

Hockey versus Basketball: A Comparative Analysis of Collegiate Basketball in the US to Collegiate Hockey in Canada

Jonathon Edwards, University of Alberta

Marvin Washington, University of Alberta

**Marketing
Abstract 2009-092**

**May 29, 2009
10:45 AM**

**25 minute oral
(Lexington B)**

Scholars have recognized sport as an important site to construct national identity (Holman, 2007). Furthermore, in Canada the sport of hockey "is the thread that weaves through Canada's culture, through villages, towns, cities, provinces and country" (Toronto Star, 2004). "[T]he popularity of hockey remains strong across the country, and the links between sport, community, and Canadian nationalism remain more relevant than ever" (Mason, Duquette, & Sherer, 2005, p.255), while hockey is considered in the U.S. to be as popular as "arena football, bowling, or curling" (Paikin, 2007, p.223). The "lack of popularity [hockey] was understood [in the U.S.] when some U.S. newspapers stopped sending reporters to cover home teams' [NHL teams] road games" (Paikin, 2007, p.223), and only 17 of the 30 National Hockey League (NHL) teams home city's newspapers covered the 2006-2007 Stanley Cup playoffs (Paikin, 2007). Comparatively, the popularity of basketball in the US is demonstrated at the professional level, where the average worth of a National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise is \$372 million (Forbes, 2007), whereas an average NHL franchise is worth \$92 million (Ozianian & Badenhausen, 2008). Furthermore, basketball at the college level is considered to be one of the US sports mega-events (Matheson & Baade, 2004), and a major revenue generator within US industry (Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to compare collegiate hockey in Canada with collegiate basketball in the US through national identity and examine why collegiate basketball has grown in the US to be bigger in scope in comparison to collegiate hockey in Canada.

There are two major organizations that are responsible for collegiate athletics in Canada and the US: Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). CIS governs 51 universities across four regions of Canada: Atlantic University Sport (AUS), Canada West, Ontario University Athletics (OUA), and the Quebec Student Sport Federation (QSSF). The role of the CIS is to develop policies, which includes the areas: eligibility standards for student athletes, membership rates, general rules for sports, and scholarships. In 2003-2004, it was reported that 804 student-athletes participated in CIS men's hockey for 32 universities with one national championship (Canadian Interuniversity Sport, 2008). The CIS hockey national championship was implemented in the 1962-1963 hockey season. Since 1962-1963, cities such as Calgary, Alberta; Edmonton, Alberta; Toronto, Ontario; Kitchener, Ontario; Moncton, New Brunswick; and Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island have hosted the national championship (Stauffer, Knowles, Bandla, & Brogland, 2005).

The role of the NCAA is to govern collegiate athletics throughout the US: "Our purpose is to govern competition in a fair, safe, equitable and sportsmanlike manner, and to integrate intercollegiate athletics into higher education so that the educational experience of the student-athlete is paramount" (NCAA, 2008, p.1). The NCAA is comprised of three divisions: Division I, Division II, and Division III. Universities and colleges compete in conferences that are based on geographical location to participate in the national tournament. There is a national tournament held for each division. The national tournament that universities and colleges participate in Division I is called March Madness/ Final Four Basketball Tournament, and was founded in 1939. This is a single game elimination tournament, in which 65 universities and colleges compete for Division I basketball supremacy. For the purpose of this research, we compare the Division I basketball to CIS hockey, which has no divisions. There has been research conducted on hockey regarding Canadian national identity and sport, which has focused on discussing professional athletes- Wayne Gretzky and Ben Johnson (Jackson, 1994; Jackson, 2001; Jackson & Ponc, 2001), professional hockey (Mason, 2002; Scherer & Jackson, 2004), national identity with a major event such as the Heritage Classic (Ramshaw & Hinch, 2006), and Canadian national identity and stadiums in the Canadian Hockey League (CHL) (Mason et al., 2005). In addition, there has been a vast amount of research conducted on NCAA basketball; for example: the struggles associated with U.S. college basketball (Washington & Ventresca, 2008); donations in NCAA Division I institutions (Humphreys & Mondello, 2007); and recruiting student athletes (Klenosky, Templin, & Troutman, 2001).

However the research on US collegiate basketball and the connection with US national identity is limited in scope. Furthermore, there has been very little research that compares US collegiate athletics with Canadian collegiate athletics in the field of sport management; thus, reflecting the unique nature of this research. In this research, the main source of data is newspaper articles from the Globe and Mail (national Canadian newspaper), and The New York Times (national US newspaper). Three sources of data were used: newspaper discourse, the NHL and NBA entry draft, and attendance figures for the national championships (i.e. CIS and Final Four Tournament). The search terms used to retrieve the newspaper articles were Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) hockey, CIS hockey, Canadian Interuniversity Athletics Union hockey (CIAU), CIAU hockey, National Collegiate Athletics Association basketball, NCAA basketball, and Final Four Basketball Tournament. The number of hits for each term

2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)

was recorded and tabulated to get one total. Data were collected between the periods of 1972 and 2008. Preliminary research has revealed that between 1972 and the present, the Globe and Mail has printed 263 articles on CIS hockey; whereas in the same newspaper there have been 2235 articles written on the Final Four basketball tournament. Furthermore, there have been 1701 articles written regarding NCAA basketball between 1980 to the present in The New York Times, while there has only been 11 articles written on CIS hockey. The purpose of understanding the number of articles written in the two newspapers is to track the popularity of collegiate basketball in the US; whereas collegiate hockey or hockey in general is not as popular as basketball, while hockey is considered to be Canada's national game. It is interesting to note that Canada's own national newspaper has more coverage of the Final Four basketball tournament than that of CIS hockey, it would be expected that this would garner more coverage due to the apparent link with Canada's national identity. However, this is not the case, which leads to the questions: Is collegiate basketball a reflection of US national identity?; and why has Canadian collegiate hockey not grown at the same magnitude as US collegiate basketball, when hockey is part of Canada's national identity? The important contribution that this research makes to the sport management literature is that organizations such as the CIS can use national identity as a marketing tool. Furthermore, this research can help the CIS in terms of recognizing the potential possibilities of focusing their organization and establishing an identity within collegiate hockey. Due to the unique nature of this empirical setting, a new aspect to the research on collegiate sport and national identity can be added to the field of sport management.