

# VIEW From The Cheap Seats

By Mark Savoie

One of the things that I would like to see done in professional sports is the abolition of a stratified league system incorporating minor leagues. What I would like to see in its place is a tiered system as in English football (the real kind, not the kind with the funny shaped ball). If we went to this system I believe that the free market nature which is inherent with it would bring an end to the wave of labour discontent which has marked professional sports for the last two decades.

The way English football works is that there are approximately 80 teams in four divisions, 20 teams in each. These divisions are tiered such that only teams in the Premier Division can win the league championship. In this way it is similar to North American sports; only teams in the NHL can win the Stanley Cup. However, at the end of each season, the bottom three teams in the Premier Division are dropped to the First Division (actually the second division, it's just named First Division; proof that sometimes the English are as stupid as the Americans), while the top three teams from the First Division are raised to the Premier Division. The same policy applies for the First and Second Divisions, and for the Second and Third Divisions.

In essence, the lower divisions serve the place of the minor leagues of North American sports. The beauty of the tiered division system, and the main difference from the minor leagues, is that each of these teams is actually trying to win. It is a sad fact that the Fredericton Canadiens, and all of the other teams in the AHL, are not actually trying to win the Calder Cup. Oh, if it happens it will be nice, but the real *raison d'être* for the Fredericton Canadiens is to help the Montreal Canadiens win the Stanley Cup. As a result, all those games at the Aitken Centre are really just a bunch of exhibitions. At least the Varsity Reds and the intramurals are playing to win for their own sake.

What I advocate would mean that Fredericton's representative in professional hockey could conceivably win the Stanley Cup. Given our extremely small market size, this is highly unlikely, but if some eccentric multi-millionaire decided that he was willing to take the financial loss in order to pay for the best players in the game, then he could do so and Fredericton could compete, at least for a little while. In reality, we would be a third of fourth division city, but at least our team would be trying to win.

The danger with this type of system is that its need for a completely free market makes it possible for a few rich teams to dominate completely. This is what has happened in Portugal. In Portugal only Benfica and Sporting Lisbon have won the league championship over the last thirty years. The other teams, even those in the Premier Division, play for the honour of finishing third (sometimes even getting second place). However, in countries as large and wealthy as the United States and Canada, it would be difficult for this to happen. No team in New York will ever be able to consistently dominate Chicago, or Los Angeles, or Toronto. There are too many 'great' cities in North America for one to establish a hegemony for any professional sport.

The tiered structure will mean that cities such as Winnipeg will find it increasingly difficult to compete against New York. However, there is nothing in the constitutions of either the United States or Canada that says that Winnipeg should have the same ability to recruit hockey players as does New York. The point is that if Winnipeg cannot compete with the big boys, then the big boys should be under no obligation to artificially make it possible for them to do so.

In the free market that this type of structure should necessitate, the players would have complete freedom of movement and the draft would be abolished. The teams would no longer be able to dictate terms to the players. However, the tiered structure would finally force the owners to practice financial restraint on their own, by actually allowing that option. At present, if a major league team like the Winnipeg Jets finds that it can't compete economically with the New York Rangers, it has no real options. They have to pay for the players or become a bad team and lose all of their fan support, thus creating an even worse situation. In a tiered, free market system Winnipeg's owners would have the option of electing to pay for First (or Second) Division talent if they find that they can't afford Premier Division talent.

The end result of all this is that there would be a lot more teams out there, and a greatly increased interest in the local team. It would spread the sports dollar around much more evenly. There would be more money involved in the industry, but the profits and salaries would drop. This would be great for the fans, but the owners and players will resist it as long as they are able. Thus, it is the government's responsibility to realise that the present league structures represent an unnatural restraint of trade and to thus legislate them out of existence, thereby forcing the establishment of the tiered division system.

Basketball

## Reds' season opener

The UNB Varsity Reds mens basketball team will start the season with a very busy schedule. The Reds will have three games in three days beginning with a tip-off game at Harbour Station before the Portland Trailblazers take the court against the New Jersey Nets. UNB will be going head-to-head against the defending National Champions St. F.X. X-Men.

The Reds will then head back to the Pit to play in the annual Fall Classic. The teams for this years tourney include Bishops Gaitors, Laval Rouge et Or and UPEI Panthers. The schedule of the games is designed so that the AUA teams don't play each other and so the Quebec teams don't meet each other either. On the mens side they'll meet Bishops and Laval but won't take on UPEI. As for the women's side, UNB sees action against Bishops and Laval but not the AUA entry SMU.

The UNB men's first game will be against Bishops at 8pm on Saturday night. The following day they'll meet Laval at 4pm. The women's side takes on Bishops at 6pm on

Saturday and will go head-to-head with Laval at 2pm Sunday.

The top-rated recruits for the mens team are Riverview native David Low and Jan Kreiner, one of Ontario's top forward prospects. Low is New Brunswick's 'AAA Player of the Year' and was generally considered to be the top univeristy prospect in New Brunswick this season, after completing a storybook Senior season at Riverview High. UNB Coach Clint Hamilton says "The combination of athletic ability, size (6'4") and quickness that David possesses makes him a very versatile player from the guard position"

Timmins native Jon Kreiner played 4 seasons of Senior ball at the Ontario 'AA' level. Coach Hamilton considers Jon to be "a fundamentally strong player who blends good size (6'7" and 210 pounds) with finesse. A solid athlete with a fine perimeter scoring touch, Jon has the ability to score both inside and outside, and will prove to be a tough

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Varsity Reds prepare for the new season. by Mike Dean

## AUTUMN STRIDE & GLIDE

October 23, 1994

WHERE: Forestry Complex - Top of Regent St.

WHAT: Your Choice of: 1 Mile Run  
1 Mile Run/3 Mile Bike  
1 Mile Roller Blade

REGISTRATION: 1:00 to 1:45 pm at Forestry Complex

RACE: Starts at 2:00 pm

AWARDS: Fastest 1 Mile Run - Male/Female  
Fastest Run/Bike - Male/Female/Team  
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