Ice Hockey and the Cold War: Impacts on the Development of Canadian National Identity

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One of the most well-known aspects of the Cold War era in Canada was the impassioned ice hockey rivalry that emerged against the Soviet Union. Amidst the height of geopolitical tensions between the communist states of the Eastern Bloc and the capitalist states of the Western Blocs, sporting events and competitions materialised as a non-destructive venue for the nations involved to assert their respective ideological superiority. They presented an opportunity to not only gain international acclaim for the successes of their athletes but to allow also for the shaping and development of a distinct national identity at home. For Canada, this was a significant phenomenon and took place primarily through the avenue of ice hockey. Most Canadians who lived throughout the early 1970s would recall the Summit Series, an eight-game tournament featuring professional players, as the climactic manifestation of the nation's rivalry against the Soviets. In truth, the early roots of the on-ice conflict had emerged many years prior to the 1972 tournament and would last well beyond the Summit Series until the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. The Summit Series' origins were situated within Canada's broader geopolitical interests. A Cold War policy of diplomacy was responsible for creating such an event and continued to linger over competitions between the two nations over the next several decades. The context of the Cold War also appeared to be reflected in the ways in which the playing style of each nation was perceived. Fierce nationalism and a sense of superiority began to emerge within Canada as a result of this and contributed significantly to the development of a unified national identity based on the sport. While ice hockey was not the only sport where Canadian athletes squared up against the Soviet Union, it was certainly one of the most heavily covered of these events and carries the most notable legacy within Canada. Success in sports was seen as an important milestone to the nations of each side of the Cold War as it was considered to represent examples of greatness and the righteousness of their respective ideological systems. Throughout the Cold

War era in Canada, the sport of ice hockey was, therefore, a critical element behind the development and reinforcement of a nationalistic perception around a unified identity.

Following the end of the Second World War, the stability of global politics remained uncertain as the United States and the Soviet Union entered into a state of great tension with each other. As a geographical neighbour, Canada became one of the United States' closest political and economic allies, resulting in an increasingly intertwined foreign policy. Despite this, Canada's exact role in the Cold War remained uncertain. Since the end of the Second World War, Canada's international image was politically constructed to reinforce a perception of a diplomatic and peacekeeping nation.[1] This was an effort that assisted in establishing the nation's independence and authority on an international level. When Pierre Trudeau became Prime Minister, he viewed major sporting competitions, such as the Summit Series, as an opportunity to improve the nation's diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union and to further establish Canada's independence within international politics.[2] For Trudeau, matters of sport were increasingly viewed as being directly connected to the concept of a Canadian culture and were, therefore, important for promoting unity within the country. In concurrence with this, the advent of television further unlocked the potential for sports during the Cold War period by enabling the ability to broadcast such events directly into the homes of Canadians.[3] With increasing technological advancement and the changing political environment, the opportunity existed for the Canadian government to utilise sports such as ice hockey for political gain and the development of national identity.

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[1] Michael A. Robidoux, "Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey," *The Journal of American Folklore 115* (456) (2002): 209.
[2] John Soares, "The Cold War on Ice," *Brown Journal of World Affairs 14* (2) (2008): 82.
[3] Donald Macintosh and Donna Greenhorn, "Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy," *Journal of Canadian Studies 28* (2) (2018): 97-98.

By the beginning of the Cold War, ice hockey had already established itself as an identifiably Canadian sport within the country. Michael Robidoux, a scholar of sport identity in Canada, argues that hockey was viewed as uniquely Canadian by those within the country due to how it was played on a rough and frozen landscape, symbolising an idealised perception of the lifestyle of a Canadian colonialist.[4] The violent and aggressive nature of hockey was what separated it from other popular "bourgeois" sports and made it appealing to Canadians.[5] He further describes how post-confederation Canada was internally divided along the lines of language, region, and ethnicity, and was without a distinct identity or national unity.[6] Therefore, hockey became a source of unity for culturally distinct groups of Canadians such as the French-speaking and English-speaking populations. This source of unification and overall perception of hockey as "Canadian" in nature allowed for it to flourish throughout the nation. By the middle of the 20th century, the country had become well-established on the international stage as the most dominant nation in the sport. In the International Ice Hockey Federation's World Championship, a Canadian team medalled in every event that they participated in from the tournament's creation in 1920 until 1961.[7] Similar success was experienced in the Olympics where Canada won six out of the seven gold medals that were awarded between 1920 and 1952.[8] The indisputable success of the nation's international teams assisted in allowing the sport of ice hockey to become a source of pride and identity for Canadians throughout this period.

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[4] Robidoux, "Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport: A Historical Interpretation of Lacrosse and Hockey," 218.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid. 219.
[7] IIHF - World Men Medallists. https://www.iihf.com/en/medalists?selectedTournamentTypeID=3&gender=men (Accessed June 30, 2022).
[8] IIHF - Olympic Winter Games Men Medallists. https://www.iihf.com/en/medalists?selectedTournamentTypeID=3&gender=men (Accessed June 30, 2022).

While Canada's reputation as a dominant ice hockey nation had already been established by the years following World War II, it had come under serious threat when the Soviet Union began to find its own major international success in the sport. The first time the Soviet Union participated in Olympic hockey was during the 1956 Winter Olympics in Italy. During this competition, the Soviet team received international acclaim when they upset the Canadian team and went on to claim the gold medal.[9] This marked a defining shift as the reputation of Canadian ice hockey would suffer in the years that followed. At the same time, the Soviet Union carried on with its rise into a position of dominance. From 1963 to 1971, Soviet teams won nine straight gold medals at the IIHF World Championships while Canadian teams only managed to secure three bronze medals.[10] The setbacks of the 1960s were particularly difficult for many Canadians to come to terms with as the inability to maintain a high standard of international success was lamented across various newspapers. One article from *The Daily Colonist* stated that "it has been difficult for us to recognize the fact that [the] ability to play hockey well was not something given exclusively to Canadians."[11] For the Soviet Union, it was their clear goal to dominate the world stage of ice hockey and to demonstrate how communism was the economic system that produced the world's best athletes.[12] At this point, Cold War policy had led each of these nations towards realising the importance of athletic success and the notable effect that it had on international diplomacy.[13] The international accomplishments of the Soviet team had, therefore, offered great value in political propaganda. Simultaneously, the Soviet team had also come under significant criticism from Canadians due to the controversial reasoning behind what defined an

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[9] Macintosh and Greenhorn, "Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy," 97.
[10] IIHF - World Men Medallists. https://www.iihf.com/en/medalists?selectedTournamentTypeID=3&gender=men (Accessed June 30, 2022).
[11] Jim Tang, "It Beats Me," The Daily Colonist (February 14, 1963): 12.
[12] J.J Wilson, "27 Remarkable Days: The 1972 Summit Series of Ice Hockey between Canada and the Soviet Union." *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions 5* (2) (2004): 273.
[13] Macintosh and Greenhorn, "Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy," 106-107.

amateur player. Until 1976, the IIHF's rules on international tournaments had prohibited non-amateur players from participating.[14] Since the Soviet national team was based out of the Central Army Sports Club, all athletes were classified as military officers and were, therefore, considered to be amateurs by the IIHF.[15] Meanwhile, many of Canada's top players were professionals in the National Hockey League (NHL) which prevented them from being granted eligibility to play internationally. Many Canadians saw this ruling as a plot by the Soviets to take control of their national winter sport and it eventually led to the nation's withdrawal from the IIHF in 1970 as well as the boycotting of international tournaments such as the 1972 and 1976 Olympics.[16] During a meeting amongst IIHF members that took place in Geneva, this withdrawal was made official when a vote went against Canada's petition to allow players to be sent to international competitions regardless of their status. At this moment, the president of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association, Earl Dawson, claimed that the Soviets were looking to win at any cost and their odds were improved greatly without the presence of a Canadian team.[17] On its own, the Canadian boycott was ultimately unsuccessful in forcing the IIHF to change or clarify its rules and the nation's absence on the international stage did little to help repair its damaged image in the sport. The success and rise to international dominance by the Soviet Union was, therefore, paralleled throughout this period of time by Canada's declining image as the top nation in ice hockey.

By the 1970s, the poor state of Canada's hockey image was widely realised throughout much of the country. Most importantly, this truth had been recognized in 1968 by newly-elected Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, who connected ice hockey with national unity and made a

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[14] "The Final Report of the President's Commission on Olympic Sports," *U.S. Government Printing Office* (January 1977): 110.
[15] Soares, "The Cold War on Ice," 78.
[16] Macintosh and Greenhorn, "Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy," 104-105..
[17] "Push to End All Sham Amateurism To Follow Withdrawal from Hockey." *The Daily Colonist* (January 6, 1970): 10.

campaign promise to create a task force pertaining to the sport.[18] Trudeau followed through with his campaign promise and Hockey Canada was incorporated the following year with the mandate of managing and developing a national ice hockey team.[19] This was a major step for the nation in its attempt to re-establish Canada's prominence in international hockey. In combination with Trudeau's aims to improve the nation's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the context for organising an international tournament between the two entities was set. During an IIHF meeting in Prague in April 1972, an agreement was made between Soviet representatives, Canadian diplomats, and Hockey Canada to schedule an eight-game series without amateur restrictions between the two teams in September of that year.[20] While the Canadian team was unrestricted by international rules in constructing its roster, a complication emerged with the National Hockey League, which needed to give permission for contracted players to participate in international events. The NHL agreed to allow the participation of its players on the condition that only professionals from their league be permitted to represent Canada.[21] While the vast majority of Canadian players likely to be selected for the team already played in the NHL, this did lead to some exclusions from the rival World Hockey Association where notable players such as Bobby Hull were excluded.[22] Although it may not have been realised during its organisation, the Summit Series would eventually become the most prominent tournament of the era and a major landmark in Canadian history. The governments on both sides had good cause to be eager towards facilitating such an event. The Soviets had yet to prove themselves against the best that Canada had to offer and the Canadians were hoping to put any doubts about their hockey dominance to rest. Although the Summit Series was initially planned as a series of "friendly"

[18] Macintosh and Greenhorn, "Hockey Diplomacy and Canadian Foreign Policy," 101.
[19] Ibid. 102.
[20] Ibid. 106.
[21] Scott D. Watson, "Everyday Nationalism and International Hockey: Contesting Canadian National Identity," *Nations & Nationalism 23* (2) (April 1, 2017): 302.
[22] Ibid.

games between the two nations, it became clear throughout its duration that it had evolved into something much more serious.

In September of 1972, school gymnasiums were converted into cinemas for spectators to watch and some urban centres across both countries were described as being left nearly deserted when the games started.[23] During the weeks leading up to the tournament, it became clear that many Canadians expected an easy Canadian victory. The existence of a national myth that portrayed Canadians as hockey's inventors with the world's best players, enabled the belief that the Soviets would be put in their place for claiming to be the world's champions.[24] The Canadian team of professional players did not take the pre-tournament training camp seriously and were overconfident that they would sweep the series against the Soviets. The players admitted that going into camp, nobody was overly concerned about the series and this attitude reflected their work ethic in preparation.[25] This overconfidence was not exclusive to the players. Many journalists had also voiced their assertions that the Canadians would dominate the series, including Dick Beddoes, the *Toronto Globe and Mail* reporter who would later have to fulfil his promise to eat the newsprint of the column he had written if Canada did not win all eight games.[26] Before flying to Moscow to play out the remaining four games of the series, the Canadian team had only managed to secure one win while tieing in another game and losing the other two against the Soviets on home soil. By the end of the fourth game in Vancouver, it appeared as if the Canadian fans had turned against their nation's team. Phil Esposito, one of the team's captains, recalled that after being selected as star of the game for Canada, fans in the

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[23] Wilson, "27 Remarkable Days," 277.
[24] Roy MacSkimming, "Cold War on Ice: Summit Series '72," directed by George Roy, *Flagstaff Films,* (2012) DVD.
[25] Phil Esposito, J.P. Parise, Bobby Clarke, Rod Gilbert and Paul Henderson, "Cold War on Ice: Summit Series '72," directed by George Roy, *Flagstaff Films,* (2012) DVD.
[26] "Russian Revolution," *TIME Magazine 100* (12) (September 18, 1972): 61.

arena began booing and yelling out suggestions that communism was better.[27] The first half of the Summit Series had resulted in a major wake-up call for Canadian hockey. The poor performance reflected the team's overconfident expectations while the strong reaction shared between fans and the media proved that the series was about more than just hockey. In Moscow, it was revealed that around 3000 Canadian fans had made the trip along with the team to witness the remainder of the series.[28] Despite losing in game 5, the Canadian team rallied to win the remaining three games and the series. Although the team emerged victorious and the moment became embedded within Canadian history, the close series was a humbling experience for a nation that had taken its position of superiority in hockey for granted. The Summit Series was significant in providing the opportunity for Canadians to unite behind the country within the context of the Cold War and it reinforced the perception of a shared identity based on the sport of ice hockey.

One of the major themes throughout the Cold War was the dichotomy presented between good and evil. This was typically expressed between the respective ideologies of communism and capitalism. Communism, the economic system and political theory based on communal ownership and the absence of private property, was adhered to by the Soviet Union. Capitalism, the economic system based on free markets and private ownership principles, was followed by Canada. Both nations sought to prove that their respective ideological system was culturally superior to each other and much of this notion also emerged within the sport of hockey. Phil Esposito described the Summit Series itself as a clash between two distinct societies and that the players were at war with each other.[29] In some regards, the way in which both teams modelled

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[27] Phil Esposito, "Cold War on Ice: Summit Series '72," directed by George Roy, *Flagstaff Films,* (2012) DVD.
[28] "Cold War on Ice: Summit Series '72," directed by George Roy, *Flagstaff Films,* (2012) DVD.
[29] Scott Morrison, "The Days Canada Stood Still: Canada vs USSR 1972" *McGraw-Hill Ryerson* (1989): 17.

their approach to the sport was often perceived to be reflective of their ideological differences. A coach from Newfoundland described the differences in the approach to hockey development as being "communistic versus capitalistic," where in the Soviet Union, the state assumed sole responsibility, and in Canada, involvement was regarded as being more open.[30] The associations between the sport of hockey and these political ideologies evidently took on significant meaning. For the Soviet Union, much of their style of play appeared to reflect certain aspects of their nation's political ideology. In this system, players were largely viewed as indistinguishable from one another with the collective effort of the team taking precedence over individual skills and accomplishments.[31] The Soviet playing style emphasised the value of skilled teamwork which diminished the presence of star players. This technique was pioneered through the innovative ideas of the Russian ice hockey architect, Anatoly Tarasov, who incorporated aspects of soccer, ballet, and science to reflect a practical application of communist principles into ice hockey.[32] In contrast to this, hockey within Canada and much of North America was played very differently at the time. The Canadian style typically involved hard-working forwards and checking defensemen with a strong reliance on goaltending.[33] This system benefited more from the physicality and determination of individual players as opposed to effective teamwork.[34] In contrast to the Soviets, the Canadian style of hockey lacked a strong systemic approach and was often reliant on the skills and efforts of individual players. For example, Phil Esposito was recognized as a key leader for the Canadian team and his speech following the game 4 loss was notably credited with rallying the disillusioned team and nation.[35] Furthermore, Paul Henderson

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[30] "Secrets of the Soviet hockey program," *CBC Archives,* (1974) https://www.cbc.ca/archives/secrets-of-the-soviet-hockey-system-of-1974-1.5273212 (Accessed June 30, 2022).
[31] Wilson, "27 Remarkable Days," 273.
[32] Soares, "The Cold War on Ice," 79.
[33] "Canadian Hockey," *Maclean's 98* (4) (1985): 25.
[34] Watson, "Everyday Nationalism and International Hockey," 303.
[35] Wilson, "27 Remarkable Days," 274-275.

emerged as a star player and was the decisive factor in Canada's victory after scoring the winning goals in each of the final three games of the series.[36] These differences were also demonstrated more broadly throughout the Summit Series with the Canadians being outmatched in game one by the skilled systematic approach taken by the Soviets and in games six and seven where Canada's physicality proved a major factor in their victories.[37] During game six, in particular, a controversial incident occurred when Canadian forward, Bobby Clarke, broke the ankle of one of the Soviet players, Valeri Kharlamov, with a violent slash after being instructed to by his coaches.[38] Although these different playing styles were rooted within the ideological nature of their geographical context, much of this was due to the way in which sporting culture had developed. As Michael Robidoux argued, the nature of Canadian hockey was situated within the context of its rough-natured origins. This was a notable factor during the Summit Series games that were played within Moscow as the Canadian team tended to be penalised more frequently. Despite the Canadian team's claim of poor quality refereeing, which resulted in significantly more penalties being called against them, this was likely due to the different style of play that was recognized in the region. Soviet officials tended to be far more strict in determining what on-ice behaviour was permitted than those in North America.[39] This should not have come as a shock given the fact that the Soviets, as well as other European teams, had been critical of the rough nature of Canadian hockey in the past. In 1960, during a preliminary match against Sweden for the upcoming Olympics, the Canadian style of play was reported to have upset the Swedes so much that it harmed diplomatic relationships between the two countries.[40] Additionally, when European teams arrived to play in Canada, they would often arrange for

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[36] Ibid, 277.
[37] "Cold War on Ice: Summit Series '72," directed by George Roy.
[38] Wilson, "27 Remarkable Days," 276.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Soares, "The Cold War on Ice," 82.

games to be played under international rules that were less lenient towards the physicality that many Canadian players were used to.[41] Overall, this difference in the approach that Canada and the Soviet Union took towards playing hockey served as an important aspect of their Cold War rivalry by representing the existing political tensions. Canadians rallied behind and supported the nature in which their team played hockey as it had become viewed as an extension of ideological and national values. With the Soviet system possessing strong correlations with communist values, the methods typically employed by teams from Canada would naturally come to be identified as the Canadian way of playing hockey.

Although the 1972 Summit Series was likely the most climactic moment of the Soviet-Canadian hockey rivalry throughout the Cold War, it did not mark its ending. In reality, the Summit Series resulted in a major boost toward national interest amongst Canadians for international tournaments, particularly against the Soviets. Regular international events such as the Winter Olympics and the IIHF's World Championship continued to offer the chance for the two teams to face off against each other, however, over the course of the next two decades, several additional tournaments would be formed to provide even further opportunity.[42] Included amongst these was the Canada Cup, a tournament modelled similarly to the Summit Series with the inclusion of several other countries that was hosted for the first time in 1976.[43] Following the success of the Summit Series, the establishment of the Canada Cup reinforced the development of Canada's hockey identity within this context. The National Hockey League also took an interest in organising events against national teams from the Soviet Union which included instances such as the 1979 Challenge Cup and its follow-up, Rendez-Vous '87. The most notable

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[41] "Rough Stuff," *The Daily Colonist* (December 21, 1963) 4.
[42] The Canadian boycott on international events ended in 1977. The ban on professional athletes from participating in the Olympics lasted until 1986. See F. Litsky.
[43] Michal Marcin Kobierecki, "Canada – USSR Hockey Exchanges. Between Positive and Negative Sports Diplomacy," *Historia i Polityka, no. 18* (25) (February, 2017): 29.

of these events was the Super Series, a set of exhibition matches organised between various Soviet and NHL teams that ran from 1976 through 1991. One of the more memorable moments from the Super Series happened in the inaugural tournament during a game between the Philadelphia Flyers and CSKA Moscow.[44] It is best remembered for the Soviet coach withdrawing his team to the locker room midway through the first period to protest the rough playing style of the Flyers. In response, NHL president, Clarence Campbell, threatened to withhold the $200,000 payment promised to the Soviets unless they returned to the ice.[45] While this instance exemplifies the culture clash between these hockey styles, it also highlights that the intensity of the Summit Series had remained a prominent aspect within the Canadian and Soviet hockey rivalry. The organisation of these tournaments that followed the Summit Series demonstrated further evidence of the success and lasting effects of the original event. This ongoing interest in international hockey throughout the remainder of the 1970s and into the 1980s reflects how hockey culture had continued to become entrenched within Canadian identity.

The 1987 World Junior Championship in Piestany, Czechoslovakia would be where one of the last and most significant matchups between Canada and the Soviet Union took place. The tournament is not as well remembered amongst Canadians for its final results, but instead for the infamous on-ice brawl that erupted during a round-robin game against the Soviet team.[46] Canada and the Soviet Union had been matched up against each other in the final game of the tournament on January 4th, 1987 to determine the medal results. The structure of this tournament meant that teams did not play in medal rounds and that the final results were instead determined

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[44] Although an American team, the Philadelphia Flyers roster in 1976 was composed of almost entirely Canadian-born players, including Bobby Clarke, who had played for Canada at the Summit Series in 1972.

[45] "Soviet Superseries," *TIME Magazine 107* (4) (January 26, 1976): 45.

[46] A type of tournament schedule in which a team plays once against every other team within their group or division. In hockey, it can often be used to determine the tournament's final results or the seeding for a playoff or medal round that follows.

by the overall records of each team during the round-robin. The Canadian team was guaranteed to win at least the bronze medal with a chance at securing gold while the Soviets had already been eliminated from medal contention.[47] The stakes going into the game were clearly higher for the Canadian team while the best result that the Soviet team could hope for was to spoil their opponent's chances of winning a silver or gold medal. During the 2nd period of the game, an altercation took place between Soviet and Canadian players, Pavel Kostichkin and Theoren Fleury, which initiated a fight that eventually escalated into a full-scale brawl as players from both teams left their respective benches.[48] This carried on for twenty minutes as the referees, unable to control the situation, left the ice, and arena officials turned out the lights in a futile attempt to put an end to the fighting.[49] In the aftermath, the International Ice Hockey Federation suspended the remainder of the game and announced that both teams had been expelled from the tournament.[50] The event was dubbed the "Punch Up in Piestany," and resulted in a fierce national debate within Canada.[51] While this debate had various arguments and interpretations from a wide range of individuals, it was primarily centred around the determination of who was responsible for the on-ice brawl. Blame for what took place on the ice was directed toward all of the parties involved in the tournament. Referee Hans Ronning received part of the blame for his inability to control the situation and the IIHF was criticised for their use of game officials perceived to be unqualified.[52] Blame was also directed toward the Canadian Head Coach, Burt Templeton, for his controversial history involving similar incidents.[53] The implication that the Soviet players were the ones responsible was backed by the claim that since they were already out of medal

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[47] "A Hockey Fight That Cost a Medal," *Maclean's 100* (4), January 19, 1987: 50.
[48] Ibid. 50.
[49] "1987: Canada, USSR brawl at World Junior Hockey Tournament," *CBC Archives*, (January 4, 1987) https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/1987-punch-up-in-piestany Accessed March 9, 2021.
[50] "A Hockey Fight That Cost a Medal," *Maclean's,* 50.
[51] "1987: Canada, USSR brawl at World Junior Hockey Tournament," *CBC Archives*.
[52] "A Hockey Fight That Cost a Medal," *Maclean's,* 50.
[53] Ibid.

contention, they had nothing to lose by deliberately sabotaging the Canadian team's chances.[54] One of the most outspoken individuals on the matter was CBC commentator and former NHL coach, Don Cherry, who appeared on television to debate the matter with sports writer, Michael Farber. While Farber described the instance as a national embarrassment, Cherry directed blame entirely towards the Soviet team and described the decision for the Canadian players to leave their bench in response to this as "the Canadian way."[55] One certainty from the debate is that Canadians were strongly attached to their country's association with ice hockey and how it reflected their image internationally. Many within the country, such as Don Cherry, were quick to defend the Canadian players and direct responsibility away while others, such as Michael Farber, considered the brawl to be an embarrassment for the nation. It is clear that a common aspect shared between both sides of this debate was the assertion that ice hockey was a defining feature of Canadian identity. The Piestany debate reflected the culmination of the effects of decades prior within the Cold War context. The legacy of past matchups was active in fueling the correlation between hockey and Cold War politics. Contrary to the Summit Series, which had created an atmosphere of national pride and unity, the events that took place in Piestany managed to do the opposite as after the team was disqualified, the nation found itself divided on how the causes behind it were to be interpreted.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is evident that the ice hockey rivalry between Canada and the Soviet Union had undergone a significant shift. At the same time that international tournaments were providing the means for players from opposite sides of the Cold War to face off against each other, there was also a growing interest amongst Soviet players to enter the top

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[54] Ibid.
[55] "Don Cherry on the 1987 World Junior Hockey Brawl," *CBC Archives,* (January 5, 1986) https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/don-cherry-on-the-1987-world-junior-hockey-brawl Accessed March 9, 2021.

league in North America, the National Hockey League. Up until this point in time, hockey players from the Soviet Union had previously been prohibited from playing in the NHL. In 1989, Sergei Priakin became the first Soviet-approved player to play in North America after being signed by the Calgary Flames.[56] Others soon followed, notably players who were unable to receive the same type of approval and instead chose to give up their Soviet allegiance and become defectors. Defection and the resulting migration of former-Soviet hockey players to North American leagues, is notable as it demonstrated a major shift in the status of the international hockey rivalry between Canada and the Soviet Union. Animosity shared between the players began to decline as they looked less towards the national prestige of playing hockey for their country and more towards a personal and economic desire to play with and against the top players in the world on a non-international level. In doing so, players who had been on opposing sides of international teams were now finding themselves as teammates in the National Hockey League. The results of defection and the gradual influx of both Soviet and other European players into North American hockey provided a strong indication that the peak of this rivalry had passed. The ideological and political intersections with hockey had become significantly less prevalent by this period of time. Previous distinctions of east versus west and communism versus capitalism that had symbolically defined the context of previous events were now disappearing. These notions had played a major role in shaping Canada's ice hockey identity and with their increasing absence and the nearing of the Cold War's end, these immediate effects ceased to remain a major factor going forward. The eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 represented a formal conclusion to this rivalry, although the effects of its legacy remain visible to the present.

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[56] John Howse, "Soviet Invasion, " *Maclean's 102* (41) (October 9, 1989): 46.

The lasting effects of the Cold War era on Canadian hockey can be most clearly seen through the nation's persistent devotion to the sport that has existed since. Standing out as one of the largest examples of this is the reception towards the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. When the Canadian team defeated the United States in the gold medal game, the total audience was 16.7 million, making it the most-viewed television broadcast in Canadian history.[57] A more expansive example that represents the legacy of this is the nation's attachment to the IIHF's World Junior Championship. Prior to the television rights for the tournament being acquired by The Sports Network (TSN) in 1991, the tournament was largely inconsequential in the broader scope of international sporting events for Canada. Even though the 1987 tournament attracted significant publicity from its controversial nature, games at the annual World Junior Championship were rarely broadcasted live and tended to attract small in-person crowds.[58] The transformation of the event into one of the nation's most monumental sporting tournaments was in a large part the result of TSN's acquisition which led to an increase in marketing and promotion that allowed Canadians to gain meaningful interest in it. The network took an intimate approach towards the tournament with their level of personal involvement and, as a result, has consistently attracted millions of Canadian viewers to the games whether they are played domestically or overseas.[59] The tournament's scheduling around the holiday season at the end of December and beginning of January is also a significant factor in its success in Canada. For many Canadians, this has allowed the tournament to become a part of their holiday traditions as games take place when many are off work and at home. The meaning of national identity in relation to hockey is certainly different within this context as the emphasis on aspects of communism against

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[57] "2010 Gold Medal Game is the Apex of TV Viewing in Canada," *Hockey Canada,* (March 13, 2010) https://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/news/2010-oly-024-en Accessed March 10, 2021.
[58] Scott Stinson, "Making of a monster: How TSN transformed the world juniors from small-time curiosity into must-see TV," *National Post*, (January 4, 2018).
[59] Ibid.

capitalism has largely disappeared. However, it is clear from the continued successes of international hockey in terms of viewership that many Canadians continue to view hockey as a significant aspect of their national identity.

As a result of the developments that took place with regard to Canadian identity and hockey culture throughout the Cold War, the resulting legacy is considerable. Ice hockey was quickly recognized by government officials as an important means to the development of national identity. It was from this recognition that the 1972 Summit Series was organised. Along with being a battle between two of the world's best hockey teams of the era, the competition also encapsulated the realities of Cold War politics that extended far beyond hockey and would stand as a major landmark within Canadian history for its effects on unifying the country through the sport. Throughout this era, the Summit Series and subsequent events were situated within the context of a period of intense ideological differences where the rivalry between Canada and the Soviet Union flourished. Following the 1987 World Juniors and an influx of Soviet defectors, much of this intensity faded away. One of the most significant features from this period of time was the realisation of the importance that both hockey and sports, in general, had on the concept of Canadian identity on the international level. Ice hockey remains a major source of Canadian identity in the present and much of this perception was developed and shaped throughout the events of the Cold War era.

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