

FOCUS

And the towel snaps for thee

Hazing in collegiate sports isn't going anywhere, sociologist says

BY JO-ANN CHIU

VANCOUVER (CUP) — Exposing rookie initiations in the media will not stop hazing among varsity athletes, says University of Calgary sports sociologist Jamie Bryshun. If anything, it will drive the rituals underground.

Bryshun, who has co-authored a chapter in the soon-to-be-released book *Sport and Gender in Canada*, says the traditions often run too deep, and nothing any coach or university administrator says or does can end them.

"Just because we don't see it anymore doesn't mean it's not going on," he said in an interview this week. "It's too drastic of a step

for administrators and coaches to think people will stop hazing."

Bryshun and colleague Kevin Young have documented a range of hazing activities. Some are designed for public humiliation, such as women's teams forcing

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rookies to wear unfashionable clothes and bad makeup in public. Others are just downright gross, as when rookies are forced to insert food items into various parts of the anatomy.

In their chapter, they describe the "Rookie Olympics" held by one men's soccer team, in which rookies had to place Twinkies under their armpits while running relay races. Losers had to collect all the Twinkies and take a bite out of them.

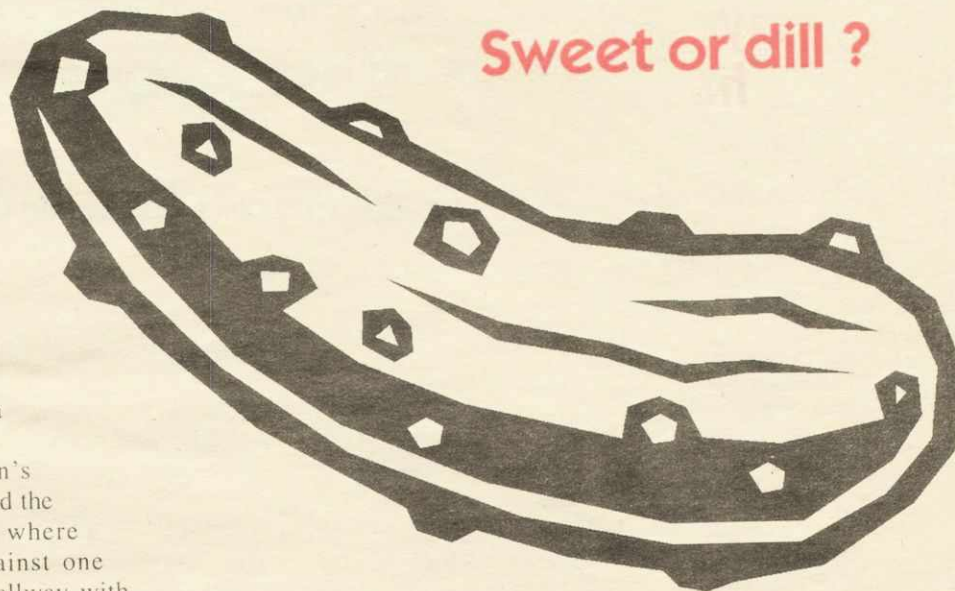
A women's soccer team featured the "Pickle Race," where rookies raced against one another down a hallway with pickles inserted into their clothed buttocks. The loser of the race had to eat her own pickle. Although the chapter describes less humiliating forms of initiations — one team, for example, only required their rookies to guzzle lots of beer — there are also more severe cases cited.

In 1994, four male hockey players in Ontario reported that they were forced to masturbate publicly. As a result, 13 people were charged with over 100 sexual offenses.

Earlier this month, veterans on the University of British Columbia men's swim team told rookies that they had

ejaculated in their spaghetti dinner, later insisting it was just a verbal joke.

In that case, coaches said they had taken measures to end these activities.



Sweet or dill ?

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But Bryshun says there is little that can be done to stop initiations.

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After punishments have been dealt and coaches and administrators have implemented a no-hazing policy, athletes will likely take on "codes of silence", Bryshun says. Hazing will be moved from a public venue to a private one. Instead of a prominent spot on campus, the rituals will more likely take place in a teammate's basement.

It's a vicious cycle that is difficult to stop.

"This year's rookies will not be pleased if they are told next year not to do to others what has been done to them. One of the joys you look forward to is being able to initiate rookies the next year," explains Bryshun, who had to eat a live goldfish for his high school football team's initiation in Saskatoon.

"When the vets are older and physically larger, and you want them to like you, you don't think about it, you just do it," he says.

When both the veterans and rookies are willing participants, hazing becomes even more difficult to regulate.

Bryshun says although the public views hazing as punishment, for athletes initiations are "just another day, an accepted part of life."

Hazing, he explains, is about issues of power and hierarchy within a sports team. Rookie initiations allow veteran players to

assert their power and position in a social setting, and for the rookies, it is the opportunity to become an accepted member and to be ascribed an identity.

For the rookies who decline to participate, the consequences are sometimes grim.

"Accepted members will ostracize them right off the team," says Bryshun.

Since no previous data was available when Bryshun began

preparing his 1997 master's thesis on sports-related hazing, he spent a year gathering information and conducting in-depth interviews with 30 varsity athletes from across

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Canada.

Bryshun says some coaches turn a blind eye to hazing.

"A lot of coaches are ex-athletes and probably know more than they care to."

According to Bryshun, initiation into male teams often includes nudity and physical violence. In contrast, female teams frequently involve public humiliation. Binge drinking, defined as five drinks or more, is a hazing practice common to teams of both genders.

Bryshun says that sometimes it takes a hazing incident gone wrong, such as alcohol poisoning or hospitalization, to finally force officials to address the issues.

And when they do attempt to stop hazing, will the intervention work?


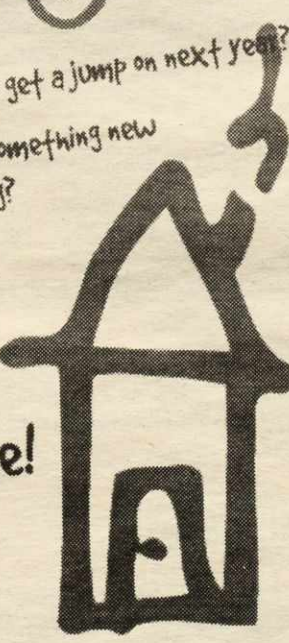
Bryshun responds with his own question. "What do you think?"

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