

Editorial

It's Only a Game

On April 17, 1982, just after Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, signed the proclamation making the new Constitution Act law, I watched an exchange between a television interviewer and one of his three guests. When asked what his impressions were of Canada's new constitution, the interviewee, a professor from the University of Toronto replied, "Well, it will sure curb police powers." He did not say something like "I think it stinks because it doesn't protect the rights of blond-haired, blue-eyed women," or "I think it's great because now there is a proper division of powers between the provincial and federal governments," or whatever. No. The very first answer to the very first question was a statement about curbing police power.

In a democracy, police powers spring from the law, in reality from the people themselves. Most policemen have heard of the odd instance when these powers have truly been abused, and hopefully have abhorred the act and severely criticized the perpetrator. There are times, however, when policemen must surely see themselves as pawns in some sort of monstrous game. Allow me to illustrate.

Most policemen have at some time arrested a person, who, on the spur of the moment, decided to fight or flee. Many policemen have also, at times, lost either the chase or the fight. When that happens — well, it's just too bad — it's part of the game, after all. If the culprit is later caught and charged, a wrist-slap is often the extent of his penance. At times like this the policemen must often feel as if he is involved in a sporting event against a favored underdog. If the underdog wins, everyone goes wild; if the underdog loses, the crowd still applauds the effort.

But when the officer wins the footrace or overcomes the resistance to the arrest and has locked the individual up, he often finds himself on the spot, having to defend his actions about whether or not he used too much force. In the meantime, the perpetrator of the offence "innocently" watches from the sidelines, trying to make the circumstances look as if he was just "a good ole boy" having a little fun, and that this "bully" took it too seriously. No one seems to pay much attention to the fact that it was the culprit who started the whole thing by committing an offence — a free decision to make, then continued on by testing the mettle of the arresting officer — another free decision. Instead, hopefully, the blame will be shared and therefore the adjudicator will lessen, if not completely wash out, any penalty.

Here let's make a comparison. Millions of viewers watched as a National Hockey League player, in a fit of frustration, struck a referee with a half-hearted slap during an altercation with another player. The sports world was aghast — to think that he had violated the person of an official! "Give him a year — more