

Sports

weakened in choosing their teams by the skimming of the cream of players into professional leagues as happens in Canada. Everyone with an interest in Canadian hockey must work together in a voluntary and free way in order to improve our representation and record. We must press for "open" competition. We must insist on the removal of artificial barriers to the participation of our best players.

Certainly, that concept changes part of the motion.

Meanwhile, we must create a unit involving all interested parties to develop and manage and sustain the Canadian team at international tournaments, whether these are "closed" as now or ultimately and hopefully "open".

We note approvingly the initiative shown at a gathering held in Ottawa on February 20, 1969, . . .

Just shortly before this report was released—

. . . chaired and convened by the hon. John Munro. Out of this meeting came the announcement of HOCKEY CANADA. As conceived there, it dovetails with the recommendations we now make, and it follows on from our summit meeting last December, and discussions previously held between the CAHA, NHL teams' officials and National Teams over the last two years.

This 1969 report of the Task Force on Sports for Canadians went on to recommend:

. . . that a non-profit corporation, to be known as HOCKEY CANADA, be established for the purpose of managing and financing the National hockey teams of Canada.

The report contains a series of recommendations on how Team Canada would be set up and these have basically been followed. In recent years, we have found that sport at the international level has assumed an increasingly important place in the eyes of people all around the world. We have had our own discouragements, as in the 1960's when we fell behind in world competition, and ran into problems with the International Ice Hockey Association.

The effect of international competition upon internal and domestic development of each sport is most important. The highlights of such events are individual performances. When you talk about hockey, you must look to what happened in the initial games last year. Players were picked out of the various teams and so the players had not worked together, but finally they came through for their country in a manner that I do not think any of us expected. The international effect of competition at home and abroad is very important and, as the task force report concludes, was felt last year in diplomatic circles in Europe. Apparently national prestige was low with European countries as the performance of our teams in international competition fell behind. Until the early 1950's, we were doing well in the world championships in ice hockey. The one exception was 1936 when the British team won the championship and that was principally a team made up of Canadians anyway, so we could not feel too badly about that.

● (1730)

We know about developments over the past two decades in Russia, Sweden and Czechoslovakia. Certainly the United States has come a long way. The national team concept, which started all this and which brings us to this discussion, was first introduced about one decade ago under the guidance of Father Bauer. That team was first housed in Vancouver, then Winnipeg, then Winnipeg and Ottawa. Again efforts were made to put together amateurs

[Mr. Fleming.]

but we just could not keep up with the competition by working on that basis.

The problems of establishing an ongoing Team Canada today are even greater. The establishment of the World Hockey Association has created a war for the best available junior players, with the result that salaries have skyrocketed in the NHL and in the World Hockey Association. In essence, the sources of talent are being drained at a greater rate than in former years: anybody who watches hockey will not argue with that assertion. This has come about because of the expansion of the NHL and the introduction of the World Hockey Association.

Team Canada would have extreme difficulty in obtaining the kind of competition it would need in order to keep its players competitive and, indeed, it would experience great difficulties in keeping its players. Even if it were possible to obtain the calibre of player required for international competition, it is easy to visualize that those players would soon become bored with the usual kind of competition which could be offered to them and it is very likely that sooner or later most of them would return to the professional ranks.

You would need one excellent team with top pay; and remember you have to compete with the NHL and the WHA if you are to get it. In this case you are talking about millions of dollars and long-term contracts. The question is, even if you get players on the team, how do you keep them there when they do not have their own kind of people to compete with? The only way to do this would be to create the sort of Team Canada which we have had in the fairly recent past, and deal directly with the NHL and the WHA.

Such a team would be ineligible for Olympic competition; let us remember that. And assuming that it consisted of professional players who were salaried, it would have difficulty in arranging regular, ongoing games with teams from other countries outside of world championships or Olympic Games. Graduated junior players in themselves would not be competent to compete equally in world championships. That was borne out last year when the chief responsibilities for Team Canada rested with the experienced NHL players on the team.

It should be noted that the International Ice Hockey Federation does not recognize players in our established professional leagues, including the National Hockey League, the World Hockey Association, the Central Professional Hockey League and the Western Hockey League. That is where the professionals are; that is where the best players come from. The motion before us suggests that players of that caliber ought to be included on the team. Frankly, under the rules of the International Ice Hockey Federation they would not be eligible for certain kinds of competition.

The responsibility for fielding a hockey team to represent Canada in international play rests with Hockey Canada. It is a non-profit corporation established under part II of the Companies Act. All the varied interests in hockey in Canada, the Canadian Intercollegiate Athletic Union, the Canadian professional teams, the NHL and the WHA, the players' association, the public at large and the government are represented on the board of directors of Hockey Canada.