

Professional sports today . . .

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Sport is fast becoming 'big business' in Canada. The past 30 years have seen a tremendous mushrooming of the spectator sports industry in Canada, and in Toronto especially. This past year Toronto was given a second "national" hockey team; this fall the Toronto entry in the World Football League will swing into action.

Canada, in fact, lags behind the United States in its emphasis on

"big time" spectator sport, but the sports industry and the relatively few who own it in Canada stand to make a great deal of money through expansion. No longer is sport a game designed to be played for enjoyment; now we are conditioned to watch it — an inactive pastime.

One University of Toronto coach said last year that we are

"probably only 25 years behind the United States" in its emphasis on big time sport. However, we seem to be closing the gap rather quickly.

The following feature is reprinted from the book *Rip Off the Big Game* by Paul Hoch. Hoch, a former post-doctoral fellow in physics at U of T, analyzes the politics of big time sport in his recent book published by Double-

day Anchor. Much of the article centres around sports in the United States, but Hoch makes use of some Canadian examples to indicate that Canada is not that far behind. Big time sport in this country is less developed, more subtle in some cases, and owned by fewer people, but it is still quite widespread. The relationships that Hoch sees between producers and consumers in US sport can also be found in Canadian sport.

By PAUL HOCH

In evaluating the successes and failures of the so-called "jock liberation movement," we have to keep in mind just what these players are up against. Not just in terms of authoritarian athletic institutions, but in terms of the relative isolation, narrowed world view, and distorted self-identities imposed on the athletes themselves. Not just by one coach. But usually by their whole athletic upbringing.

From the first time our aspiring athlete made it to his first schoolboy or little league team, he had to keep his hair "neatly trimmed," possibly even in an army crew-cut. Already he was being set aside, made to look different from other kids. More than likely all of his friends would tend to be fellow athletes or athletic boosters. If he was good at the game, his girlfriend may even have been a cheerleader.

By the time he was in university he may have been living in a separate athletic dormitory, eating his meals separately, certainly taking separate (and almost always, inferior) courses from the other students, possibly even going to separate parties or hanging about with a separate jock-set (most United States campuses now have "jock" fraternities).

In short, by the time he makes it to the first team of the university varsity, he is likely to be totally locked into the narrow circle of the jock world and the jock mentality, for which he was preselected. (An innovation in the selection process of late is the use of psychological testing to help choose those potential athletes who show most evidence of hypercompetitiveness, aggressiveness, and the need to fight, fight, fight to win, win).

Intellectually, the varsity or professional athlete is likely to have been held back — more or less deliberately retarded — so as to be more fully exploited as an athletic commodity. At the big-time universities, practice sessions are apt to be so long and so frequent the athletes literally don't have time for their courses. Lacking any intellectual background — even that which comes from having broad student friendships and involvements — the varsity or pro athlete literally cannot imagine doing anything that would bring him the same social rewards and prestige as sports, temporary as that prestige may be. His whole self-identity is athletics.

Even so, many have rebelled. But it is difficult. And those that do rebel are usually so appalled by what they see they seldom wait around for an authoritarian

coach to boot them off the team. They just quit. The odd pro footballer who does this — in George Sauer's case throwing up a \$45,000-a-year contract — gets big publicity. But thousands of high school and university athletes have done the same.

'Fit into the system or get out'

This is certainly one of the main tragedies of today's militarized, commercialized sports: They have been so brutalized by the society around them that an athlete who really enjoys sports and wants to be something more than a jock-machine finds that there is literally no place for him. Unless, of course, he gets together with other athletes to change things.

There are those, of course, apparently content to be athletic robots. Or at least too weak to try to be anything more satisfying. The big jocks — brutalized by their coaches, exploited by their teams, put through their paces like toy soldiers — have been permitted to "make it" to the top of a mythical dreamworld in which they can play Superman.

Back in the real world, most take orders like good little tots. They have to. The labor market structure of their industry absolutely requires it (unless the players organize). No doubt all

capitalists would like workers who are absolutely obedient, absolutely loyal to the company team, constantly striving to stay in shape, put out, improve their productivity, beat last year's figures, and so on. But all capitalists are not in the enviable position of professional sports owners (or even college coaches) of having perhaps as many as two score candidates for every job (though in practice they wouldn't bother to "draft" that many). Candidates who have no place else to go if the boss says their attitude is bad.

So the labor market is structured in that elitist pyramidal fashion that keeps the kids hustling harder and harder for a smaller and smaller number of places all the way up the pyramid to the pros at the top. This structure puts the sports owners and their managers in a stronger position to dictate the values of their subordinates than capitalists in virtually any other industry, provided, of course, the athletes remain unorganized.

The only thing comparable is the pyramidal structure that screens out top management in the large corporations. There, too, the victims are totally unorganized. And there too — as Vance Packard shows in *The Pyramid Climbers* — the level of brutality and emphasis on having absolutely correct bourgeois attitudes is simply incredible. Because of this bottom-heavy labor market — with a mammoth reserve army of labor always in the wings — elitist sports serves as an ideological generator for the most neanderthal values of hypercompetitive, authoritarian, jungle capitalism.

Competition for status goals

But why do boys subject themselves to the brutality of competing, in order to "make it" in elitist sports? Bernie Parrish concludes his excellent inquiry into pro football *They Call It a Game* (P 293) with the remark that players "feel part of something big and important, and that outweighs logic... They're swept up in its exaggerated importance — tv makes it glamorous... Every action and reaction is subject to detailed



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