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More Than a Game: Sports Branding in Canadian Politics and the Canadian-American
Relationship

By

Tyler Rohleder

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
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at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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More than a Game: Sports Branding in Canadian Politics and the Canadian-American
Relationship

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ABSTRACT:

The topic of sports and politics is extremely relevant in today's world. This paper looks at how sports branding within Canadian politics provides a tangible advantage to former athletes turned politicians, while these branding efforts also provide politicians who associate themselves with the phenomenon of sport a strategic advantage, termed the “Athlete Advantage.” These advantages are in a multitude of areas such as name recognition, higher approval ratings, and further political aspirations. This “athlete advantage” of sports branding is then expanded on in the form of sport diplomacy. With sport diplomacy and branding the concept of the “Athlete Advantage” is then examined on the international level to see how this phenomenon helps shape the Canadian-American relationship. With consideration of both parts it is determined that the “Athlete Advantage” alters the Canadian political reality and helps further cement friendship and cooperation in the Canadian-American relationship.

DEDICATION:

I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for all their support and for pushing me to be the best version of myself. I would also like to thank Kevin Hamlin, assistant coaches and players of the University of Windsor Lancers Men's hockey team, and the management and players of Windsor City FC for supporting me and furthering my love of sport beyond what it already was.

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Introduction:

Athletes make ideal politicians in Canada as they are beloved cultural figures that can cultivate a political image quickly. A political image is something created to sell a politician, their ideas, and what they represent to the people. In an era of social media more than any other at any other time, the sports media serves to establish name recognition that creates a larger political reach, familiarity with the audience, and an opportunity to launch an athlete's own brand. Furthermore, brand and name recognition of world class athletes may give sport celebrities an advantage in the polls, approval rating hikes, and fast track them to ministerial positions, all despite having no prior political experience. Canada has a storied history of such individuals and the advantages they have in politics. The association of sport orientated policies within Canada is another way for politicians to build this sport advantage and project a popular image to the Canadian public. This paper will argue that through sports association and name recognition there is a strategic advantage dealing with the media, for prior athletes turned politicians, and with political projects.

The first half of this paper will develop this argument by exploring a branding phenomenon in Canadian politics that the author labels the 'athlete advantage.' Other things being equal, a prominent association with sports makes political victory more likely, increases approval, and increases brand ability. The second half of this paper will then expand on the larger 'brand Canada' and how the 'athlete advantage' is used beyond the polls, and moreover, how this association with sport influences the Canadian international image and diplomacy as best exemplified by the Canadian-American relationship. This second section of the paper will explain what sport diplomacy is and how it allows the public a more active role in diplomatic matters via sports opinions, participation, and friendship building. The international Canadian

image is defined by sport, and improvements to the nation's political, social, economic, and environmental capital. Sports diplomacy allows for tensions with their southern most neighbour to be released in a less serious manner. The Canadian media demonstrates how it better focuses the Canadian spirit with higher level standards, a willingness to defend itself, and increased sports nationalism. Sports diplomacy has also brought Canada and the United States closer through a competitive relationship, emotional connections to the sporting tradition, cooperation, and a better relationship with Indigenous peoples. Public diplomacy via sport between Canada and America is under analysed in the scholarly literature, and the second chapter will help fill in that gap. It will argue that Canadian-American relations are furthered because sport-branding creates a more positive image of Canada within the relationship, while tension from the relationship rallies Canadians, and it gives a greater sense of unity to the Canadian nation.

Chapter 1: Sports Branding in Canadian Politics

Political branding and image is a fundamental element of democratic politics. Political branding and name recognition go together in Canadian political reality. Political branding relies on selling a politician to the public, (name recognition), relating with the voters (creating a brand), and ultimately getting the electorate to care.¹ In all of these areas sports figures have an innate advantage in as their name is publicly known, their brand is often already well-established, and support is more abundant for them. With that being said, a brand in politics but sometimes politicians need to rebrand to boost their campaigns. Political scientist Alex Marland suggests that often a political re-brand comes with hopes of an improved public image, reputation, better competitive positioning, and emotional connection with the electorate.² All of which athletes already have as previously outlined. Even something that might not be a popular branding in politics like a war or conflict can even be rebranded. War and other conflicts are often rebranding and use sports imagery to soften, sanitise, or normalise it within a society.³ In short, sportswashing. This sportswashing is popular with combat-esque sports like ice-hockey, equestrian, archery, fencing and mixed-martial arts where combat is part of the activity. In regard to Canadian politics, sports can be useful in political branding as it denotes relatability and symbolism of national strength, much like the military does in the United States. Sociologists Richard Gruneau and David Whitson best articulate the co-mingling of sport and political branding,

¹Wojciech Cwalina, and Andrzej Falkowski, "Political Branding: Political Candidates Positioning Based on Inter-Object Associative Affinity Index," *Journal of Political Marketing* 14, no. 1 (2015): 152.

²Alex Marland, Tom Flanagan, "Brand New Party: Political Branding and the Conservative Party of Canada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 4 (2013): 951.

³Jean Claude Simard, "Hockey and Politics- Same Battle!" in *Hockey and Philosophy*, ed. Normand Baillargeon and Christian Boissinot, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2015), 29.

“Politicians have long known the value of demonstrating a knowledge and love of hockey, perhaps the next best thing to simply wrapping themselves in the flag. That is why we so often witness politicians of all stripes donning the jerseys of local teams as the politicians try to connect their political identities symbolically to the imagined regional and local communities.”⁴

This demonstrates the overall power of sports symbolism and political branding in Canada. The symbolism of sport also provides a unity factor for the country. Leagues like Major League Baseball, and the National Basketball Association only have one team placed in Canada, which often means the entire country rallies behind them seasonally. The Toronto Blue Jays stand as a key example that allows the transcendence of many cleavages, (English-French, geographical, etc), in the name of Canadian strength, support and image on the world stage.⁵ This is also prevalent in basketball, a sport traditionally dominated by American teams and athletes. Hence the athlete advantage thematically can heal divisions where political tensions have exacerbated them.

The sports media of the Cold War era substantially influenced the interpretation of political matters in Canada. The ease of access for professional athletes to the media further clarified and legitimised who the ‘enemy’ was to the average Canadian fan. Sports media allowed stars like Brendan Shanahan to state, “There was a lot of talk [from older teammates]. The Commies, they were the enemy. And now they are over here taking the jobs from good old

⁴Richard Gruneau, and David Whitson, *Artificial Ice: Hockey Culture, and Commerce*, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2006), 76.

⁵Keegan Dalal, Lindee Declercq, Megan C Piché, Craig G Hyatt and Michael L Naraine, “One Nation, Two Teams: Repositioning the Toronto Blue Jays Among the Threat of a New Entrant,” *Cases in Sport Management* 10, no. 1 (2023): 48-49.

Canadian and American kids.”⁶ Even more liberal players like legend Dale Hawerchuk had reservations towards Soviet players in Canada, “I’m not crazy about it, [...] I hope they aren’t taking jobs away from North Americans.”⁷ This shows not only the possible reach athletes have, but also the political sway they carry before even entering office. This also shows the possible negative ramifications of political branding during this era.

Around and immediately after the Cold War era, sports related advertisements also furthered negative sentiments towards the United States of America. Political scientist Robert Seiler highlights Molson’s sports based advertising campaign, “I AM CANADIAN” as idealistic convergence that spotlights Canadian sports and political culture. The ad-campaign demonstrates nationalistic, popular, and anti-Americanist attitudes that reflected the largely conservative sports fan base.⁸ This campaign produced a commonality and Canadian unity through its targeting of anti-Americanism as a core element of Canadian social, and political life. This anti-American attitude of the Canadian public was obvious to executives in the sports media as well. This bias is best exemplified by the Canadian Football League’s expansion into the United States. Canadian pundits feared that such expansions meant the end of an independent Canadian sports culture, as American athletes and teams would dominate.⁹ This anti-Americanism framing was popular to the point that American teams in the league filed multiple formal complaints with the

⁶Keith Gave, *The Russian Five: A Story of Espionage, Defection, Bribery and Courage*, (Ann Arbor: Gold Star Publishing, 2018), 148.

⁷-, “Atmosphere Impresses Flames’ Priakin in NHL Debut,” *Montreal Gazette*, April 1, 1989. Nexus Uni Online Archive.

⁸Robert M. Seiler, “Selling Patriotism/Selling Beer: The Case of the ‘I AM CANADIAN’ Commercial,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 1 (2002): 60.

⁹James Christie, “CFL Move to US May Sideline Canadian Roster Protection to End for Local Talent,” *Globe and Mail*, November 12, 1992. Proquest Newspapers.

commissioner's office.¹⁰ Making fun of the United States of America stands as a Canadian fever dream and is quite popular in cultural and political spheres.

In the 21st century there is much more of an emphasis on electronic media and for much more peaceful reasons. Sports networks and channels play a crucial role in getting politicians into the households of millions of Canadians nationwide. Sports channels are some of the most watched channels on cable TV, and the prime reason some households have yet to cut their cable deals, especially in the 21st century. Sports channels attract millions of Canadians across the nation, so they are valuable for all levels of politics.¹¹ Campaign and policy advertisements on channels like Sportsnet, TSN, and CBC Sports have an even larger viewership during primetime or rivalry games.

Ironically sports and the athletes that take part are so influential on all political brands of every single party in Canada that they force election debates to be rescheduled due to National Hockey League playoff games.¹² This phenomenon of athletes first is important to note as these individuals have a larger media profile already than most politicians, hence the athlete's advantage. In addition, former Olympic athletes like Haley Wickenhiser, Adam Van Koeverden, and many others have some of the most mentioned names in Canadian media history. Media expert Lauren Reichart Smith mentions in her study, "Striking the Balance," that sports account for eighty eight of the top one hundred broadcasts of 2018, and in those both men and women athletes have proven to be equally marketable.¹³ Traditional electronic media allows for a

¹⁰Marty York, "U.S Coaches Accuse CFL Officials of Anti-American Calls," *Globe and Mail*, August 22, 1995. Proquest Newspapers.

¹¹David Taras, *Digital Mosaic: Media, Power, and Identity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 134-135.

¹²-, "Election Debate Moved to Accommodate Habs Game," *CP 24 News*, April 10, 2011. CP 24 Online.

¹³Lauren Reichart Smith, and Paul J. MacArthur, "Striking the Balance: The Portrayal of Male and Female Athletes on NBC's Primetime Television Broadcast of the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games," *Electronic News* 14, no. 4 (2020): 182-183.

nationwide audience familiarity with an athlete's name where regardless of gender an athlete's brand proves to be marketable before they even hit the campaign trail.

Another contributor to the sports-politician brand is social media. A major factor that determines the reach and strength of an athlete turned politician's brand is the teams/sport they played for their career. The background of which team(s), and which league(s) serve as a pillar of the politicians 'brand architecture' as the individual becomes integrated with the brand of the original organisation they joined.¹⁴ More teams and off the field/ice opportunities means more organisations and a deeper brand integration, which bodes well for any prospective politicians visibility (minus extremes). This can have substantial sway in Canada especially if the athlete played hockey or played for a Canadian based team/audience. Furthermore the type of content they post also plays a crucial role in their brand-ability. The share of the Canadian electorate the athlete was exposed to during their athletic career means more people that will recognize them post-career. Campaign ads featuring pictorial athletic pursuit, teammates, and high quality photos make the electorate more likely to engage with the content, while the number of hashtags actually decreased engagement.¹⁵ Social media helps former athletes establish their post-career brand, while also dictating the electorate's engagement with them.

However, a counter argument in scholarly circles points to the limited tangible influence of celebrity generally in direct political results. Some academics have pointed to the effect that celebrity endorsement does not particularly influence political habits, but rather the perception of a candidate's likeliness to win.¹⁶ So the argument could be made that because there is not one

¹⁴Yiran Su, Bradley J Baker, Jason P. Doyle, and Thilo Kunkel, "The Rise of an Athlete Brand: Factors Influencing the Social Media Following of Athletes," *Sports Marketing Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2020): 44.

¹⁵Jason P. Doyle, Yiran Su, and Thilo Kunkel, "Athlete Branding Via Social Media: Examining the Factors Influencing Consumer Engagement on Instagram," *European Sport Management Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (2022): 506.

¹⁶Andrew Pease and Paul Brewer, "The Oprah Factor: The Effects of a Celebrity Endorsement in a Presidential Primary Campaign," *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13, no. 4 (2008): 390-395.

hundred percent certainty, the direct influence and strength of a celebrity endorsement can not be calculated. Additionally, other research has suggested that celebrity endorsement itself is ineffective, but oftentimes is solely effective at a targeted at a specific fandom (ie: sports fans).¹⁷

This intersection between sports and the Canadian identity is unmistakable. Even someone that has a famous sports name, like Windsor MPP, Lisa Gretzky, benefits from name recognition on the ballot.¹⁸ The term athlete advantage is in reference to the phenomenon where name recognition or sport based branding translates to instant votes. This marketability on traditional electronic media combined with the online individual brand, sets up many athletes for name recognition in a political career. This demonstrates the ability of sports to alter the political reality of Canadians. Former athletes have used their prior success in the sports world to run successful campaigns and achieve successful careers in politics. Canadian Olympic sprinter, Adam van Koeverden, is one of the most recent examples of this as he was able to use his name recognition, his gold medals and appearances at three Olympics and six world championships to give his political career legitimacy.¹⁹ In short, the electorate was sure he would make a good Member of Parliament due to his past loyalty and devotion to the nation. This perception is a key element of Van Koeverden's brand that he regularly mentions, "After representing Canada for 20 years on the international stage as an athlete, today I'm announcing my intention to seek the federal Liberal nomination in Milton, Ontario."²⁰ It's incredibly effective as he was able to beat the Conservative Party of Canada deputy leader incumbent, Lisa Raitt, 51 percent

¹⁷Dan Brockington and Spensor Henson, "Signifying the Public: Celebrity Advocacy and Post-Democratic Politics," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 18, no.4 (2015): 445-446.

¹⁸Dave Waddell, "Gretzky Fights Off the Heavy PC Wave to Win Third Term," *Windsor Star*, June 3, 2022. Proquest Newspapers.

¹⁹Laura Steiner, "Milton Candidate Adam van Koeverden: Liberal Party of Canada," *The Milton Reporter*, September 11, 2021. Proquest Newspapers.

²⁰Adam Van Koeverden, Twitter Post, October 4, 2018, 7:30AM. <https://twitter.com/vankayak/status/1047811276670418944>.

to 36 percent, despite having no political background. Especially in Milton, a typically Conservative leaning riding, Van Koeverden's name recognition increased Liberal votes by almost twelve percent from the previous 2015.²¹ The ability to defeat a prominent and well liked opponent, in a typically oppositional riding, with no prior political experience demonstrates the effectiveness of the sports recognition and name compared to the average politician. The use of athletic influencers can also sway public opinion as Van Koeverden and other compatriots were thinking about doing during the Covid-19 pandemic, "Public health and government should partner with influencers who can amplify accurate public health information, influence risk perception, reach subpopulations, and increase trust."²² This sway that athletes have as not only politicians but also online influencers puts them at a unique disposition unlike most other politicians where they have greater trust from the public.

Another example of sports and name recognition in politics would be the honourable Ken Dryden's three terms as a member of parliament.²³ Dryden, the former longtime goalie of the Montreal Canadiens and Team Canada, has a highly recognizable stature within Canada as a social and cultural icon. Dryden was the goalie that represented Canada in the victorious 1972 Summit Series against the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. With this role many Canadians associate him with nostalgia, comfort and nationalism. Dryden reflected on this in his work, *The Series*, as one of the most important moments in hockey history, and the deep emotional connection Canadians felt to it because it was viewed as personal.²⁴ This personal

²¹Christopher Cheung "Liberals Prove Kings of Tight Ridings," *The Tyee*, October 23, 2019. The Tyee Online.

²²Melissa MacKay, Caitlin Ford, Taylor Colangeli, Daniel Gillis, Jennifer E. McWhirter, and Andrew Papadopoulos, "A Content Analysis of Canadian Influencer Crisis Messages on Instagram and the Public's Response During COVID-19," *BMC Public Health* 22, no. 763 (2022): 15.

²³-, "Ken Dryden Star Liberal Candidate in Toronto," *CBC News*, May 17, 2004. CBC Online.

²⁴Ken Dryden, *The Series: What I Remember, What it Felt Like, What it Feels Like Now*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2022), 187.

attachment that Canadians have means that an athlete may have a pre-existing emotional attachment with the electorate before a campaign is even announced. This is a crucial competitive advantage in politics. This can be further expanded on by political scientist David Tarras who points to the influence of sport on nostalgia and public memory, “Sport is about place and memory about where we grew up and where we call home, about the warm experiences of childhood, and about our sense of belonging. It’s about deep attachment and loyalty.”²⁵ This is exactly what Dryden’s political brand gave the Canadian public, so much so he was even named minister of social development soon after his initial election. For a first time federal politician to be given a prominent ministerial position speaks to the acknowledgement that even the old guard political elite have towards the sports brand in politics. Generally the Canadian public approved of Dryden’s work as well, especially with his promotion of the International Day of Disabled Persons.²⁶ The athlete advantage certainly played a part in his immediate posting at a high ranking ministerial position.

This ‘athlete advantage’ is also prevalent in French Canada, and on the provincial level. Former silver and bronze medalist speed skater Isabelle Charest was immediately endorsed by the provincial party CAQ of the Quebec legislature.²⁷ This proves that this political athlete's advantage in branding and name recognition not only defies gender lines, but also linguistic differences. As a Quebecois woman, Charest served as a diplomat for the Canadian government at the 2018 Olympics, which gives a greater insight into sports diplomacy than that of a standard

²⁵David Taras, Christopher Waddell, *Sports: How Canadians Communicate*, (Athabasca: Athabasca University Press, 2016), 6.

²⁶-, “The Government of Canada Recognizes the International Day of Disabled Persons,” *Canada Newswire*, December 3, 2004. Proquest Newspaper Archive.

²⁷Alex Drouin, “Isabelle Charest candidate pour la CAQ dans Brome-Missisquoi,” *Le Journal de Montreal*, June 18, 2018. Le Journal de Montreal en Ligne.

political diplomat.²⁸ Athletes make ideal cultural diplomats as they all have insider perspectives that allow for greater insight into sports and cultural matters. Charest was also named the education minister and minister responsible for the status of women for the province of Quebec. In these posts Charest established policies that aimed to reduce bullying and harassment in athletic and school settings.²⁹ Policy options like these show increased legitimacy and accountability from the sports sector of Canadian society. This is especially so in 2023, when National Sports Organizations, (NSO's) and professional sports lacks this, as exemplified by the Hockey Canada scandals.

There is a long history of this 'athlete advantage' in Canada. In the 1950s NHLer Howie Meeker channelled the spirit of hockey on the ice and in the parliament building as an active professional athlete and MP at the same time.³⁰ Red Kelly followed in these footsteps in the 1960s as an active National Hockey League player throughout his political career as a Canadian MP until 1965.³¹ The demands of a high performance professional athlete did not deter voters from electing Kelly. When it came to name recognition on the ballot, Leafs faithful had multiple options as Syl Apps served as a conservative MLA in Ontario from 1963-1975.³² Frank Mahovlich is another former athlete that served in Canadian politics. He was appointed by Jean Chretien in 1998 to the Canadian senate and served there until his retirement in 2013. This success that these athletes turned politicians is at least partly, and in many cases significantly due to the public memory and relevance of athletes in Canadian society. In Canadian society the

²⁸Bill Beacon, "Short-Track Speed Skater Isabelle Charest to Lead Canada's Team at the 2018 Olympics," *The Canadian Press*, February 6, 2017. Proquest Historical Newspapers.

²⁹-, "Minister Isabelle Charest Announces Significant Measures to Counter Cases of Abuse and Harassment in Sport," *Canadian Newswire*, November 23, 2020. Proquest Newspapers.

³⁰-, "From Pucks to Politics," *Toronto Star*, August 28, 2009. Proquest Newspapers.

³¹-, "Leafs' Kelly Set to Retire from Politics," *The Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1965. Los Angeles Times Online Archive.

³²Paul Patton, "Where are They now? Syl Apps Hockey," *The Globe and Mail*, May 7, 1985. Proquest Newspapers.

cultural prestige of athletes like Wayne Gretsky, Maurice Richard, Steve Nash, and George St-Pierre far exceeds those in many other forms of traditional cultural production.

The use of sports helps a politician's brand and image, but also the urban development of an entire city. At a municipal level urban policies can be life or death for a city's development and it is crucial that both the city and its people agree on initiatives. Political scientist Andrea Lucarelli highlights that often 'place branding,' or the creation of a new urban setting that reflects the complex political situation of a municipality, can deeply sway the electorate positively or negatively.³³ Sports are precisely one of those arenas where a city can 'place brand' and in Alberta there are two ideal cases of this phenomenon.

This revitalization was the case for Edmonton Mayor Don Iverson, whose political career was furthered because the development for Rogers Place mobilised the political and economic power of the city to the international stage.³⁴ Rogers Place not only benefits the Edmonton Oilers, but it also completely revived the city's downtown district and made it a popular destination for prominent musical acts, speakers, and conferences. Association with popular culture furthers a political brand, and a close tie between the two. One of the best measurements of this is the surge in public opinion, as in 2014-2015 Don Iverson enjoyed a sixteen percent approval rating.³⁵ Fast forward to 2017, just two years and a Rogers Place opening later, and Iverson's rating improved to a sixty-one percent approval.³⁶

³³Andrea Lucarelli, "Place Branding as Urban Policy: The (Im)political Place Branding," *Cities* 80, no. 1 (2018): 12.

³⁴Jay Scherer, David Mills, and Linda Sloan McCulloch, *Powerplay: Professional Hockey and the Politics of Urban Development*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2019), 310-312.

³⁵Lorne Gunter, "Edmonton Mayor Don Iverson Gets a C," *Edmonton Sun*, October 16, 2015. Edmonton Sun Online Archive.

³⁶Clare Clancy, "Connor McDavid More Popular than Edmonton Mayor," *Edmonton Journal*, September 5, 2017. Edmonton Journal Online Archive.

Sport plays a helpful role in the political branding and public consciousness towards recognition of local politicians. Where sports can help, rejection or denial of it can also severely hurt a politician's image as well. The mayor of Calgary has been branded as the stereotypical proto-academic with an apparent dislike for popular culture. This unintentional branding was furthered when Flames ownership backed out of their initial deal after the mayor's imposition of extra climate change initiatives.³⁷ Calgarians place the failure of this agreement and generally see the addition of extra 'climate change taxes' as a purposeful killing of the deal, reflected in mayor Gondek's disapproval rating (53%).³⁸ When the perspectives of citizens strongly reflects a negative view of the politician because of the perceived harm to both their social life, and for the economic health of the city, the neglect of popular culture within a political brand becomes a killer aspect. So much so that it even got to the point where even the very conservative premier of Alberta was telling the city of Calgary to follow the Edmonton model for an arena deal.³⁹ In addition, inclusive city branding is heavily influenced by items within the city (i.e. a new arena or sports team), than any other factor.⁴⁰ Both case studies outline an increase or decrease in the public profile for politicians that embrace the importance of sport within the Canadian experience.

Canadian politicians use notions of unity when talking about sports to further their brand and recognition within Canada too. Often Indigenous sport is a vehicle used to further this narrative. The Indigenous Sport Excellence awards, better known as the Tom Longboat awards,

³⁷-, "Calgary's New Arena Deal Terminated," *CBC News*, January 3, 2022. CBC.ca.

³⁸Jessika Guse, "Disapproval Outweighs Approval Rating for Calgary Mayor Gondek in March Poll," *Global News*, March 29, 2022. Global News Online.

See Also: Carrie Tait, "Calgary Flames Owners Pull Out of Arena Deal with City," *Globe and Mail*, December 23, 2021. Proquest Newspaper Archive.

³⁹Chris Varcoe, Premier Points North to Edmonton as Model for Calgary Arena Deal," *Calgary Herald*, January 4, 2023. Calgary Herald Online Archive.

⁴⁰Warda Belabas, and Bert Geroge, "Do Inclusive City Branding and Political Othering Affect Migrants' Identification? Experimental Evidence," *Elsevier 133*, no. 1 (2022): 7-8.

have been reclaimed in the 21st century by the Indigenous community with the support of various politicians. These awards serve as a symbolic achievement acknowledging redress and progress within the Canadian political sphere via sport.⁴¹ This notion was obvious in the case of the National Basketball Association's Toronto Raptors during their title run in 2019. The "We the North" brand marketing campaign put forth created this sense of "Canada versus the world."⁴² It put forth this underdog sports brand of 'what is Canada,' became even more pronounced when the Raptors ended up winning the NBA championship in 2019. This was a brand that many Canadian politicians wanted to be a part of. Some politicians like the Prime Minister Justin Trudeau wanted both his brand and name to be associated with this team, and immediately scheduled a meeting with the victors.⁴³ This meeting was also juxtaposed against the Trump administration at the time, which furthered Trudeau's brand as a charismatic man of the people.

The championship run of the Toronto Raptors wasn't the only time politicians wanted to be associated with pro-sports branding either, as Canada has a long history of cultural protectionism. This cultural protectionism allowed politicians to be seen by the average Canadian sports fan as a saviour. It was believed that this increased sports protectionism would grant Canadian political institutions a more relatable image that cherished popular culture. This attitude was extremely prevalent in the 1970s when the expansion of the World Football League threatened the viability of the Canadian Football League. Other government officials such as the former Saskatchewan Attorney General, Roy Romanow, and provincial governments across the

⁴¹Janice Forsyth, *Reclaiming Tom Longboat: Indigenous Self-Determination in Sport*, (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2020), 182-185.

⁴²Doug Smith, *We the North: 25 Years of the Toronto Raptors*, (Toronto: Viking, 2020), 208.

⁴³-, "Toronto Raptors Coach Says No Word From White House but Meeting with Trudeau in the Works," *CBC News*, June 19, 2019. CBC Online Archive.

country saw the Canadian Football League as an, “distinctly Canadian and a positive force for national unity.”⁴⁴ Politicians saw an opportunity to brand themselves as Canadian cultural saviours, “[The federal government] is trying to protect all the people in this country. The Grey Cup is an emotional institution and we are trying to protect all that is Canadian.”⁴⁵ This emotional plea to the voters worked as the Canadian expansion of the World Football League, the Toronto Northmen, got blocked by Canadian courts. Political scientist, Stephen Azzi, pointed out that this Canadian protectionism was focused on Canadian investments in the face of increased foreign influence in the post-war world, (particularly that of America), in which the Canadian Football League was both a Canadian investment and cultural staple.⁴⁶ This cultural staple was part of the Canadian brand as a whole, “The Canadian Football League, our league, is that it often reflects Canada's political, economic and ideational condition. Our game of football, something distinctly Canadian, acts as an interesting barometer vis-à-vis the state of our country.”⁴⁷ This also shows the emphasis on high level sports on which politicians stake their image on. The ‘saviour’ branding that sport protectionism brought established a crucial avenue for emotional, economical, and cultural connection to the Canadian public.

⁴⁴-, “Whole CFL Seen Affected: Government Action Realistic Long Range Outlook, Preston Says,” *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1974. Proquest Newspapers.

⁴⁵Christie Blatchford, “Constitutional Issue Involved in Action Northmen Suggest,” *Globe and Mail*, April 11, 1974. Proquest Newspapers.

⁴⁶Stephen Azzi, *Walter Gordon and the Rise of Canadian Nationalism*, (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 182.

⁴⁷Zach Paikin, “What the CFL has to do With Canadian Politics,” *Huffington Post*, November 28, 2012. Huffington Post Online.

Chapter 2: How Canadian Sports Diplomacy and Athletic Branding Influence the Canadian-American Relationship

Sports diplomacy in foreign policy alters international perceptions and foreign affairs. Sports diplomacy falls under a more generalised category of cultural diplomacy. These exchanges of cultural diplomacy can be better articulated and defined as the exchange of ideas, cultural spectacle, or art that are done between nations and their peoples in the name of mutual

understanding.⁴⁸ Sports diplomacy is a branch of this concept, and stands as a newer emerging form of cultural diplomacy. Sports diplomacy is a public-oriented diplomacy, where the general public's opinion, perception, and voice serve as the central elements. At its root, public diplomacy relies on informal public relations where daily communication between nations, cultural relations.⁴⁹ Sports diplomacy is a byproduct of these daily cultural relations, and notions of identity through political and popular culture exchanges between Canada and the United States. The branding of athletic individuals and events changes the face of international relations, especially for a image that is dependent upon sport, as is Canada's. This form of diplomacy revolves around the branding and promotional culture that nations use to then promote themselves worldwide.⁵⁰ This exchange of promotional culture is something Canadians and Americans engage in every day indirectly and often unbeknownst to them. Lastly, sports diplomacy is an effort at cultural diffusion in an attempt to further national brand recognition, which is a focal point of the American-Canadian relationship. This diffusion allows sports to transform from ritual into record.⁵¹ A record of success is vital for a nation to be taken seriously in sports diplomacy, because otherwise it delegitimizes their credibility.

Sports diplomacy is used irregardless of a government's ideology and objectives, and there are a multitude of ways governments can implement it. Sports diplomacy is a unconscious or conscious branding exercise within foreign affairs. Governments can consciously use international sports to influence other nations' governments on special issues that result in real

⁴⁸Milton Cummings, *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, (Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture, 2003), 1.

⁴⁹Alan Hunt, *Public Diplomacy: What is it, How to do it?*, (New York: United Nations, 2016), 128-129.

⁵⁰David Whitson, "Circuits of Promotion: Media Marketing and the Globalization of Sport," in *Mediasport* ed. Lawrence Wenner (London: Routledge, 1998), 67.

⁵¹Maarten Van Bottenburg, "Beyond Diffusion: Sports and its Remaking in Cross Cultural Contexts," *Journal of Sport History* 37, no.1 (2010): 44.

policy change.⁵² A clear example of this is how the Nixon administration used table tennis matches with the Mao Zedong regime in the 1970s to change their foreign policy via more open diplomatic channels between the two nations. Another common way is the use of sports to create dialogue channels between non-state actors (leagues regulating sports bodies), and various governments because of sporting competitions.⁵³ This is most obvious during the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics when governments like Qatar, Russia, and China use these events to justify conversations with FIFA, FIBA, or the International Olympic Committee.

Sports diplomacy can also be used to further existing goals, like promoting friendships, or normalising politics to the non-political. Political scientist Stuart Murray's *The Two Halves of Sport Diplomacy* argues that sports diplomacy grants entrenched relationships, (like that of Canada and America), an alternative channel to move beyond the status quo of the relationship by demonstrating the affinity of two populations for the same activities.⁵⁴ This is exactly what the Canadian-American relationship is. The idea that the two populations have to have a mutual interest in an activity also demonstrates the power that public opinion and perspective have in this form of diplomacy. It gives greater power to the people. This is the main reason why politics being normalised is key to this diplomacy. American presidents have a history of public visibility at Major League Baseball games, as it serves to boost the normalcy of American institutions and politics with allies, and domestically in the household.⁵⁵ Canadian prime ministers enact the same phenomenon at hockey games.⁵⁶ Both countries also allow sports talk to be present in

⁵² Stuart Murray, and Geffory-Allen Pigman, "Mapping the Relationship Between International Sport and Diplomacy," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014): 1101-1102. ESBCO Host.

⁵³ Stuart Murray, and Geffory-Allen Pigman, "Mapping the Relationship Between International Sport and Diplomacy," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014): 1111.

⁵⁴ Stuart Murray, "The Two Halves of Sport Diplomacy," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21, no. 1 (2012): 588.

⁵⁵ George C. Rable, "Patriotism, Platitudes and Politics: Baseball and the American Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1989): 370.

⁵⁶ Justin Trudeau, Twitter Post. September 23, 2016, 1:38PM.

https://twitter.com/JustinTrudeau/status/779374286700150784?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed

formal meetings with other countries' leaders.⁵⁷ This ability to penetrate both the bureaucratic and public layers of a relationship is what makes sports diplomacy unique compared to the other more traditional forms.

Sports diplomacy goes beyond traditional means of formal diplomatic meetings, and allows the public and culture a more active role in the process. Cultural goodwill is important, as athletes serve as the central political actor in this diplomacy. Sports events, teams, and individual athletes serve as the face of a nation and a better vehicle to show a nation's soft power.⁵⁸ This soft power is then amplified by an athlete's reach online and in person. Online, athletes get extremely high levels of engagement from normal citizens as the general perception of the public is that it is more likely the athlete will respond.⁵⁹ Simply put, athletes can dictate how people dress and act, so it would not be a large assumption that they influence their politics too.⁶⁰ This bodes well for athletes serving as diplomatic actors if more of the population are interacting and engaging with them, it creates more political transparency for diplomatic efforts abroad. This influence allows athletes to serve as support figures for the general public as well, which can heavily sway internal and domestic political outcomes.⁶¹ This sway has a direct impact on voting habits, political perspectives, and Canadian and American society as a whole. This influence

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⁵⁷“Prime Minister Justin Trudeau Speaks With President Sauli Niinistö of Finland,” *States News Service*, January 16, 2019. Gale Academic OneFile.

⁵⁸Judit Trunkos, and Bob Heere, *Sport Diplomacy: A Review of How Sports can be Used to Improve International Relations*, (New York: Fit Publishing, 2017), 15.

⁵⁹Evan Frederick, Choong Hoon Lim, Galen Clavio, and Patrick Walsh, “Why We Follow: An Examination of Parasocial Interaction and Fan Motivations for Following Athlete Archetypes on Twitter,” *International Journal of Sport Communication* 5, no. 4 (2012): 482-483.

⁶⁰Delisia Matthews, Qiana Cryer-Coupet, and Nimet Degirmencioglu, “I Wear Therefore I Am: Investigating Sneakerhead Culture, Social Identity, and Brand Preference Among Men,” *Fashion and Textiles* 8, no. 1 (2021): 1-2.

⁶¹Jimmy Sanderson, *It's a Whole New Ball Game: How Social Media is Changing Sports*, (New York: Hampton Press, 2011), 85-88.

domestically also translates to an international scale. Often the United States would send ethnic minority athletes to various continents to off-set racism narratives in the late 20th century.⁶² As time went on this idea as the athlete as an ambassador was further ingrained in the North American political mindset. From 2005-2017, the United States overwhelmingly used prominent athletes as prime ambassadors for cultural envoys to nations worldwide.⁶³ The use of sporting celebrities and institutions like FIFA demonstrate how diplomatic messages can be relayed through less formal channels and have a more meaningful influence than that of a traditional diplomat. The use of these non-traditional figures creates more unity between two governments, nations, or regions in a non-conventional manner. This non-conventional manner is increasingly potent in the western world. Around one third of the Canadian population watches sports daily, while around seventy-seven percent of Canadians pay some level of attention to professional sport.⁶⁴ In comparison, around seventy percent of the American population engages with professional sports.⁶⁵ This high level of engagement highlights the position that the branding of athletes as non-state actors have to influence the Canadian foreign relations. There is a history of athletes as diplomats producing results, tangible evidence that sport diplomacy influences the public.

Aspects of universality found in sports allows even substantial ideological differences to be bridged. In addition the use of athletes as diplomacy actors bridges the political ideological

⁶²Kevin Witherspoon, "Going 'to the Fountainhead': Black American Athletes as Cultural Ambassadors in Africa, 1970–1971," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 13 (2013): 1508-1509.

⁶³Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, "Promoting Mutual Understanding, Sports and Public Diplomacy Envoys 2005–2017," 2017. Retrieved from <https://eca.state.gov/programs-initiatives/sports-diplomacy/sports-envoys-and-sports-visitors/sports-and-public-diplomacy>.

⁶⁴-, "Nearly One Third of Canadians Watch Sports Everyday: Study," *Media in Canada*, June 22, 2017. <https://mediaincanada.com/2017/06/22/nearly-one-third-of-canadians-watch-sports-every-day-study/>.

⁶⁵Andy Young, "New National Survey Shows 70% of Americans are Sport Fans," *Spectrum News1*, February 27, 2023. <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/buffalo/news/2023/02/27/new-national-survey-shows-70--of-americans-are-sports-fans>.

divide better than any politician with a political past ever could.⁶⁶ The motivation to implement sports diplomacy and reap the benefits of the athlete advantage often comes from its ability to increase the soft power of governments and alliances. More directly, the use of sports diplomacy, even on a domestic level, has direct benefits for citizens including greater national unity, happier citizens, and healthier life.⁶⁷ Sports diplomacy allows for an increase in soft power through the means of social capital. Its effectiveness in diplomatic pursuits is undoubted, as even the European Union recognizes its potential and has made it a ‘priority’ theme to include in their own diplomatic channels.⁶⁸ These international and domestic benefits of sports diplomacy are incredibly useful for democracies in peacetimes as it allows for image building, dialogue, and furthering unity for everyone involved.

Sport is linked to Canadian society as a whole. As highlighted in chapter one, sports and politics are becoming more and more linked, especially with the emergence of the athlete advantage within brand Canada. Simply put, sport is Canada. This influence of sport diplomacy on Canadian institutions is best articulated by academic Anne Hall’s work *Sport in Canadian Society*, “[Sport] is inextricably linked to the major social institutions that regulate Canadian society-government, politics, the economy, big business, the mass media, and the educational system to name a few.”⁶⁹ Public diplomacy and its international branding is also crucial. Evan Potter’s, *Branding Canada: Projecting Canada’s Soft Power through Public Diplomacy*, highlights this intermingling of sports and politics as part of the nuanced Canadian brand that

⁶⁶Andrew Cooper, “U.S Public Diplomacy and Sports Stars: Mobilizing African American Athletes as Goodwill Ambassadors from the Cold War to an Uncertain Future,” *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 15, no. 3 (2019), 169-170.

⁶⁷Harvard Mokliev Nygard, and Scott Gates, “Soft Power at Home and Abroad: Sport Diplomacy, Politics and Peace-Building,” *International Area Studies Review* 16, no. 3 (2014): 239-243.

⁶⁸Richard Parrish, “EU Sports Diplomacy: An Idea Whose Time has Nearly Come,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 60, no. 5 (2021): 1518-1520.

⁶⁹Ann Hall, Trevor Slack, Garry Smith, and David Whitson, *Sport in Canadian Society*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), 11.

gains the nation more respect from their American partner, thus making them later re-examine their position with their northern neighbour.⁷⁰ Phenomena like the athlete advantage results in a higher willingness for alliance cooperation with the lesser powerful Canada, therefore directly increasing Canadian political capital in the alliance between the two nations. Progress in sports that are traditionally American-dominated like basketball are central to this increase in sports based cooperation, and shows the overall aptitude of the Canadian nation.⁷¹ Even a sport like baseball, America's pastime, has a Canadian profile. Canada has a long history of racial acceptance and baseball diplomacy with America beginning with Negro-League players in the 1930s increasing the socio-political capital of the Canadian brand drastically.⁷² This influence of sport on Canadian branding and society demonstrates how sports can increase the political capital and prestige of the nation in its daily relationship with the United States.

Sports imagery and institutional social capital is obvious within the Canadian-American relationship. At the base level this sport-political image can be best exemplified by mayoral bets between Canadian and American cities.⁷³ It adds an element of 'fun' to politics on both sides of the border that will increase the younger demographic's engagement with municipal politicians. The use of sport increases political engagement for both nations. This role of sports imagery for Canadian identity is further expanded on by sociologist David Whitson, "[Hockey] was an indelible part of a distinctly Canadian way of life and the swashbuckling success of the young

⁷⁰Evan H. Potter, *Branding Canada: Projecting Canada's Soft Power through Public Diplomacy*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 53.

⁷¹Nancy Faris, "Canadian Hoop Talent Pool Deeper than it has Ever Been; Basketball Surge; Men, Women a Tough Out at FIBA Americas," *National Post*, August 15, 2015.
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1704223511?parentSessionId=Jhe0FOXJrip0ufxSgss3tlRzDfEfa5Q8Npca%2Fq59XI4%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14789>.

⁷²Donald Spivey, "'To Canada with Love': Satchel Paige and Baseball Diplomacy," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 2 (2015): 238-239.

⁷³"Mel Lastman Makes Bet with Raleigh Mayor Over Leafs-Canes Playoff Series," *The Canadian Press*, May 15, 2002. Proquest Newspapers.

Oilers (including of course, Wayne Gretzky) was framed as marking the renewal of Canada's [international image] of hockey."⁷⁴ Both in Canada and the United States, politicians have recognized the symbolism and power that comes from associating their political brand with sports;

“[Canadian] Politicians have long known the value of demonstrating a knowledge and love of hockey, perhaps the next best thing to simply wrapping themselves in the flag. That is why we so often witness politicians of all stripes donning the jerseys of local teams as the politicians try to connect their political identities symbolically to the imagined regional and local communities.”⁷⁵

Canada's social capital and its politicians contribute to the nation being portrayed as a sports nation, through which 'the athlete advantage' furthers its relationship with the United States in a multitude of ways.

The personality of the athletes also plays a role in this image. Throughout the 20th century, Canadian hockey players were figures that politicians used to establish the 'athlete advantage' as they defied all notions of class, serving as an image of Canada the public could rally behind.⁷⁶ Therefore, even if a Canadian does not watch sports, they can still identify with the athletes as Canadian icons. Any Canadian could identify with Wayne Gretzky's small town boy roots. When Gretzky moved south of the border in the pursuit of the American dream in Los Angeles, this harmed the Canadian brand.⁷⁷ This idea of southern migration influences the

⁷⁴David Whitson, and Richard Gruneau, *Artificial Ice: Hockey Culture and Commerce*, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2006), 76.

⁷⁵Ibid, 76.

⁷⁶Conn Smythe and Scott Young, *Conn Smythe: If You Can't Beat 'Em in the Alley*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1981), 141.

⁷⁷Pete McMartin, "Grieving for the Great One," *Vancouver Sun*, August 13, 1988.

<https://www.proquest.com/news/docview/243619016/F44F77779A9E487CPQ/1?accountid=14789>.

Canadian-American geopolitical relationship as it positions the Canadian image as secondary to the American-dream-esque aspirations of its own citizens.⁷⁸ This migration is extremely evident in professional sports as only twelve of the possible one hundred and fifty three top tier professional sports teams are in Canada. Additionally, Canadian sports serve as a venue where an imagined collective community identity romanticises the past in the face of an uncertain Canadian-American future.⁷⁹ This uncertainty revolves around the idea that this ‘going Hollywood,’ as Gretzky did, can happen to any and all Canadian stars. To the same extent Canada has an image distinct from complete Americanization. The sport of gridiron American football shows this, as the Canadian Football League is a cultural variant of the American game in an attempt to politically weaponize the athlete advantage for Canadian sports culture and create cultural separation from the United States.⁸⁰ Sports changes the social makeup of the Canadian-American political relationship through increased youth engagement and symbolism of the Canadian image.

The rugged image of hockey players and the environment of the ice rink are deeply associated with the ‘toughness’ of the Canadian public. This toughness is a key staple in the perception of Canadians. The prominence of smaller Canadian cities like Edmonton have an altered trajectory in history because of sports, and the position they hold in the Canadian mythos.⁸¹ The sheer fact that representatives of Edmonton could beat world class cities like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston demonstrates the importance of sport within brand Canada and its vitalness to the cultural relationship with the United States. Despite it being a staple,

⁷⁸Jeffrey Simpson, *Star Spangled Canadians: Canadians Living the American Dream*, (Toronto: Harper Collins, 2000), 4-7.

⁷⁹John Nauright, and Phil White, “Mediated Nostalgia, Community, and Nation: The Canadian Football League in Crisis and the Demise of the Ottawa Roughriders,” *Sports History Review* 33, no. 1 (2002): 134-135.

⁸⁰Alan Bairner, *Sport Nationalism, and Globalization*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 123.

⁸¹Wayne Gretzky, and Rick Reilly, *Gretzky: An Autobiography*, (New York: Harpercollins Publishings, 1990),138.

academics Paul Rodney and Andrew Weinbach found that overtly masculinity, fighting, and grit actually has little influence on attendance, which reflected a shifted attitude towards twenty-first century masculinity.⁸² Despite its little economic influence on athletics, it provides a generally positively associated image of Canadians, and provides a beneficial perception of the country. Character and environmental imagery via sports adds to the Canadian image and almost mystifies it in the Canadian-American relationship.

The Canadian image is also hurt by stereotypical perceptions of American-born athletes. Where the American public can admire the aspects of Canadians, it also drives them away from living in Canada. For American-born basketball players, Canada does not have a good image. Playing for the Toronto Raptors and living in Canada is often associated with the likeness of a third world country as a complete wasteland.⁸³ This is a long held idea among American athletes and in their imagination. It is not so much the individual athlete's ideas that cause direct political harm to Canada, but the audience that these ideas reach. The influence of these professional athletes can not be understated, as their individual brands have a larger reach and platform than any government officials. As a matter of fact, American athletes also have more influence than most other types of celebrity.⁸⁴ The brand personality of athletes can directly influence millions of followers online, and such a negative perception of Canada influencing millions can cause significant harm to the wider Canadian-American relationship. This social media brand is increasingly influential in the age of the internet, the speed where athlete coverage it is instantaneous. This channels the ideas of Harold Innis, where the speed of the media is

⁸²Paul Rodney, and Andrew Weinbach, "Determinants of Attendance in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League: Role of Winning, Scoring, and Fighting," *Atlantic Economic Journal* 39, no.1 (2011): 310.

⁸³Doug Smith, *We the North: 25 Years of the Toronto Raptors*, (Toronto: Viking Publishing, 2020), 30-32.

⁸⁴Marion Hambrick, Jason Simmons, Greg Greenhalgh, and Christopher Greenwell, "Understanding Professional Athletes' Use of Twitter: A Content Analysis of Athlete Tweets," *International Journal of Sport Communication* 3, no. 4 (2010): 454-455.

everything, for it sets the stage to inform and create progressive social shifts within a society.⁸⁵

Speed allows media momentum and creates a larger stage because it allows citizens to inform themselves faster. The influence of an athlete is staggering and the speed at which it reaches the largely American population allows it to harm the Canadian-American relationship.

Despite the stereotypes, American players who actually travel to Canada notice the positives. Such positives like less racialization and fairer treatment than in the deep south of the U.S ever gave them. There is a long history of sports diplomacy between the two nations that this fairer treatment as well, for African American baseball players expressed the humanising public sentiments as early as 1946, Canadian baseball teams refused to abide by Jim Crow laws of racial segregation.⁸⁶ This is not to say Canada does not have racism, but it has been less prevalent. Former players like African-American All-Star defensive player James Parker said, “The way [African American are] treated in Canada, they treat me like I’m royal, I couldn’t find it any better.”⁸⁷ Other players also remarked on the overall safety, and lack of shootings, carjackings, and crime in Canada, along with less racial hostility.⁸⁸ Academia also points to the overall cultural diversity within Canadian sports leagues as beneficial for the Canadian political and social image, “Cultural diversity [in Canadian sports] positively influence cohesion especially considering the promotion of diversity.”⁸⁹ In general Canadian sports leagues are well below American ones in terms of payment so most players need off-season jobs. One of the benefits of playing in Canada is a ease of access to seasonal employment, “Team members [in

⁸⁵Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1951), 60.

⁸⁶“Montreal Shows the Way,” *Chicago Defender*, April 13, 1946. Chicago Defender Online Archive.

⁸⁷Tom Keyser, “We’ve Made Strides, but Work Continues,” *Calgary Herald*, November 26, 1993. <https://www.proquest.com/news/docview/244264691/19730C95AB7D43BBPQ/1?accountid=14789>.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Micheal Godfrey, Jeemin Kim, Manon Eluere, and Mark Eys, “Diversity in Cultural Diversity Research: A Scoping Review,” *International Review of Sport and Exercise* 13, no. 1 (2020): 140.

the CFL] reported virtually no evidence of discrimination directed against them when they sought out accommodations and off-season employment.”⁹⁰ The same can be said for the Asian-North American communities. Historically sports like judo and baseball welcomed these minorities to gain full acceptance and opportunity within mainstream Canadian society.⁹¹ This increase in quality of life for minority athletes is common knowledge and is beneficial to the Canadian image towards the Canadian-American public and the international political world. It was so well known that west coast baseball is used as a diplomatic tool in the United States and abroad with Canada to ease strenuous racial tensions within the country.⁹² Ironically perceptions and testimonials like these by athletes furthers comedic narratives of American populations who want to move to Canada (seemingly every four years).⁹³ The Canadian image of acceptance and its practical application demonstrate increases in social, economic, and political relations between the Canadian and American general public.

Tensions between the two countries can now be released in a healthy competitive way that limits political repercussions as tensions can be eased on the sports field through the athlete’s advantage. The venues themselves are often a collection of the two general publics, which allows for greater level of open and active participation between Canadians and Americans. Sporting venues created a celebratory and stable atmosphere for the public, “[Athletics] have been significant social venues where men and women learn to relate to one

⁹⁰Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 461.

⁹¹Anne Dore, “Japanese-Canadian Sport: History in the Fraser Valley, Judo and Baseball in the Inter-War Years,” *Journal of Sport History* 29, no. 3 (2002): 440.

⁹²Joseph Reaves, *Taking in a Game: A History of Baseball in Asia*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 140.

⁹³Andy Prest, “So You Want to Move to Canada Eh?,” *North Shore News*, March 6, 2016.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1772086719?parentSessionId=HSNbkGMXE3qJTAkWD1wqbv5INMO%2BMBatiflI5tzAZt0%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14789>.

another [while they] celebrate lifestyle and community values.”⁹⁴ This means that although both nations will never walk away happy from a game, they can at least relate to one another and express mutual values. Both arenas found in Canada and the United States serve the singular purpose of increasing the public’s opinion and perspective of whichever city the sports event is in.⁹⁵ By increasing the hype around events this assures that local councils, and municipal governments put forth their best effort to make sure that the opposing fan base (American or Canadian) are treated in a good manner. Arena atmospheres are tense, but ironically because Canadian/American politicians are concerned with providing a better experience/brand than their rival they actually assure a high standard.

The Toronto Northmen are an ideal case-study of how serious Canada takes its sports branding within the nation. The Toronto Northmen highlight how the athlete advantage in Canada can ignite defensive anti-American tensions in the Canadian-American relationship. In 1972 the Canadian government and league officials openly opposed any American interests or Americanization of the league.⁹⁶ This stance directly influenced the Canadian-American economic and political relationship, but also demonstrated Canadian independence. These actions were hostile to American interests, and reinforced the notion that despite how close the two nations are Canada will always view themselves as ‘separate and unique.’ This unwavering support by the government for the Canadian Football League as a political and cultural institution was put to the test when American businessmen in the World Football League tried to

⁹⁴Carly Adams, “Softball and the Female Community: Pauline Perron, Pro Ball Player, Outsider, 1926-1951,” *Journal of Sport History* 33, no. 3 (2006): 324.

⁹⁵Jay Scherer, David Mills, and Linda Sloan McCulloch, *Powerplay: Professional Hockey and the Politics of Urban Development*, (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2019), 310-312.

See Also: Yulia Chukisk, Brad Humphreys, and Adam Nowak, “Sports Arenas, Teams, and Property Values: Temporary and Permanent Shocks to Local Amenity Flow,” *Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy* 49, no. 1 (2019): 1.

⁹⁶“Munro Fights Americanization of CFL: Even Considers Appeal to the US Congress,” *Globe and Mail*, November 20, 1972. *Globe and Mail Online Archive*.

poach Canadian talent for the Toronto Northmen team in 1974 from the Canadian Football League.⁹⁷ The government believed that this proposed team threatened the Canadian sports brand and landscape, believing it would lead to the collapse of the Canadian Football League. The Canadian Football League was in no position to compete with the eight figure budgets of the World Football League. The government preserved the Canadian Football League's integrity through an unprecedented move that blocked The Northmen from playing. The federal government in this unprecedented political move directly altering sport, citing Canadian cultural interests as the reason: "[The federal government] is trying to protect all the people in this country. The Grey Cup is an emotional institution and we are trying to protect all that is Canadian."⁹⁸ After the World Football League challenge, a law was put into place that prevented any foreign interest from putting football team in Toronto besides the Canadian Football League.⁹⁹ Ironically twenty or so years later the CFL expanded into America. This time it was Canadian cultural imperialism, and yet the Canadian public still expressed American-takeover fears.¹⁰⁰ The Canadian political sphere often termed this expansion, "A battle against NFL ignorance."¹⁰¹ Calling a key ally culturally ignorant is not an ideal look, but ultimately since the relationship is so one sided that American politicians did not even notice. This supposed

⁹⁷ Rex Macleod, "CFL Hunting Ground," *Globe and Mail*, February 6, 1974.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1239628843/527FAC7C8BE64C38PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

⁹⁸ Christie Blatchford, "Constitutional Issue Involved in Action Northmen Suggest," *Globe and Mail*, April 11, 1974. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1239723075/3D9C5CA4B5644A44PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

⁹⁹ "Feds Ponder CFL Defensive Strategy," *Kingston Whig Standard*, November 16, 1995. Proquest Newspapers.

¹⁰⁰ James Christie, "CFL Move to US May Sideline Canadian Roster Protection to End for Local Talent," *Globe and Mail*, November 12, 1992. https://go-gale-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/ps/retrieve.do?tabID=T004&resultListType=RESULT_LIST&searchResultsType=SingleTab&retrievalId=ba5fecc8-be9d-49d9-8593-374b7706150d&hitCount=1&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm¤tPosition=1&docId=GALE%7CA163999320&docType=Article&sort=RELEVANCE&contentSegment=ZONE-MOD1&prodId=AONE&pageNum=1&contentSet=GALE%7CA163999320&searchId=R1&userGroupName=wind05901&inPS=true.

¹⁰¹ Charles Kupfer, "Crabs in the Grey Cup: Baltimore's Canadian Football Sojourn, 1994-1995," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 24, no. 1 (2007): 64.

takeover was never achieved, because it was the American teams that claimed Canada was expressing unfair treatment against them, and filed complaints with the league.¹⁰² Canadians across the country rejoiced when the American expansion teams in the Canadian Football League failed, so the institution went back to being purely Canadian.¹⁰³ This case study demonstrates how deeply entrenched sport is to ‘brand Canada’ and how devout politicians are to the protection of the athlete advantage. This case also highlights how American overreach into that aspect of life faced harsh resistance in political, and social realms of Canadian society.

Another fundamental element of brand Canada that forms the athlete advantage is heavy media coverage. Often this heavy media coverage, league expansions, and league popularity fuels sports-nationalism and furthers tensions in the Canadian-American relationship dynamic. Even a well respected athlete like NHL player Mark Messier notices the difference in attention, privacy, and expectations of the Canadian market versus the American one.¹⁰⁴ Everything that an athlete does is heavily covered and scrutinised by the media, especially for athletes in global cities like Toronto, New York, or Los Angeles. The framing of media stories is crucial as the American athletes in Canada are political and social representations of their country and vice versa. The media for Canadian sports, and daily sports diplomacy of the four major leagues that operate with Canadian teams, (NHL, NBA, MLB, and MLS), can be starkly nationalist. As early as 1991 the Canadian public saw the American encroachment on their ice hockey supremacy as a challenge that initially Canada did not take seriously.¹⁰⁵ Canadians felt that their combined

¹⁰²Marty York, “U.S Coaches Accuse CFL Officials of Anti-American Calls,” *Globe and Mail*, August 22, 1995. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/385122216/CBCE4B4CA56E4687PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

¹⁰³“The Canadian Football League is All Canadian Again,” *CTV News*, February 2, 1996. Proquest Archives.

¹⁰⁴Mark Messier, and Jimmy Roberts, *No One Wins Alone: A Memoir*, (Toronto: Simon and Schuster, 2021), 244-247.

¹⁰⁵Stephen Brunt, “Hockey’s New Villains Don’t Fit the Bill,” *Globe and Mail*, August 19, 1991. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1146243299/fulltextPDF/995D940DAE064690PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

ownership (both English and French) over the game could never be challenged by the United States. Then the growth of American commercial interests in the National Hockey League led to drastic expansion in the league. As it doubled in 1967, suddenly Canadian markets became less important.¹⁰⁶ This growth in the league's commercialism, and continued Americanization scared the Canadian public and it became seen as a political threat. The Quebec City Nordiques were moved to Colorado in May of 1995, which created significant tension for French-Canada.¹⁰⁷ Then the relocation of the Winnipeg Jets in 1996 all but confirmed Canada's worst fear of losing control of hockey.¹⁰⁸ Canada is better positioned to encourage sports nationalism because of increasingly common losses and higher tensions.¹⁰⁹ These venues are filled with Canadian sports nationalism, and American sports patriotism.

The increasing commercialization and Americanization of the National Hockey League hit the Canadian media the hardest as it turned public opinion in Canada towards sports nationalism. The focus of the NHL on the American audience with gimmicky marketing of the sport caused a crisis of identity for the Canadian audience and political institutions as it felt to them that the sport had 'sold out' to commercial American interests.¹¹⁰ Furthermore the public opinion reflects sentiments of decreased Canadian political and cultural aptitude in favour of

¹⁰⁶Carly Adams, Russell Field, and Michel Vigneault, "Hockey Identity and Nationhood," in *Sport and Recreation in Canadian History*, ed. Carly Adams (Champaign: Human Kinetics, 2021), 186-188.

¹⁰⁷"Bye Bye Nordiques," *CBC News*, May 25, 1995, Proquest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁰⁸David Roberts, "Hull Part of Tribute At Last Regular Season Jets Game in Winnipeg," *Globe and Mail*, April 12, 1996.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/384869844?parentSessionId=t4mjRuUUy%2BoVu38VNZyLpODyOM9drEDb sjwjC9K7FU4%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14789>.

¹⁰⁹Bryan Armen Graham, "USA See off Canada in Shootout to Capture Olympic Women's Hockey Gold," *The Guardian*. February 22, 2018. <https://go-gale-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=wind05901&id=GALE%7CA528518544&v=2.1&it=r>.

¹¹⁰Daniel Mason, "'Get the Puck Outta Here: Media Transnationalism, and the Canadian Identity,'" *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 26, no. 2 (2002): 140-141.

American expansion.¹¹¹ This created strain on the Canadian-American relationship because of the supposed catering to American interests. This has been a lasting opinion and worry for the Canadian public for the entirety of the 21st century. Canadian media around the turn of the 21st century went on regular ‘anti-American’ crusades which attempted to assert claims that the Super Bowl of the National Football League was copied from the Grey Cup’s tradition and legacy.¹¹² In comparison, the sheer size of the National Football League audience in the hundreds of million justifies sports networks nationwide to keep the NFL in their programming schedule.¹¹³ This mismatch of the Canadian desire to be noticed and the overwhelming American coverage demonstrates to an extent the element of jealousy in the Canadian-American relationship. Whether or not this is true, it certainly negatively impacted the Canadian-American relationship as the sentiments became more commonplace. This anti-Americanism holds the belief that Canadian traditions were stolen by American institutions, and that these supposed thefts attempt to change Canadian values: “The Canadian media lamented [American sports] unwarranted popularity in Canada as an agent of corruption from the south.”¹¹⁴ ‘Corruption from the south’ is partly due to the fact that American companies control a large portion of the sports-content producers. Part of this is because of the wealth of expensive sports content at both Canadian and American fingertips via streaming, cable, or specialty channels.¹¹⁵ This means that it is becoming harder and more expensive for the average citizen to be engaged with the sports-

¹¹¹Jim Silver, *Thin Ice: Money Politics, and the Demise of an NHL Franchise*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishers, 1996), 176.

¹¹²Craig Greenham, “‘Super Bore:’ The Canadian Media and the Grey Cup-Super Bowl Comparison,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 1 (2017): 76.

¹¹³Bhupesh Shetty, Jeffrey W. Ohlmann, and Gary J. Gaeth, “Analysis of Monday Night Football,” *Journal of Statistical Analysis and Data Mining* 9, no. 5 (2016): 326-327.

¹¹⁴Craig Greenham, “‘Super Bore:’ The Canadian Media and the Grey Cup-Super Bowl Comparison,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 34, no. 1 (2017): 76.

¹¹⁵David Taras, *Digital Mosaic: Media, Power, and Identity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 208-212.

diplomacy narrative. An unintentional part of the Canadian sports diplomacy brand is fear and paranoia. Although not idealistic, they serve to unify Canadian cultural values that shift into political priorities of cultural independence in the face of the American cultural behemoth.

All relationships, good and bad, have some sort of rivalry between the two. This is only natural. A key component of 'brand Canada,' and part of the prestige in the athlete advantage, derives from the Canada-USA rivalry. Be it among English or French Canadians, the sports based rivalry with the United States plays an undeniably important role in the Canadian-American cultural competition.¹¹⁶ Geography is key in this rivalry as the only thing that really separates the two nations is the political boundary of the 49th parallel. The geography of rivalry and the unity that results is a key factor. Social scientist Tyler David pointed out that sports rivalries which are geographically based have experienced an increased intensity more so than any other rivalry, so it would be impossible for two neighbours like Canada and the United States to not have a rivalry.¹¹⁷ Geography heavily influences the relationship as it becomes results-based for a smaller nation like Canada which historically determines their nation's worth from what others think of them. This means that every match with the United States is crucial. This rivalry is most evident in hockey, but other sports like basketball have increasing implications as Canada still needs to 'prove themselves' as worthy in the face of the United States and other international talent pools. This narrative leads to a framing of a David vs Goliath battle, which grabs instant political attention as it is a core element of the athlete advantage and

¹¹⁶Alan Bairner, *Sport Nationalism, and Globalization*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 126.

¹¹⁷Tyler B. David, Craig A. Morehead, Joe Cobbs, and Timothy D. DeSchrive "What is Rivalry? Old and New Approaches to Specifying Rivalry in Demand Estimations of Spectator Sports," *Sports Marketing Quarterly* 26, no. 1(2017): 209-210.

brand Canada, for it rallies political support of their national teams.¹¹⁸ Unity for Canada can also be felt even in the United States. Academics Craig Hyatt and Julie Steven have even identified a phenomenon in American sports fans as ‘Canadian sympathisers’ because the public perception is that Canada as a nation gets put as second class citizens behind the United States, so American fans feel bad for Canadian teams.¹¹⁹ This not only shows unity in the Canadian-American relationship, but also demonstrates that just like the political and economic relationship between the two nations, the cultural one is also one-sided. The commonly held belief by many Canadians is that Canada has ‘ownership’ over ice-hockey which provides nationwide unity.¹²⁰ Americans themselves even recognized how Canadian sports leagues united Canada, “Institutions, built in the name of unifying [Canada] and shielding it from insalubrious cultural encroachments from south of the border.”¹²¹ There are few other things that unite provinces like Alberta, Quebec and British Columbia other than sport. This unification is exceptionally obvious when rivalry games against the United States are on. Anti-Americanism in Canadian sports serves as a unification tool that counters other geographic, political, economic, or social cleavages that the Canadian nation state has.¹²² After all, one thing that unifies most Canadians is the fear of cultural encroachment. This was evident even at the provincial level as provincial parliaments across the

¹¹⁸J.J. Adams, “Canada Basketball Hopes Flood of Talent Turns Tide to Global Success,” *The Province*, June 21, 2018. <https://theprovince.com/sports/basketball/canada-basketball-hopes-flood-of-talent-turns-tide-to-global-success>.

¹¹⁹Craig Hyatt, and Julie Stevens, “Are Americans Really Hockey’s Villains?: A New Perspective on the American Influence On Canada’s National Game,” in *Canada’s Game: Hockey and Identity* ed. Andrew Holman (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 31-35.

¹²⁰David Richards, *Hockey Dreams: Memories of a Man Who Couldn’t Play*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1997), 212.

¹²¹Mary Williams Walsh, “CFL: Folksy Football and a Touch of National Identity,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 22, 1990. <https://www.proquest.com/news/docview/251714984/60CC1166D80944D9PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

¹²²John Valentine, “Cultural Nationalism, Anti-Americanism, and Federal Defence of the National Football League,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 49, no. 3 (2019): 389.

country saw the Canadian Football League as, “distinctly Canadian and a positive force for national unity.”¹²³

Sports also provide unity to brand Canada and serve as a foundation for the athlete advantage as they nurture an emotional connection and a sense of a national ritual and tradition of greatness in North America as a whole. Author Peter Gabel pointed to the connection and recognition of this greatness through the simple act of attending a San Francisco baseball game with his son, “The idea was that at a higher level we had participated in a ritual that had reaffirmed our national unity.”¹²⁴ This emotional connection is important for the Canadian-American relationship because if the two nations no longer feel an affinity, (be it positively or negatively), then the connection between the two countries begins to fall into disrepair. This sense of tradition is essential to national culture and sometimes is completely dependent on the Canadian-American relationship. For example the gold medal events between Canada and the United States routinely experience high viewership, (ex: 2010 gold medal men's hockey game had 16.7million Canadians tune in) because there is a sense that tradition is at stake. This unity because of tradition is best articulated by author Sean Fitz-Gerald, “Hockey still binds Canadians. It can turn big cities into small towns.”¹²⁵ However, tradition evolves and this evolution means continued national unity with an increasing challenge from the United States.

This emotional connection in Canada and this unity (often against the United States), is strong though. This strong affinity for Canadian unity can be found in the Toronto Raptors, as Canada’s only team they are able to effectively get the entire nation to rally behind them. The

¹²³ “Whole CFL Seen Affected: Government Action Realistic Long Range Outlook, Preston Says,” *Globe and Mail*, April 3, 1974. Proquest Historical Archive.

¹²⁴ Peter Gabel, “Patriotism At the Ballpark,” *Tikkun* 23, no.4 (2008): 30.

¹²⁵ Sean Fitz-Gerald, *Before the Lights Turn Out: A Season Inside a Game Worth Saving*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2019), 287.

nationwide unity campaign launched by the Raptors titled, “We the North” actually began in 2014.¹²⁶ One of the main highlights of the campaign unified the Canadian nation for what it is, but also others it for what it's not. This other in a sense pits Canada against all the other teams based in the United States, so although it was not its intention, its cause is indirect messaging revolves around anti-Americanism. This unification and othering was effective though, because by 2016 this campaign had 160 million impressions, and its reach far exceeded traditional Canadian media channel to the extent that even the Canadian Olympic Committee backed the ad agency that created it.¹²⁷ This is a positive addition to the Canadian-American relationship because an increase in reach allows for more penetration into the American market and mindset. With the Raptors championship run in 2019, the “We the North” campaign was featured prominently in the American press cycle.¹²⁸ Demonstrating a success as Canadian unity was actually able to increase the profile of Canada in its relationship with the United States.

Even short lived leagues like the World Hockey Association influenced the Canadian-American relationship substantially. Had the league not expanded to Winnipeg, Edmonton, Quebec City, and Calgary it is likely that the NHL would not have, as there was significant internal commercial opposition to increasing the Canadian presence in the league.¹²⁹ Canadian communities fell in love with the WHA, and as a result sports culture expanded and became the pride of the communities, “The WHA thing is also to show kinship and solidarity with other

¹²⁶Gregory Strong, “Raptors Rebrand: Canada’s Lone NBA Club to Launch New Campaign “We the North,” *The Canadian Press*, April 16, 2014. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1517583645?parentSessionId=hTpLFBfidQEeLmNGfsjrQ7OiHkfZnhe7Rq%2Bon67hkqI%3D&pq-origsite=primo&accountid=14789>.

¹²⁷“We the North II: Canadian Olympic Committee Hopes Slogan Magic Rubs Off,” *Toronto Star*, December 1, 2016, Gale Academic Onefile.

¹²⁸Josh Peter, “We the North is Rallying Cry for Raptors,” *USA Today*, June 3, 2019. <https://go-gale-com.ledproxy2.uwindsor.ca/ps/i.do?p=AONE&u=wind05901&id=GALE|A587590442&v=2.1&it=r>.

¹²⁹David Cruise, and Alison Griffiths, *Net Worth: Exploding the Myths of Pro Hockey*, (Toronto: Viking Publishings, 1991), 278.

[Canadian] cities.”¹³⁰ This demonstrates an increase in Canadian cultural awareness in the increasing face of Americanization. In fact, the American National Hockey League had to be threatened with an investigation into a monopoly by Pierre Trudeau’s Canadian Government to give specifically Western Canada a spot at the NHL round table per se, and even then Vancouver was not granted a team until three years after the original demand.¹³¹ The ease of Americanization to harm Canadian sports culture and tradition with team movements of the Winnipeg Jets, Quebec Nordiques, and Vancouver Grizzlies, (among others), all negatively influences the Canadian public's perception of their southern neighbour.¹³²

In e-sports, (professional video games), there is an increasing level of North American Cooperation between programs like Windsor-based Saints Gaming and Detroit based Liquid Gaming.¹³³ The fact that Canadian e-sports teams are welcomed at American tournaments shows little hostility and genuine support in an emerging esports industry that if American actors so wanted they could dominate. This cooperation is also evident in NCAA vs USports occasions. In all of the major college sports Canadian and American universities play pre-season games against each other. These games allow both organisations to test out new strategies, lines, or systems, while this bi-lateral element is on full show for their promotion.¹³⁴ This bilateral political and social arrangement benefits everyone. In addition there is an increase in cultural

¹³⁰Craig Hyatt, and Julie Stevens, “Are Americans Really Hockey’s Villains?: A New Perspective on the American Influence On Canada’s National Game,” in *Canada’s Game: Hockey and Identity* ed. Andrew Holman (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 33.

¹³¹Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sports Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), 226.

¹³²David Whitson, and Richard Gruneau, *Artificial Ice: Hockey Culture and Commerce*, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2006), 186.

¹³³Benjamin Scholl, “An Ethnography of Early Canadian Varsity Esports,” (PhD Diss., University of Windsor, 2020), 67-68,

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2428563390/fulltextPDF/E2DBA62AB91C4D5APQ/1?accountid=14789>. PDF.

¹³⁴“With the Return of U SPORTS Men’s Basketball Comes the Return of NCAA vs U Sports Exhibition Games,” *Sportsnet*, August 2, 2022. Sportsnet Archive.

profile especially in regards to French Canadian-American relationships. Francophone players in the Canadian Hockey League and their French-first teams directly influenced American culture with Francophone elements of the game like speed over physicality.¹³⁵ Influences like this only serve to better entrench a friendship and the quality of North American athletics.

Unity of Nations within Nations:

Within the Canadian-American relationship there are many moving parts, one of which is both countries' relationships with their Indigenous peoples. Sports diplomacy relating to Indigenous groups in both Canada and the United States reflects Dale Turner's 'word warriors' notion, where Indigenous groups listen to traditional native perspectives, while incorporating the intellectual and political traditions of the dominant Canadian/American culture.¹³⁶ Since sport serves as a unification activity and is adopted into diplomacy on both sides of the border, Indigenous groups have followed suit. Sports influence nation to nation relationships that both Canada and the United States are involved in with third party Indigenous peoples. The use of lacrosse by Indigenous groups across the continent meant a larger reach for the messages of the Iroquois nation, as their participation at lacrosse nationals symbolised cultural resurgence, reunification of their people, and articulation of nationhood.¹³⁷ Nationhood alone is not a full measurement of the influence of these sports teams and athletes on the Indigenous quality of life. Furthermore, lacrosse teams and athletes within these communities stand as political, and social symbols of Indigenous strength in the face of their Canadian and American partners.¹³⁸

¹³⁵Neil Hodge, "QMJHL Looks to Increase U.S. Profile," *The Times*, April 7, 2018.

<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2022457979/8AA2FA082C0F4F68PQ/1?accountid=14789>.

¹³⁶Dale Turner, *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards A Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 8.

¹³⁷Alan Downey, *The Creators Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 210-211.

¹³⁸Allan Downey, *The Creators Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 140.

Academic Thomas Vennum suggests too that lacrosse in these communities also prepare and serve as a prelude to military training demonstrating direct political nationalistic influence of sport on the continental military prowess between the two nations.¹³⁹ For Indigenous peoples within the Canadian-American relationship, sports has served these communities with an avenue to express their unity as the often forgotten third nation in this relationship.

¹³⁹Thomas Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War*, (Baltimore, M.D: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 221.

Conclusion:

The athlete advantage is obvious at the media, political personnel, and branding levels of Canadian political society. The media shows the power that athletes have to influence political society, while furthering their advantage by building their own brand. The personal examples highlight the increase of public approval and leniency that former athletes get in Canadian political spheres and from the Canadian political elites. Lastly, by sheer association with sport, other politicians can benefit from the athlete advantage as well with increased approval, and branding techniques that idealise themselves with Canadian culture and the Canadian public. All in all, athletes benefit during their career, and are set up politically for a political career afterward.

The athlete advantage is also transferable to diplomacy as anything involving sports gets greater attention. The athlete advantage and the northern desire to have a more recognizable 'brand Canada' through sports needs to be given more credit in their relationship with the United States. Sports allows Canada a more beneficial image, a justifiable defensible position, and increased unity. Sports diplomacy is a unique form of diplomacy that focuses on the people and the athletes. The athlete advantage increases the political and social capital of Canada with the United States and on the world stage. Tensions force Canada to push for a more distinctive identity that can be furthered by sports and its high standard of service, an avenue for Canada to defend itself politically and culturally, while also rallying sports nationalism in the nation. Sports diplomacy also serves to unify the country in the face of the American cultural giant, and allows for some aspects of cooperation and emotional commonality. All in all, as the world progresses sport based diplomacy will become a common form of nations conducting business.

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