

We wanted to make big money for furthering Hockey Canada's programs to improve domestic play. We dreamed that from out of the contrasts in style, training and methods offered by the Russians would come lessons for all stages of hockey in Canada.

### Federal role

Success crowned all these hopes and plans. Despite this, other complications, including the tendency to ambivalence about Mr. Eagleson and Team Canada's behaviour, have given everyone I know in Hockey Canada reason to ponder the future of hockey in Canada and elsewhere, and to re-examine the role the Federal Government may play or should play.

In hockey we do not manifest ourselves as the fair, peaceable, high-minded neutrals projected by men like the late Vincent Massey and Norman Robertson. Some outline of the career of Alan Eagleson may explain this generalization, which most of those who have taken an interest in international affairs would tend to dismiss as unimportant because international sport has only peripheral importance.

Mr. Eagleson is 39 years old. His parents were Irish Protestant immigrants, his father a long-time shop steward and union activist in a Toronto factory. The young Eagleson was a sports enthusiast but a good physique and quickness were not enough to counter smallness and jerky co-ordination. By the time he reached university he had settled for managing teams rather than playing. At the University of Toronto his classmates came to know him as mercurial and bright, never as interested in good marks or in law as a scholarly field as he was in politics, contacts and mixing with people.

Mr. Eagleson became a public figure as a Conservative candidate in York West in the federal election of 1963. He lost heavily (and ironically) to the Liberal candidate, Red Kelly, the fine hockey star of Detroit and Maple Leaf fame. At this time the young lawyer was just emerging as the first major agent for professional athletes in Canada. The trend that brought lawyers into bargaining positions for players with owners began to run strongly in the Fifties in the United States during the war between the National Football League and the American Football League.

The huge sums won by high "draft" choices agitated the veteran players into a militancy that turned hitherto bland players' associations in baseball and football into aggressive groups with a willingness to strike in order to get improvements in contracts from owners. This militancy

was transferred to the National Hockey League Players Association, which, as a player-run group, had not made much headway with the owners.

In autumn 1963, Mr. Eagleson won the provincial riding of Lakeshore for the Conservatives. He held the seat for only one term, losing in 1967. One of the partisan charges against him in the latter campaign was that he was spending too much time as a wheeler-dealer in sport, not enough in the Legislature and at riding chores.

It was in this period that Mr. Eagleson established his ascendancy as the head of the NHL Players Association. In 1966 he had tied his fortunes to the brightest hockey prospect in generations, Bobby Orr. He dickered with Boston for the first professional contract of this Parry Sound boy. The NHL was a six-team league in 1966; the next year it began to expand, opening up "a players' market".

The first expansion of six teams affronted Canadian nationalism, particularly in Vancouver. All the new franchises were sold to U.S. cities. While Vancouver was admitted two years later (along with Buffalo), one consequence of its first failure was a deepening nationalist antagonism to the NHL. There were increasing complaints that the NHL dominated all levels of hockey in Canada but was more and more an American entertainment enterprise.

Nationalistic pressure usually finds its focus on the Federal Government. British Columbia ministers and MP were demanding action, noting that federal funds had helped build an arena in Vancouver suitable for major league hockey. There was a broad feeling that the NHL held all hockey players 16 years old and older in peonage to a foreign sports industry.

Mr. Eagleson raised another issue with the Federal Government, asking for the abolition of the "reserve clause", the traditional means in American pro sports by which leagues and teams owned and controlled players.

### Election promise

Out of this dissatisfaction came the Pierre Trudeau election promise, made in B.C. to have sport examined and to develop a stronger federal role in sport than had followed the passage of the National Fitness and Amateur Sport Act in 1960. After the election, a Task Force on Sport, chaired by Harold Rea, a Toronto Businessman, was named. It was to make a quick report, announcing its recommendations in May 1969. One of the concerns it tackled was the limping fortunes of the imaginative

*Events have forced a re-examination of Ottawa's role*