

Brashear victim of changing game

Let me first preface this by letting everyone know that I did not watch Coach's Corner before coming up with this. The views expressed are mine and mine only. *The Gazette* staff or anyone else bored enough to look this over for me before it went to print made editorial changes only.

The sight of Marty McSorley's two-hander to the head of Canuck's winger Donald Brashear on the night of February 21 sickened me. For those of you scratching your heads right now, I am of course referring to the stick swinging "incident" that took place on the left coast late in a game between the Vancouver Canucks and the Boston Bruins. The NHL, in their continuing efforts to become more like the NBA (I promise not to start), quickly slapped McSorley with a suspension that ended his season, 23 games plus playoffs (don't lose any sleep Bruin fans). Court adjourned, right? Wrong.

The Vancouver Police Department has pressed criminal charges against McSorley. Let me tell you something, the last thing the NHL needs is to have charges pressed against one of its players by some politically motivated police chief who is looking to make a name for himself and win the support of some small left winged special interest group. I can't wait for The Human Rights Commission to get involved because Brashear is

black and McSorley is white. When are we going to be "graced" by the presence of the Rev. Jessie Jackson shown visiting Brashear at home or in the hospital? Hopefully soon (sarcasm littered the previous sentence). But this is not the issue here.

Before we all get out our torches and pick-axes and mob the McSorley home, let's take a look at why this incident occurred. For years McSorley has been regarded as one of the old boys of the NHL, an honourable warrior and a player who has made his living protecting his teammates. Nearing the end of his career, why would he risk tarnishing his good name, that has twice been etched on Lord Stanley's Paul?

The answer is simple. This game, Canada's game, has changed. This incident was not a mean spirited attack but rather a symptom of a much larger problem that exists in the NHL. Gone are the days when players respected each other for not only their ability but for the roles they played. The NHL no longer goes by Conn Smyth's famous adage "If you can beat 'em in the ally...you can beat 'em in the rink." Today, the game is plagued with little shit heads like Mathew Barnaby running around taking liberties against the stars of the league and taunting opponents like he's a tattooed NBA hoodlum.

Let me set the stage for the game that night. Boston was down

5-2 with less than 10 seconds to go. Brashear and McSorley had already danced earlier in the game, and Brashear put a hurtin' on the Bruins defenseman. The puck came from the Boston zone, and McSorley looked over and asked for a re-match. Brashear laughed. Would Conn Smyth tolerate a guy laughing at an opponent who wanted to fight? Never. He would have sent him to the minors. As the play crossed the Vancouver blue line McSorley took a whack at Brashear in one last attempt to get him to drop the mitts and settle the score of the game the old way. His whack was too high.

When NHL commissioner Gary Bettman came into power, one of his initiatives (besides exposing the game to every redneck American south of the Mason-Dixie line) was to banish fighting from the game. The owners quickly told the new sheriff in town just how this game was played and fighting stayed. Bettman did get one rule changed however. He introduced the "instigator" penalty. Only a minor penalty (2 minutes for those not familiar), but so significant was this penalty that fighting in the NHL changed forever, and not necessarily for the better. No longer can players just drop the gloves after an injustice has been committed against a teammate. The responsibility of initiating a fight must be shared equally between the two

combatants.

This rule is partly to blame for the recent McSorley incident. Five years ago, McSorley would have simply skated in front of Brashear and dropped the mitts. In today's game, players have to try to get the other guy to look like he wants to go at the same time (therefore, no instigator penalty would be issued; incidentally, the penalty carries an automatic suspension when committed in the last two minutes of the game). This is what McSorley was aiming for, banking on his nasty slash to catalyze a fight that would settle the score and send his teammates and coach a message that you can't role over and die in this league. He said it after the game like a 10-year old who'd been caught stealing, "I didn't want that, I simply wanted to fight."

Who are we kidding? The slash was nasty, but was it any worse than what Claude Lemieux did to Chris Draper in the '97 playoffs, earning the Avalanche winger a 2 game suspension during the Stanley Cup? Is it worse than Tony Granato's tomahawk chop over a guy's head that resulted in a 15 game vacation? The worst that I have seen was Gary Suter's near career-ender on Paul Kariya (10 games), that not only cost the Anaheim captain the rest of his season but also cost my country a gold medal in the Olympics. And let's not forget Suter's crosscheck on

Gretzky in the 1991 Canada Cup, which knocked the Great One out of the final game. It's players like Suter that we have to get rid of (oh yeah, take Chelios while you're at it). By the way, don't Suter and the boys have a Japanese hotel room to trash? How he has escaped alive from any Canadian rink over the years is beyond me.

All incidents were equally as ugly and uncalled for. However, it was the motive and the intent of each attack that should be looked at. McSorley wasn't looking to hurt Brashear; he was looking for a scrap. That's more than could be said for Suter. Marty McSorley should not have his career ruined because of this incident. He should be remembered for who he was and what he brought to the game and not for the black eye he gave our great sport.

There was no one more hurt by the McSorley slash than Marty McSorley. It hardly makes sense that charges have been laid against the Bruin defenseman, but this is Vancouver we are talking about. It was a stupid mistake but one not made with vicious intent. It is instead a reflection of the changing nature of hockey.

Oh, by the way, if Brashear had had his helmet done up right, I'm wouldn't be writing this and you'd have already forgotten about the slash heard round the world.

Michael Hartley

Sammy who?

Not more than two weeks ago, the Dominican Republic was, in my mind, the home of Sammy Sosa and a respected feeder of pro-calibre talent to Major League Baseball. I can hardly be faulted for stereotyping the Caribbean island as a bastion of the Great American Pastime. After all, what else do average Canadians know of the DR?

During my several forays off the resort and into the heart of Puerto Plata and the surrounding countryside of the north side of the island, I was surprised to find only one baseball field. Most curious is that it was used by local youths for soccer, not baseball. I met a man in central Puerto Plata who was interested not in the Blue Jays or Expos, but rather in our national soccer teams recent victory over Mexico in the Gold Cup tournament. I even had a waiter who was wearing a Team Canada hockey pin. He was probably just fishing for a bigger tip, but he seemed surprisingly knowledgeable and had questions I couldn't really answer.

While visiting a small coastal fishing village, I was witness to what one man assured me was "a real Dominican special show." Two roosters had weights tied to their legs and were thrown at one another — it was a cockfight. It lasted the better part of ten minutes and ended when one of the contestants relented in his attack and fled the strikes of his foe. Winners collected their bets and losers paid out. I felt like I was in a "B" movie.

Most people I came into contact with off the resort really didn't have much to say about baseball or the Major Leagues — not that they

should have. I guess it's a lot like American tourists arriving at the Canadian border in July with skis on top of their cars. Somehow, I just expected to see baseball connected to every facet of Dominican life.

However, Dominicans have bigger problems. A good job in the DR pays about \$8 Canadian a day. Haitian migrants make less than half that amount. They work hard in markets, on resorts, in restaurants and in the fields. There is virtually no trace of a middle-class in the DR. A neighbourhood can go from affluence to poverty in the space of a city block. The government is virtually bankrupt, under a heavy debt load, corrupt, and has almost no tax base because of a proportionally large underground economy. On the outskirts of Puerto Plata, there is a tract of land cleared to accommodate a raised highway. The government reallocated project funds with just one support partially completed.

My departing thoughts and perception of the Dominican Republic were polar opposites of my expectations. Where I thought there would be carefree children playing baseball or hopscotch, I found elementary-aged kids shining shoes for a few pesos a day or directing tourist traffic into their parents boutique. I came across resourceful people in rural areas with homemade irrigation systems and hot running water in their homes by virtue of a large rooftop tank heated by the sun. I may have arrived as an American tourist with a snowsuit in the trunk, but at least I feel that I left in the right mind set.

Christian Laforce



Works every time.

Photo by Patrick Blackie