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CANADA

TODAY / D'AUJOURD'HUI



HOCKEY is volatile and lightning fast.

It is as Canadian as the beaver and can be more dangerous than mountain climbing, hot rod racing or swimming in shark-infested lagoons.

It is, informally, the state religion — each Saturday night in season millions of Canadian men, children and women sit in spiritual communication before their TVs, watching the colorful players elevate the little black puck. Twelve million, a national majority, watched the final and deciding game in the Russian-Canadian series last year.

It ties the East to the West, more than the St. Lawrence Seaway, more than the railroads; and it binds the young and the old, the French speaker and the English speaker, the Liberal and the Conservative, the farmers and fishermen and the Yonge Street merchants.

When a TV station tested a thousand viewers with flash card pictures of twelve very important Canadians, 88 per cent recognized Hockey's grand old man, Gordie Howe — he was topped only (and some people were surprised) by the Prime Minister.

Small boys have long dreamed of being NHL heroes and they have done their dreaming on dim winter afternoons, outdoors, on ice at 40 below. Hockey mothers, wearing (from the inside out) flannelette pajamas, ski pants, woolen skirts, sweaters and reversible ski jackets, are out on the Saturday rinks at dawn shouting encouragement ("Go, Johnny, Go!") to their young. In recent decades, Hockey has become a major export and to some gentle people who have seen one player slam another with his stick, it may seem Canada's grossest national product; but to many Americans, Scandinavians, Central Europeans and Russians, it has become the most exciting, demanding sport in the world.

In this issue *Canada Today* takes quick looks at Hockey's past and present.

