he's a young guy forget it. I will try to use him as a screen and get a shot. Because otherwise I'm just asking for trouble. He's gonna take me out and it's gonna hurt.

J: What brought on that change?

P: It's the physicality. I just don't have the strength, um, I don't have the endurance to do that sort of stuff. I know my limitations. And of course the way we find these things out is that we do them and then we get hurt or we get injured and we say, "Whoop, I can't do what I used to be able to do." So, it's just a matter of knowing your limitations. And as I get older I have more and more limitations. And that's why I'm starting to prefer to play against guys who are closer to my own age because they have the same limitations. So we change our game style and we understand each other. Where as the young guys they don't understand, they don't understand your frailty. And they don't care. It's like you're going to drive the net? You're going to pay for it. So I just, I'm not going to do it, I'm not going to do it. I just have to realize what I'm going up against and what the results *can't* be.

J: What does a game of older guys look like?

P: It's positional and the guys who are faster, even though they are older, the guys who are faster those are the guys you want to use to win the game. So the guys that are faster you know they are faster so you want to give them the puck. No no, I don't want you to pay for this!

Joking about Aeronautics Company paying for it, “Yes they are going to pay for it.” Leaning into microphone. “Waiters are loaded, I’ll pay for it.”

P: So the game at this 45 to 55 year age category is very technical, very positional, lots of shooting, because even though the guys are older, many of them are very heavy so they can put a lot of weight behind their shot, right? So a lot of shooting, good quality shooting. The goalie’s still uh enjoys these kinds of game, cause they are getting a lot of high quality shots. So like I said you know who your fast guys are and you’re trying to set them up, you’re trying to send them away, you’re trying to make a two-on-one with them or send them on a breakaway. That’s the classic. You’re trying to send these guys off on the boards on either the left wing or the right wing. Cause typically it’s either your left wing or your right winger that’s this sort of fast guy. So you’re just trying to send those guys. You’re trying to get them to blast by the defencemen and go in alone. So, that’s what it comes down to. So it comes down to, let’s find out who the fastest guys are and send ‘em on their way. That’s what wins games. Cause otherwise everyone’s playing positional, everyone’s jostling to take a shot, but everyone’s playing positional. Trying to get a lot of shots away, from the point. But even from the point they hardly get through cause everyone’s standing around, so they block the shot (laughs).

J: What do goalies look like in those leagues?

P: There’s one obvious uh difference. The goalies that play with the guys who are 45 to 55 are much weaker in skill than the goalies who are playing with guys who are younger. The goalies playing with the guys who are younger are doing very fast butterfly, have very fast hands, move side-to-side extremely quickly, uh, completely opposite of the guys who are playing goalie with the 55 year olds. They’re not fast, they have weaknesses, they certainly can’t do the butterfly quickly. They can do it but they don’t do it quickly. I’ve also noticed that the older goalies that will play with the older guys are much more prone to injury, especially with anything that has to do with stretching, any kind of muscles that get stretched because they tried to move too quickly to the side, they tried to split, they tried to butterfly too quickly. Prone to injury. There’s a big difference in goalies that play in this 50 year old range, than goalies who play in the 20 to 30 year age category. Big difference. Very clear. But it has to be that way because if a 25 year old goalie is that fast plays with 50 year olds, the guys who are 50 will never score. And that’s just no fun. So you really want the goalie caliber to change with the player category, you really want that. It makes for more fun, for the guys, and I don’t know about for the goalie. But for the guys it’s more fun to have a goalie of that caliber. I know a stand up goalie that I play with and he’s my age and he says, “I just can’t do that shit” [the butterfly style goaltending]. So he plays in position and he adapts his game to being a stand-up goalie. He will go down, but mostly on one knee. He won’t butterfly. He will go down on one knee to protect the side of the net, Johnny Bower style. And it’s interesting because he plays against a goalie who is a very fast butterfly, and very fast hands. And you

can really see the difference between the two goalies. And it's interesting the teams actually adapt themselves around the two goalies. We know who the defencemen are who have the big shots and we just stick to them like fly on paper. And the defencemen same thing. They don't let anyone get free in front of him, because they know he cannot protect the two lower posts. So the defencemen are trying to block shots and protect the slot because they know he can't stop them. He can do the Johnny Bower thing for the sides, so he can protect the corners from the sides, but if a player is facing him and shoots for the lower corners it's going in. So you gotta play for that. So the defence do their best to help him. So the goalie at the other end who's very fast and can butterfly their defence are free-for-all, they're all over the place. They don't care. They know he's so good that unless you're getting him moving side-to-side you're not getting it by him. So the defencemen on the other side adapt their game. They go on rushes, they go end-to-end, because they know he's good. They don't have to protect him. The players adapt their style based on the goalie they are playing. Just like the things I've described to you that I've had to adjust in my game as I've got older I can fully understand how for a goalie it's more so. Goalies I'm sure have to do more stretching, and stretching and stretching.

The interesting thing about Paul is that he integrates his understanding of his changing age and body into the game that continues to keep him young. Therefore, although he is changing with age he is allowing for part of his younger self to continue through an acknowledgement of, and reaction to, his age. He is consciously aging in a manner that allows him to escape some of the confines of age. This may seem contradictory: that acknowledgement of age allows someone to maintain a sense of youth, and that making changes allows for some measure of continuity. A re-adaptation of what is considered participation in hockey based on the social and physical changes associated with age is exactly what allows people to continue the sport that they associate with their youth. If, in those younger years, they had not played, their current playing would not harken back to an earlier time in their lives. Maybe this sense of continuing youth is predicated on early involvement and someone who had not played hockey when they were younger would not feel as though they are staying young by playing. However, for my interlocutors it is definitely the case, that hockey simultaneously makes them aware of their current age and also makes them feel young. Hockey both reveals and conceals age. At one moment, racing down the ice, Paul (at 52) feels just as if he was six years old again, playing as he always has done, with that same fervor for the puck. Moments later, as he approaches the net, he realizes he has to use a different strategy from that which he would have employed in his younger years due to the limitations age has imposed on his body. And as he collides slightly with the defenceman, his

body also reminds him that his shoulders are not as young as they once were. He shoots the puck with the same unchanged enthusiasm and, as the puck enters the net, he feels the elation he did as a child. Paul continues to play hockey and feel young. He also continues to play hockey and age. His continuity in the sport has required him to change, and the changes in his life and his body have been mitigated by his continued participation in hockey. There is a tension between continuity and change but, like many players, Paul has been able to balance the two in a way that works best for him. And one day that tension might lead to an unfortunate injury, or to his having to quit the game he loves, but for now Paul remains an intelligent negotiator of his participation in hockey.

Many of the older players said that they experienced having to change their playing style, such as Paul spoke of above, and Don described a similar change:

Jordie: Just how has your game has changed over the years? You mentioned you play more positional rather than chase pucks down.

Don: Ya, I don't think I play as hard in front of the net anymore. I get a thrill that I can still do a slapshot, cause old-timers I'm not allowed to do a slapshot anymore. I think that's why I get a thrill at Consortium, because I can wind up ha ha. It's more finesse as you get older. It's less about scoring and more about doing the good play. It's absolutely a thrill to undress anyone when you deke 'em, especially if I am going against a young puck, right. When I was younger it was about winning, you go hard to the net, if someone shoves you in the corner, you know you take care of business. Now, it's like I'll say "guy I gotta work tomorrow, relax." I'm not as intense as I used to be and at Consortium I play against kids that I was intense at their age, so I understand they're intense. I don't know, I'm more sage. Ha ha. So I take a different approach.

Many players took their physical capabilities into account when they played hockey, regardless of their age. At first Bohemyth told me that he did not do any other sports/art activities outside of playing hockey, but then it was revealed that actually he worked out to maintain his fitness levels to compete on ice. Players that had the time to train for hockey did, those with less time do so less frequently, and the older players on the Bulls said that they had to train their bodies to be able to continue playing the game at all. Players of every age were very aware of their capabilities and their limitations. And, they worked hard to maintain or improve their performance. Continuing in the game required them to constantly work on their bodies as it changed due to age, injury, and a changing lifestyle. Those that I spoke with demonstrated both

the extensiveness of their embodied hockey knowledge extensive, but also how that knowledge took into account their age. Players learned how to tailor their playing style so as to increase the amount of enjoyable years they could invest into playing the game. These adjustments were not restricted to their games, but also extended into their everyday lives.

Injury – Yatesy Early February 2015

It was a cold winter Monday night and snow blew against the windshields of cars as they passed, obscuring the lights with reflections of feathery flakes. Through the kaleidoscope of refracted light that danced across my vision, the hospital stood out as the last landmark before the Verdun arena to its left. It was a slow drive that evening on the streets of Montréal because the roads were very slippery and wet from *pluie-versglace* (as it is commonly referred to in Montreal). Inside figure skaters were pirouetting (“Toe picks out!” – *The Cutting Edge*) to the sound of tranquil classic music, but soon hockey would take over that space. Within the hour the arena would go from being an interpretive dance stage on ice to a clash of bodies and sticks. Yawning and grey-faced, the men and the occasional women of the Monday Night Hockey League would take to the ice for their weekly dose of the “the best game you can name”. The rooms were full of lively chatter and spirited conversation, regardless of the late hour (22:00), and the workday long past dinner time.

Sitting in his regular stall just one place removed from the corner, Yatesy sat bent at the waist, engrossed in putting on his skates and getting ready well ahead of time as usual. He was conversing casually with some hockey friends about a game they had had in another league the previous night and asking about the final result. Yatesy, who considered himself a dedicated hockey enthusiast of the highest order (both as a player and a fan, if not ambassador of the game), was enthusiastic about getting out there and skating, even if nothing about Yatesy ever conveys such enthusiasm. His low deep voice and air of hipster sarcasm and coolness, which seemed to manifest itself in dragged-out last words, did little to convey his age of 39. As usual, Yatesy was ready before everyone else, picked up his stick on the way, and slowly headed out onto the frozen abyss with the mechanical walk of a person wearing ice skates. He wanted to be on the ice as long as possible if he were going to be out this late playing hockey in a friendly non-competitive beer league. Yatesy had many friends in the league, but probably would not be

out at such an hour on a Monday night if it weren't for the hockey. Work would start early the next day, and everyone present knew that the adrenaline that mounts during a game that ends at 23:30 was unlikely to wear off before "2 hre *le matin*", regardless of how many beers one drank, or joints one smoked.

By the time the last of the players had exited the room and the goalies were ready and warmed up, the game was about to begin. Our referee of many years shooed all the unnecessary players off the ice and stood at center ice ready to drop the puck for the opening face-off. Yatesy stood ready in the classic hockey player crouch with his stick on the ice, ready to start the game.

The puck drops and the face-off is won by my team for the evening, but the puck isn't properly picked up by the defenceman on the left side. Yatesy pounces from his position, bounding after the loose puck, picking it up on his stick and moving quickly towards the goal. The defenceman turns in reaction, trying to catch Yatesy. The two become entangled in the ensuing action, which is propelling towards the net at incredible speeds, each man sticking for the puck. Suddenly their legs get caught up, one player falls away from the other, landing hard and not moving, but Yatesy has too much momentum and he is sliding towards the end boards on his hands and knees. With little time to react, but mindful enough to brace himself, Yatesy turns his head to the side to absorb the impact with his left shoulder. The puck slides harmlessly towards the corner end-boards, but the force of Yatesy's collision reverberates through the boards sending the Plexiglas into a spasm. Everyone sighs in relief: Yatesy hadn't hit the boards with his head. We had all seen that particular sort of fall before— it's okay; he should be fine. But he is not fine. After a few minutes Yatesy isn't getting up. He looks like he can't get up. Ken blows the whistle and the players skate over to make sure their buddy is okay. Yatesy is now in visible pain and he looks to have dislocated his shoulder. He stays on his knees on the ice for a few moments breathing heavily. Such an injury can leave your body severely impacted. Some players help him up and to the bench. Ken lines the players up and the game continues. Some voice concern about Yatesy's condition and one of the players goes with Yatesy to the locker room to make sure he is doing all right (Field Notes).

It turned out that Yatesy needed help out of his equipment because he had shattered his collarbone, breaking it in five different places. What had seemed like an innocuous and almost routine tumble had turned out to be a ten-second event that would change Yatesy's life for months to come, and had not even been resolved the following year when I played with the Cyclones in 2015. Months of rehab and physiotherapy treatment would be required and the

injury would force a dedicated practitioner of the sport of hockey to completely regain his form from the ground up (or from the collarbone down, if you will).

When towards the end of the regular season, we had a chance to talk over some coffee at a café near where his home, we discussed his injury and what it meant for him for this season and beyond:

Y: I'm kinda freaked out right now, obviously. You asked me about how my game has changed over the years and stuff. I am really worried I will have to change my game and stuff because of this. I cannot afford to get injured this badly again. I'm gonna miss...if I decide to get surgery tomorrow, I will be out at least another 4 weeks after that. That means I'll have missed two months of work. What is my boss gonna think that if September I go and play and get a similar injury? You know... So I'm pretty worried about that, because even though I am not quite so young that I should have a semblance of a disability, and I have never been afraid to go full speed into the corner or anything before, but now not only do I think I will be when I get back, even just watching... but now even just uhhh watching you guys play, or watching the Habs play, or whatever, any time since my accident that anybody's gone sliding toward the boards, fast or slow or anything, I can feel my heart starting to beat, like, oh shit, I am scared for them. And I can't imagine getting on the ice and that not happening when I go towards the boards. Anyway, it's gonna take me a year to get back on to get over that shit. At the same time, you know when I was going into the boards, when this happened, I totally knew that I was gonna get hurt, but I had no idea that it was going to be this bad!

J: How did you know?

Y: I could just feel how fast I was going in and I just knew, I guess. When I first fell I was coming in on you...I don't know if you remember...the first thing I tried to do was make a play, I swatted at the puck. And then as soon as I did that I didn't keep track of going, because I thought, Oh my God I am going really fast and I am not going to slow down because we're playing on fresh ice. And it just occurred to me as that play happened that oh my god, I'm going really fast and I can't slow down and I don't have time to get my legs around to stop here and I'm going in head first, all I have time to do is move my head out of the way. So I thought, Get your head out of the way, your shoulder can take this. And the moment I hit I was like, Oh! That hurt." (laughs). A lot harder than I thought it was gonna. I think I might have actually blacked out for a split second, 'cause I remember hitting the boards and the next thing I remember I was on the ice. I don't remember falling to the ice. And I couldn't move, not that I couldn't, but just because of the pain. I knew something was really wrong with my arm. The very first thing I was thinking was I wonder if I will be able to finish the game! hahaha! I was like, Man c'mon, I missed the game last week because of work or whatever the reason was. I've been dying to play and this is the first minute of the freaking game! I'm dying here, please c'mon, I gotta be able to finish the game.

And then a few seconds after thinking that I was like, No I think it's probably at least dislocated, judging by the pain. I have to pretty much count on this game being a no go. And I really hope I will be able to play by the weekend. Throughout the rest of the night I kept having to revise my mental... my mental calculations. And at some point in the night, while I was in the hospital, I'm just sitting there going, God I hope I can play again. I hope I am not never able to play. The funny thing is going through all that thought process, all of that occurred well before I thought, Well, I hope I can work. It's all about when will I next be able to play hockey? That's my number one priority.

J: How old are you?

Y: 39.

J: How does it feel being almost 40?

Y: I'm not sure. I remember, you know. I'd know that things are... things are only going to get tougher, injuries will get tougher and tougher to get over. And I remember what a huge difference it was from like between 27 and 30, what a big difference it was recovering from injuries. I could really feel a big difference in fatigue level and stuff. And I'm sure it will continue to get worse, especially... it's gonna be tough, I am going to have a lot of physio to do after this. Especially if I keep eating this cake [which he was eating with his one good arm]. I can already see it, I keep looking in the mirror and saying, Oh look at that fat-dirty bastard. And it's only been 4 weeks. It could be potentially 4 to 8 more weeks to go, so...

J: Have they told you about the recovery process?

Y: Well, no, not really, no no... I'm sure that... after, after a few weeks of physio, as long as, I think, I believe I will be able to start physio before I am completely healed. I think and I believe a few weeks after I am completely healed, with a few weeks of physio, hopefully I will be able to play again. I really have no idea how long after I am fully healed I will be able to play again. Like, I don't know if I'll have to wait like an extra certain amount of time to make sure it is like super strong, I have no idea. Anyway, at the moment I'm really hoping to play by second half of summer. Screw that man! I'm dying over here!

J: What does it take away not to be playing?

C: Well, first of all it takes away my primary source of exercise. But I just love being out there and playing. I love the challenge of it. I freaking love to score goals. I...ever since I was a little kid...I started out playing goalie when I was like a really small kid, because my favorite player was Ken Dryden, and uhhh... I was good at it!

Yatesy went on to tell me about his time playing youth hockey and how much it meant to him as a child growing up in Germany on a Canadian army base. It was one of the few things that he got to do that put him in contact with other children his age outside of the small circle of army base friends. He played with children from many different countries, such as Germany, Switzerland, Italy and England. And, though he said that it could be a boring place for a child to grow up he looked back fondly on his hockey memories and the friends he made there. We also spoke about why he loved the game of hockey:

Y: Uummmm... well, I mean... it's pretty hard to specify, because I mean, really everything about it I do love. I love the fact that it's out on the ice. I love everything about the aesthetic about it, I love that fact that it's skating and that that's in and of itself, even though it's easy for us because we've been doing it for so long, that in and of itself it is a skill you need to master before you can begin to play hockey. I don't know, the whole thing, it's a pretty... I don't know, I find it a pretty challenging sport. And the more challenging it is the more rewarding it is. The tougher a game is, the more you enjoy it, like especially when you can pull out a win or something. It's a hell of a lot better to win against a tough team than to win 8-1 or something. It's the challenge, I think. And, you know, you challenge yourself to be able to play this game that you've been practicing for so long. And make the right moves, the right decisions, the right plays, to be able to come up with the best result. And it's certainly not obvious, there is no way to predict what will happen before you get out there. Anything can happen. You just have to react in split seconds to situations. Like, you know, it's the same as most other sports. Hockey is probably faster than most other sports. But, you know, it's all split second decisions in sports. I also like the physicality of it. I loooove, you know, not necessarily full contact or anything, I don't play full-contact any more. But I love smashing and banging around and fighting for the puck. I love standing in front of the goalie and having people take slap shots at me and trying to deflect them or... get out of the way last minute, you know. I don't particularly like getting hit, but I don't mind, like if I am trying to make a play. I get only occasionally hurt, like most people we play with do not have the strongest shot. It hurts if Bill hits ya. But uh... Ya man, it's just, I don't know. It's just a game that I've loved since I was so tiny. It's all of my earliest memories are all hockey-related, or skating.

Yatesy is our captain for a reason: because his dedication to hockey is unparalleled. He showed up for games before everyone else when he still able to play, he showed up to watch us when he was injured, he would fill our water bottles and give us words of encouragement before games, he cheered and tried to coach us. Yatesy never gave up on the sport he loved, even when it broke his bones. The same speed he adores launched him into the boards. The same split second

decision-making left him able only to protect his head in this situation. His own physicality sowed the consequences.

It is the nature of hockey to be dangerous. The game is fast; the space is confined; the focus is on a rock-hard projectile being hurtled through space at bullet speed. Skates themselves are a contradictory invention: they simultaneously make the individual user incredibly vulnerable because of the chance of falling due to the slipperiness and empower the user with the potential for great speed and maneuverability. They are a blessing and a curse. No other piece of sports equipment is so minimal and interferes so little with the feeling of being self-propelled, while allowing such speed as the ice-skate. A bicycle may be faster, but it removes the person from contact with the ground. Skiing may be fast as well, but skis require the force of gravity to achieve such speeds. With ice skates the hockey player is almost running, but he can also glide and reach much higher speeds. The more the player engages his body and spirit to win, the greater the speed. Speed creates force; and force in a game of hard surfaces invariably leads to injury.

Hockey is a double-edged sword: it is equally rewarding and risky. Players walk a fine line each night, and no one knows when it might be their turn to take a bad spill or a vicious hit. In the case of such injuries our age and physical frailties are brought to light. We are not invincible, and we confront our mortality. Serious injury can make a player of any age reflect on how long they can continue to play, while small injuries seem to last longer as we age. For older players, bruises are more of a permanent condition and old injuries come back to remind them of past events. As Yatesy told me when I asked how people know they are aging through hockey, “It hurts more, it totally hurts more.” Even when it hurts more every time you get a puck off the skate or a bump in the corners, or are more severely injured like Yatesy, players are always just waiting to get out there and inflict more punishment on their bodies. How long until I can play again? How long until I can skate? How long until the next rush into the corners? It may defy logic to want to get back out on the ice shortly after such an intense injury, but there are many contradictions in amateur hockey, a dangerous game played by well-mannered adults.

Conclusion

Hockey is first and foremost a rigorous and physical sport, and that makes it sometimes dangerous for those who play the game. However, there are a plethora of different physical

rewards that players get from playing, which they believe outweigh the risks involved. Players feel that their general health and fitness is improved by playing hockey and that it would be severely impacted by quitting. Many players are not out on the ice giving it their all trying to win every night, but instead are trying to “get in a good skate” by pushing their bodies to their physical limits.

As players age, their bodily capabilities can decline and this can lead to players taking action against the effects of time. Players change their diets, they begin new workout routines, they see physical health therapists, and they even go as far as to stop drinking beer after games. Those I interviewed described the many things they had already and would change in the future, if it allowed them to continue playing hockey.. Younger players would work out to increase performance, but the older players would do so to be able to continue playing.

Players also described how they changed their playing style to one that restricted the chance of injury, and also allowed them to be more effective with their new capabilities. Players raised their hockey IQ, incorporating the effects of age, and they began to see and play the game in a brand new way. Some lamented that they wished they had had this knowledge earlier in their lives and this shows that they were not simply reacting to age, but saw their new knowledge as valuable at any age. This change in play allowed them to continue playing the game they love well into their 50s. Of course many said they wished they had the speed they once did, but playing a new game did not stop them from playing, nor did it stop them from considering that what they were doing was still a valid version of hockey. They may have changed the way the played, but they were still viewed as recognizably playing the game of hockey, the same game about which they reminisced in their interviews. The changes they made allowed them to continue to play hockey. This adaptation was not a compromise, it was an acceptance of some legitimate changes to physical capabilities and the older players were not viewed as lesser, but as inspirations to us all. The older players were a constant reminder and aspiration that one day we too could continue to play if we wanted.

Injury though, unlike age, could force itself upon the individual, forcing the player to realize they must make a change. Not every player is so lucky and sometimes injuries could end their season, or end their hockey “careers” without recourse. In these instances, if they were lucky, they could learn to play again, now with a new limitation, but it was possible. For those that were not so lucky there was no more change for change and adaptation, they were facing a

life changing accident every time they stepped on the ice. Some would still choose to play, because of their love for the game (and perhaps an unwillingness to acknowledge the reality of their situation), while the majority quit once their doctor had warned them that the next time they fell they might never walk again. For those that are still able to make a choice between continue to change or quit the game, the vast majority I played with over the past seasons would choose to change their playing style, knowing that playing differently is better than not playing at all.. And there is not much they would not change to be able to continue playing hockey.

CONCLUSION

Playing amateur hockey requires a commitment on the part of participants to make themselves available once a week to play a league game. Integrating this game time into the social, familial and work schedules of the individual requires forethought and planning. Time, money and energy are also required because hockey is an expensive, time-consuming and rigorous sport. Because my interlocutors love the game of hockey and have been playing since they were children, they make the effort that is required to participate.

Through the years they have adapted to their changing circumstances so as to be able to continue to play. What playing hockey means has changed for many of them throughout the years, but they maintain that it is largely the same activity they have always loved. There is an interplay between continuity and change here that requires some form of balancing act or negotiation. Participants have to allow or enact change in their everyday lives so as to be able to continue playing hockey, and when their everyday lives change they have to make appropriate changes in their hockey participation so as to be able to continue. The risks of ignoring these factors can lead to health problems, injury, a neglected family and social life, problems at work and/or other pressures. Hockey players become normalized to having to shift emphasis in their lives and become strong negotiators of their resources.

The balancing act between continuity and change is similar for the body: players have to be able to accurately gauge the changes their bodies undergo as they age, and need to act appropriately. Players that are unable to do so can hurt themselves due to the physical nature of hockey. An injury at any age can end a hockey season or hockey “career”; however, as players age they find even the smaller bumps and bruises of the game hurt more and have longer-lasting effects. And more severe injuries can more easily require a player to quit playing altogether; therefore, the risk of a more severe injury looms larger. Participants take action by training and keeping their levels of physical fitness high. Young players train to improve, while older players do so in order to be able to continue playing. Players develop a hockey IQ and physical skills, or a foundation of embodied knowledge, that aid them in maintaining their ongoing participation in the sport well into their later lives.

The social changes that were most commonly discussed by the youngest players were those associated with partying and drinking alcohol. Players spoke about trying to maintain these practices from their younger years (early twenties) through changing social conditions. Some were starting to have more serious career jobs, while others were starting young families. Most of the players in their mid-thirties and mid-forties had already gone through this transitional time and were no longer trying to maintain as much social interaction with teammates outside the arena. The game, played once a week, became their social event; it was their time away from the ever-present pressures of family and work life. They spoke nostalgically of their past exploits as heavy drinkers and parties; however, they rarely continued to take part in such activities because in reality they simply no longer had the time, energy or money to do so in their busy adult lives. Finally, the older players maintained much of what these 30- and 40-year-old players said, but had to focus more on their aging bodies as their aging become more apparent. Older players sometimes did not drink beer after games as their younger counterparts did. They were less likely to want to play more than one game per week, whereas the younger players would play as often as possible. To them, the game had become less about winning and competition and more about being out there on the ice and simply participating. Participating in itself could become a struggle for those over 50. Those over 60 were demonstrating to their juniors that it was possible, even desirable, to play hockey through the entire course of their lives. They played mostly for fun and to get in a good skate but, given the opportunity, they celebrated their goals with the same fervor as do young boys playing alone on frozen ponds imagining they are in the NHL.

Sports – in this case, amateur hockey – are fruitful loci for investigating how we age and understand that aging, because sports bring social and physical aspects to the fore of experience. All practices have both dimensions; however, sports readily provide participants with ample material to describe the aging process. Sports can provide a useful measure of how people feel their aging. There is a constant negotiation on two fronts that truly reveals how we age. Separately examining times of lives, phases or cycles in the life course has given us many great insights into how we age and how age is constructed at different times and places. However, it is limiting in the sense that it is overly rigid and essentializes the people it is addressing, who are far more dynamic than those structures reveal. Instead, by focusing on the dialectic between continuity and change throughout the life course in more processual terms, it is possible to overcome some of that limiting effect.

In my analysis I have highlighted some of the attributes of amateur hockey players in Montreal at different ages, thereby assigning them what could perhaps be called a phase or category of age. However, in my presentation of my findings I have tried to focus instead on the process and the dialectic of continuity and change. In this way I have not denied variety, nor differences within age groups themselves; however, I have made them neither overly rigid nor without contradiction and variety.

The amazing thing about sports is that they can serve as a vehicle for almost any message, from Nazi fascist ideology to one of peace, freedom and togetherness. That is exactly why sports are so important for anthropologists and other social scientists to study: they have a strong ability to be attached to culture, in all its elusiveness. Given that sport has such strength to be connected to ideology, the question ultimately becomes how we are going to inscribe sport with the values that we accept. The amateur men and women that I have had the pleasure of playing hockey with throughout my life re-consider and negotiate what their involvement means to them on a constant basis. Very few have time to devote more to the sport than simply playing the game the way they think it should be played. As intellectuals, anthropologists should be expected to account for what sort of ideals we want to infuse into sport, an activity that is capable of molding society. There are many influences on what message sports convey and how they should be practiced, and it is important for intellectuals to be more involved in examining/determining these messages. By becoming invested in sport and its wide-reaching appeal intellectuals will be able to enact positive social change.

The contributions I have attempted to make with this thesis are providing an in-depth ethnography of amateur hockey, looking at participation in amateur hockey as a leisure pursuit within the life course, discussing the process of aging in both its bodily and social aspects, and discussing the social dynamics of a hockey team. I believe that these are all important contributions to the anthropology of sport, in that they help address some of the gaps in the literature which I outlined in Chapter 1 and provide a fruitful avenue of research focusing on sports participation throughout the life course. Equally, I believe that amateur leisure sports (such as amateur hockey) provide a useful opportunity to probe theories of the life course, in that they focus on non-essential aspects of everyday life and they highlight the body in an activity that is also social.

I think that this thesis contributes also to the larger project of reflecting on what it means to be a citizen of Canada. Hockey has long been associated with Canada in a positive manner; however, not all Canadians participate in hockey, nor do they all believe that hockey is synonymous with Canadian identity.

It is also important to remember that hockey does have its dark side. Not all hockey participation is positive: there is a growing concern about the violence and aggression of the game (stats can), and there are also stories of abuse. These aspects warrant particular attention as much as do hockey's positive effects on youth development, a the fact that it is a good source of healthful exercise.

Finally, though it is by no means a new or complex theory, I believe that my thesis also contributes to theorization of the life course by conceptualizing the understanding of aging through the dialectical negotiation of continuity and change. Change and continuity are not polar opposites; one does not preclude the other. Instead, they facilitate each other. Players change their game so as to be able to continue to play, and continue to play so as to ease the pressures and stresses of change in their everyday lives and through their life course. Most of my interlocutors, when asked how long they thought they would play hockey, responded that they would continue to do so until they were dead or they could not physically play any more. And, given their evident ability to negotiate both the continuity and change in their lives it would not surprise me if they did.

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