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How Hockey Helps Canada to Claim and Keep Its North

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Abstract
A significant part of Canada's identity can be addressed through contrast with nations which Canada is in one way or another presumed or perceived to be on a par with: the United States of America and the Russian Federation. Culturally, (geo)politically and socially, Canada is most often compared to the USA that recognizes Canada as its North. On the other hand, when considering geographical reality, its significance and influence, as well as the symbolism, beliefs and stereotypes that stem from it, Russia might seem like the alternative "Great White North". It is then especially interesting to use sport, a well-known showcase of how countries perceive each other and consolidate their own identities, to take a closer look at Canadian identity construction. This paper presents the most prominent features of that process through an analysis of narratives dealing with selected hockey matches between Canada and its two biggest rivals.

Keywords: hockey, identity, narrative analysis, Russian Federation, United States of America

Résumé
L'identité du Canada peut être abordée, entre autres, par le contraste avec les nations avec lesquelles ce pays semble être sur un pied d'égalité: les États-Unis d'Amérique et la Fédération de Russie. Culturellement, politiquement et socialement, le Canada est d'une part le plus souvent comparé aux Etats-Unis qui perçoivent le Canada comme le "Nord". D'autre part, lorsque l'on considère la réalité géographique, son importance et son influence, ainsi que le symbolisme, les croyances et les stéréotypes qui en découlent, la Fédération de Russie pourrait sembler comme une alternative au "Great White North". Le sport est une vitrine bien connue de la façon dont les pays consolident leur identité, et c'est pourquoi cet article présente les caractéristiques les plus importantes de ce processus identitaire par le biais d'une analyse de récits traitant de matchs de hockey sélectionnés entre le Canada et ses deux plus grands rivaux.

Mots-clés: analyse narrative, États-Unis d'Amérique, Fédération de Russie, hockey, identité

1. Introduction

This paper examines three groups of narratives and perspectives found in imagining and defining Canada as a country with a specific identity, mentality, values and strengths. Those narratives are, respectively: Canada as the North, Canada as the leading hockey country in the world, and Canada in comparison/contrast to its biggest hockey rivals, the United States of America and the Russian Federation. The primary idea of reviewing and systemising such narratives comes from observing the Canadians speaking (in various different codes) about themselves. In this case, it comes down to what they say about the game of hockey itself and how they feel about it, both in general, and in terms of expressing their own identity. But more importantly, the aim of this paper is to research how Canadians themselves explain those very phenomena and their relationship to them; i.e. which narratives they use while explaining, defining or questioning their own narratives.

The analysis is, therefore, of a qualitative nature rather than a quantitative one, and strives to encompass a range of narrative templates – presented in this paper through various quotes, and observed in and originating from a number of scholarly papers, newspaper articles, studies and surveys. The criteria for including a specific text in this analysis were the following: in case of books, scholarly papers, academic writings, surveys and essays – they had to address Canada, Canadian identity or Canadian Studies in a relevant way; in case of online media texts, polls, and images covering Canada, Canadian identity, hockey in general or specific hockey matches – they had to be published in Canadian media and written, made or conducted by a Canadian author (however, few exceptions were made when the topic was relevant). All of the examples and the quotes from aforementioned texts that were finally presented and discussed in this paper, are those that were seen as the most typical for, and revealing of, a specific narrative.

2. Canada as the North and the quest for (future) Canadian identity

Just by taking a look at various online images setting hockey in the midst of a breathtaking winter nature – the snow-covered Canadian North – we might feel invited to agree that hockey and North, visually and symbolically, can function as two sides of the same idea of Canada as a country. As an example, let us take the poster showing an outside rink in a snow covered mountain area[1] claiming: *Canadians*

1) Campaign ad *Anything for Hockey* by Molson Canadian: @Molson_Canadian Twitter Account. 8 Dec 2014. Web. 20 Feb 2016. https://twitter.com/molson_canadian/status/542000657553952770

– *not giving a damn how cold it is outside since 1867*. It comes from a 2014/2015 Molson Canadian beer campaign called *Anything for hockey*, a part of which was an installation of an actual outside rink on a glacier in the Rocky Mountains outside Invermere, BC where the chosen fans had the chance to play. Or a personal photo shot of a "Mountie" from British Columbia[2] (also taken in Invermere, BC) that went viral in March 2015, and was by many dubbed the "most Canadian photo ever", quite literally combining the two Canadian motives regularly recognised among the symbols representing Canada the most.

By setting and visualising hockey in such a context, as unaltered by man as possible, it appears to us as a fact which simply comes with the natural setting that Canadians are inhabiting. It is well-known that a number of authors have discussed the concept of Canada as a northern country, but not all of the authors approach it as a self-explanatory concept – they are perhaps more likely to examine the construction of the myth they believe it to be. Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) might come to mind as a general starting point for anyone interested in such analysis, and when it comes to hockey, Gruneau and Whitson (in studies such as *Hockey Night in Canada: Sports, Identities, and Cultural Politics* (1994) or *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture, and Commerce* (2006)) thoroughly investigate the main hockey myths of Canada, and the direction they evolve in. However, in order to outline how the Canadian narratives of North are being problematized in the recent Canadian Studies, and how hockey might fit into that issue as well, I have chosen to address the articles by other authors that might offer interesting thoughts on the subject, i.e. by Canadianists Eugenia Sojka (2002) and Myrna Kostash (2004), respectively.

In her article "(De)Constructing Canadian Identities in Selected 20th Century Arts and Interarts Projects" (2002), Sojka gives a short overview of what some of the crucial myths of Canadian identity were, or still are, based upon, and also points out the new tendencies that go beyond those traditional (meta)narratives. Her "examination of a longstanding cultural fiction constructing Canada as a northern country with all its cultural, geographical and psychological connotations, or in other words, the myth of Canada as the North" is explicitly underlined with her conclusions that "these models [...] are fictions that can be easily challenged" (Sojka 2002: 241f.). The myth of Canada as the North is therefore a problematic one, and "with all its monologic implications is no longer a crucial part of the complex nature of Canadian cultural identity" (Sojka 2002: 248).

Another source that provides further food for thought on how that model of Canadian identity and nation functions in the 21st century, and is being reshaped by a new, medialised global society and new Canadian generations that are a part

2) Personal photo shared by Royal Canadian Mounted Police: @bcRCMP Twitter Account. 19 Mar 2015. Web. 20 Feb 2016. https://twitter.com/bcRCMP/status/578678981488148480

of it, is "The Next Canada: In Search of Future Nation" (2004) by Myrna Kostash. She draws our attention to a possibility that the post-Free Trade Agreement (FTA) generation is "a generation whose narratives of experience had been dissolved in borderless, denationalized media, and whose continuity with familial, class and cultural memory had been broken" (Kostash 2004: 247). It is a generation, Kostash claims, which "declares that 'here' is not a geohistorical place [...] but a landscape of communications" and explains how "for them the perennial Canadian identity crisis is an opportunity to develop a whole series of morphed electronic identities" (Kostash 2004: 251). Canada is, therefore, developing into a "virtual Canada", and the 21st century Canadians are becoming "disconnected from an actual, market-driven, globalizing and digitizing corporation with its regional office in the House of Commons" (Kostash 2004: 251). Furthermore, the author suggests that "the younger generation has the capacity to feel at home in a symbolically Canadian media universe while *actual* Canada [...] disappears. This is deeply radical", she concludes (Kostash 2004: 252), giving us a picture of how and why the Canadian identity is being transformed and what that means for the myths and narratives that the older generations still might operate from.

The same author also questions ideas of Canadian identity that were seen in the media following the Canadian gold medal at the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Olympics. "In the pages of newspapers we read of the 'meaning' of this Canadian achievement", she says, quoting the attributes describing it, such as Wayne Gretzky's about how "'it shows our depth'" or sports columnist Stephen Brunt's how it's "'all about celebrating hearth and home'" and "the very *idea* of it concentrating our 'national longing' as 'little guys living next to the big guys'" (Kostash 2004: 252f.). The discourses surrounding the victory have such an emotional dimension since it was both a match against the United States and an end to 50 years without a hockey gold for Canada. Kostash also notices fans' statements in the media describing the importance of beating the United States in such a match: "'We're not going to be pushed over by Americans anymore'", is one of the examples (Kostash 2004: 253).

But the idea that might give the best possible introduction to the topic of hockey and its significance for the Canadian identity of the 21st century is one that the author shares from another columnist, Edward Greenspon, who "drew another lesson: these young people, come of age after the FTA, personify Canada's 'new mood of excellence', meaning, thankfully, that Canadians are so 'secure' in their identity that society can now move from 'policies based on equity' to 'policies based on excellence'" (Kostash 2004: 253). It is a rather provocative conclusion in a couple of ways, but nevertheless a very legitimate one, considering how much thought and space is given to the idea of excellence in our modern society. Interestingly enough, the concept of excellence originates from the ancient Greeks, when it was known as

the term *arete* (Mark 2014). Not only was this term used to describe excellence of any kind, including in sports, but also to point out someone's moral virtue and social duty: those meanings were interchangeably linked, indicating whether someone has fulfilled their fullest potential as a human being; it was an ideal the very first athletes were striving to achieve too. Nowadays, the concept of excellence may have shrunk in comparison to the original one – emphasizing mostly our admiration and striving for flawless appearance or performance – but it still provides an interesting explanation of where sport might fit both in an individual's life and as an expression of one nation's achievement. In the following section it will be interesting to see how Canadians themselves link their hockey achievements to a specific set of Canadian values.

3. Canada and its hockey rivals

In order to identify the biggest hockey rivals Canada has had, both throughout history and at this very moment, one does not have to look very far. No matter which poll and from what source, they are all going to point to the United States and the Russian Federation. Clearly, the rivalry with the Russian Federation was most intense during the USSR era, especially in the 1970s and the 1980s, and is to date considered to be the classic, historic hockey rivalry. Recently, the United States might have proved themselves to be a tougher opponent and a bigger threat than the Russians, and therefore seem to be highlighted as the bigger rival, especially by the younger generations that have not witnessed the games of the Soviet era. Such results are to be found in, among others, one poll from *Toronto Sun Online* (qtd. in Zeisberger 2014), that posed the question: "Who do you think Canada's biggest [hockey] rival is?" The results were as follow: U.S. 67% (417 votes), Russia 26% (165 votes), Sweden 5% (29 votes), Finland 1% (7 votes), Other 1% (9 votes).

Similarly, numerous polls are clearly showing the four most important and memorable games in the Canadian hockey history (qtd. in QMI Agency 2012, 2014, Sportak 2012), namely: 2010 Vancouver Olympics final match against the United States, 1972 Summit Series against the USSR, 1987 Canada Cup against the USSR, and 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics final game against the United States – the first two mentioned events are usually alternating between the first and the second place. But what lies behind these rivalries, what made those wins so memorable – or "typically Canadian" even? That is something Canadian authors themselves deliver a lot of material on and the following paragraphs will address those narratives.

3.1. Canada vs. USA

The comparison between two countries that are sharing the same continent and a lot of their origins and characteristics in general, seems natural, not only to a distant European observer, but to Canadians as well – whether or not they actually like the comparison. Like many other authors, Marek Golebiowski, in "Canadian Values: Continuity or Change?" (2002), explains that "in the Canadian context the almost natural thing to do is to relate Canadian values to American values" (Golebiowski 2002: 92), referring to, among others, Alan Gregg and Michael Posner – the authors of *The Big Picture. What Canadians Think about Almost Everything* (1990) – and hence further stating:

> Canadians' vision of themselves, when compared to their neighbours to the South, is that of a tolerant, peaceful and independent people, with much lesser propensity to violence than is the case with the Americans. [Canadians believe themselves to be] hard-working, less competitive, better informed [...]. (Golebiowski 2002: 92)

If we take these presumptions for granted, it makes it even more interesting to see how they would fit into the hockey narratives. In his text "Hockey and Canadian Culture" (2010), Paul Martin claims:

> [...] The increasingly aggressive assertions that hockey is 'Canada's game' and no one else's naturally rubs other countries (and many, many Canadians) the wrong way. Such rhetoric, which one hears employed mostly by advertisers such as Molson, Coke, and Tim Hortons and by some commentators, most notably Don Cherry, seems counter to the modesty and humility for which Canada is known. Brash self-confidence seems, to many Canadians, to be 'un-Canadian'. (Martin 2010)

Leaving marketing strategies aside, we might start wondering whether hockey reveals the un-Canadian side of the Canadians (and why), or does it simply reveal those narratives about Canadian humility and friendliness (often repeated as characteristics that distinguish them from their neighbours to the South) – to be a national myth. Similar questions and paradoxes seem to arise when it comes to the debate about fighting in hockey, as the same author suggests (qtd. in Martin 2010). Still, he does not fail to agree with other authors, such as Bruce Dowbiggin and his book *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada* (2008), and so he notices how

> [...] it is not a coincidence that the most revered hockey stars in Canada are the ones who are the most humble and, like Crosby and Gretzky before him, are quick to point to their

> teammates as the reason behind their individual success. Unlike the more individualistic culture of the United States, Canada and Canadians see themselves, for better or worse, as being more concerned with the success of the collective rather than the individual. (Martin 2010)

Fans themselves are not immune from this debate. Among those who have researched the topic more thoroughly, similar questions arise – and some possible answers as well. For example, one of the comments in an online forum thread on HFBoards[3] titled "Paper about Canadian identity and ice hockey" (2012) – where one of the members' paper is helped being revised by others – reveals the following view:

> [...] You contrast Don Cherry and others supporting a traditional Canadian hockey 'dominant, war-like' spirit with a traditional stereotype of Canadians as modest, polite, and diplomatic. Yet these two things are not in conflict. The traditional view is that Canadians don't talk a big game or draw attention to ourselves. We just get it done on the ice. See Bobby Orr, Don Cherry's favourite hockey player. He was a very humble, unassuming man who just put his head down after he scored, but he was as tough as they come on the ice as well. (Paper about Canadian identity and ice hockey 2012)

In an article by John Dellapina, appropriately titled "USA, Canada Rivalry Has Evolved Over Time" (2010), and published on the official site of the NHL, one of the most recognisable hockey analysts in Canada and the United States (born American with both American and Canadian passport), Pierre McGuire, is quoted saying the following about the rivalry:

> Everybody in Canada sees [United States] as the big brother that you want to hang around with but you're not sure if you can trust all the time. [...] All of a sudden, with what used to be their game, now the big brother is saying: OK, I'm taking the puck; I'm taking the stick and I'm taking the game. (Dellapina 2010)

For the time being, let us use that quote as a possible explanation of why the rivalry against the United States is getting more and more attention in Canada. Maybe it is primarily (but not exclusively) because of the fact that the opponent recently got much better and poses a real sports threat – bearing in mind that in this way it is also threatening to take away a unique and significant, tangible dominance that Canada had over it, and undermining some aspects of Canadian national mythology and identity that were built upon it.

3) HFBoards are online message boards (an online forum) – with more than 100,000 members – open to hockey fans around the world to discuss all aspects of hockey and its history.

3.2. Canada vs. Russia (USSR)

The rivalry between Canadians and Russians exploded at the time when their countries were not only the best hockey countries in the world, but also belonging to two very distant and completely different worlds in a political and social way. Their games were, therefore, not only a clash between two hockey philosophies (USSR having a reputation as an extraordinary skilled and creative team, opposed to Canadian will, determination and hard work), but also between the two worlds. Even now, somewhat older generations of hockey fans in Canada, but also most of the recent polls in general, are still favoring the games against the USSR as the most memorable ones in Canadian hockey history. This rivalry was immortalised through two events in particular: the 1972 Summit Series and the 1987 Canada Cup, both of them having their own trademark moments.

"Of course, the 1972 Summit Series was easily the most important and dramatic", reads one of the readers' comments to the article "Top five Team Canada wins in hockey history" (2014) published by QMI Agency in *Toronto Sun Online*. "The most important lesson learned was that dismissive NHL overconfidence was no match for being properly prepared and trained! That first team was gasping for air in the first game and embarrassed itself", the very same reader explains: "Thankfully, they loaded up with grit and determination to overcome their early hole" (QMI Agency 2014). Again, brash self-confidence, a rather non-typical Canadian feature, is a subject of critique and so, whenever the Canadians falter in their humility, they are just as well called out for it. Furthermore, a loss should be experienced as a punishment and – as most of the interpretations more often than not suggest – is not a matter of someone else being better, but rather a consequence of Canadians not being themselves and playing at their expected level.

Bruce Yaccato in his article "Top 15 Greatest Hockey Games Ever" (2015) gives us an idea of how this match is perceived up to this day:

> It's difficult to explain how much this win meant to the Canadian national psyche. Only the maple leaf flag, universal health care and heroism in two world wars approach the importance of hockey in the nation's self-image. Team Canada had been humiliated in the early games of the so-called Summit Series and had to play the last four games in Moscow. With the series tied and the Soviets up 5–3 in the last period of the last game, the nation was on the verge of going into mourning. Such is its spiritual significance, it became for Canadians of a certain age, the Canuck equivalent of Americans asking 'Where were you when Kennedy was shot?' Redemption. Vindication. Glory. Don't even think of telling a Canadian it's just a game. (Yaccato 2015)

Although the games against the Soviet teams provide a much needed background on the dynamics of the contemporary rivalry, a more recent timeline can reveal a sharper perspective into present-day Canadian hockey identity, i.e. give an interesting insight into whether and how the dynamics have changed. Narratives similar to those explaining the differences between Canada and the United States can be found here as well. In the article "New Cold War: Russia vs. Canada" (2010) by Ethan Sherwood Strauss, there is a quote by Greg Wyshynski, an American sportswriter and creator of a popular hockey blog *Puck Daddy*, that outlines the nature of the hockey rivalry between the two countries nowadays: "'Today, it obviously has the added flair of Alex Ovechkin against Sidney Crosby, which has been boiled down to its essential clichés by Canadian media as the flashy Russian showboat against the humble, stoic boy next door'" (Strauss 2010).

One of the more recent games between Canada and the Russian Federation allows us to further reflect upon the idea that Canada's hockey rivals are only mirrors of what Canadians think they themselves are supposed to be or have failed to be. Unlike the other games mentioned here, this one was played by the Junior Team, i.e. under-20 years old players. It was a final match at the 2011 IIHF World U20 Championship and it turned out to be one of the biggest comebacks in hockey ever: Russia was down 3–0 after two periods and then scored five goals in the third period to win the gold against Canadians that had already been considering the game won. The Canadians were devastated: "It was not just a loss; it was a collapse the likes of which Canada might never have seen. It was among the most spectacular collapses in hockey history", wrote Bruce Arthur in his article in *National Post* titled, interestingly enough, "Canada has no monopoly on heart" (2011). In it, he admitted that in that match, it were the Russians who were demonstrating the ideal set of Canadian values: "It was grit, guts, heart, all those adjectives that Canadians sometimes believe to be their own exclusive property" (Arthur 2011). Another author, Rob Longley, writes along the same lines in his article "Oh, no Canada! Loss raises litany of questions" (2011): "For as much as their own country will erupt in deserved celebration at the victory, you can make a case that the Russians did it the Canadian way" (Longley 2011).

No matter the circumstances, it seems that Canada's losses and victories in hockey are explained through more or less same concepts. Those concepts are therefore revealing the role of hockey in expressing or identifying the desired aspects of Canadian identity. The following section of this paper seeks to investigate how the Canadian authors themselves perceive such narratives.

4. Canadians explaining Canadian narratives

In his paper "Canada seeks national identity through sport" (2011), Aaron Taylor identifies topoi of a great deal of hockey narratives dealing with Canadian strengths and comparative advantages:

> The ideals of what make a good hockey player are often present in what make a well-rounded person. A good hockey player is a hard worker, a team player, and dedicated to a fault. Most important, in hockey the size of the heart is more important than the size of the body. This is something that attracts Canadians, perhaps more than anything. As a relatively small country, Canada is often made to feel like the little brother to the neighboring United States. (Taylor 2011)

The comparison to the United States is by this point a familiar one, but it nevertheless conveniently reminds us of the underdog nature that Canadians believe defines them and their efforts. The loss against the Russian junior team exposes the same psychology, Taylor (2011) finds:

> After last year's gold medal collapse against the Russians, which saw Russia score five unanswered third period goals, many Canadians felt that there was a loss of identity. Aren't we the ones that are supposed to do that? Gutsy-comeback-underdog efforts are things that belong to Canada. We are the nation that never says die. (Taylor 2011)

However, once again there seems to be a divergence between what Canada is on and off the ice. Whereas in the bigger picture the Canadians very well might be perceived as an underdog both by themselves as well as by the others, it would be a rather interesting concept to label Team Canada an underdog in hockey since it is regularly one of the top contenders. Some of the narratives exploiting this perspective are a subject of Adam Proteau's critique in his article "Canadian Olympic pride is good – but not at the expense of other countries" (2014):

> Nobody is saying Canadians shouldn't be publicly proud of our athletes. But you'd think a country that spends most of its time in the shadow of the United States would be less likely to throw shade at other nations. And that goes double if Canada winds up securing the gold medal in Sochi and the narrative becomes about what great odds they've overcome to stand atop the podium. Is there anything worse than a leviathan that pretends it's an underdog? (Proteau 2014)

(Most of the comments to the article oppose Proteau, showing perhaps that fans are not aware of or not ready to question the narratives they, too, use.) So it seems only natural to wonder what the future of these identity dynamics might be, both on and off the ice. Of course, there is one factor Canada cannot influence, and that is the progress of its opponents. The emphasis is, however, on Canada itself and the tone it will set for its own progress, both in hockey and in general. Possible challenges are by all means identified. In his paper "When Sport Defines a Nation" (2015), Sam Riches draws our attention to the fact that hockey "is now modern, commercial, a sport of privilege [...], and, increasingly, a game that has limited historical and cultural significance for new generations of Canadians", but further adds in an optimistic manner how "in most respects, this may actually be a good thing. There's room for re-definition" (Riches 2015). In a way, these thoughts bring the topic of this paper full circle – it is a rhetoric similar to how Myrna Kostash (2004) was problematising the national identity and the challenges and changes it faces in the 21st century. The foundations will not disappear nor should they: "There is still the thrill of spectatorship in hockey, of Canadians organizing around the game – using a cultural activity to help whittle out a collective identity – but hockey can no longer speak to the concept of a unified, singular Canadian", says Riches (2015), concluding: "To be effective, it must speak to us all" (Riches 2015).

So are there any tangible clues to how hockey, fueled by possible identity issues – or how Canadian national identity, supported by further hockey dynamics – is to be drawn on the map of a modern Canadian society? A good place to start are the results of The 2013 General Social Survey by Statistics Canada (2015), published in October 2015. The survey investigated Canadians' perceptions of national identity – national symbols, shared Canadian values, and pride were three addressed dimensions – and yielded the following five symbols of Canadian identity as the most important: Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, national flag, national anthem, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and hockey (qtd. in Statistics Canada 2015). Although hockey's place on the list is not questionable – 77% of the surveyed identified it as an important symbol of Canadian identity – "less than half (46%) considered hockey – Canada's official winter sport, as a very important symbol, with about one in five (22%) believing that it was not very important or not at all important" (Sinha 2015). Furthermore, hockey was ranked among the lowest two at every age and it "ranks as a distant last across all provinces, except Quebec where its importance is similar to the other symbols, apart from the Charter" (Sinha 2015). The question of provincial differences in Canadians' perceived importance of national symbols would open a further discussion going well back into the history of Canada and hockey in Canada. In any case, the motives behind the survey acknowledge that "Canada's national identity has continuously changed, being shaped by shifts in the socio-demographic landscape of Canada,

historical events and social relationships" and that "it cannot be considered a stagnant construct, but rather one that evolves over time" (Sinha 2015). One might very well wonder to what extent this applies to hockey and its relevance for Canadians, which brings us to the final thoughts of this paper.

5. Conclusion

Sport remains a rewarding background for exploring national identities and their ways of coping with the changes of a postmodern world, in which new generations might be identified by their market preferences and digital presence rather than by their actual nationality. It is probably safe to assume that in Canada hockey will not lose its symbolic potential and power; however, its role and significance for the modern Canadians might go through a (likely slow and subtle, and most probably unconscious and uninstructed) process of re-evaluation.

Various narratives and metanarratives might leave us with somewhat confusing picture of how Canadians actually, whether consciously or subconsciously, project their identity onto their hockey efforts. Most of the time, it seems that the values that many Canadians believe are immanent to them are exercised (or at least looked for) in hockey, and vice versa: those traits of teams and players are welcomed that reflect the established values. But on the other hand, it is its somewhat twisted mirror image: Canada as a geopolitical underdog often interprets its hockey accomplishments from that same underdog perspective, although it enjoys an obvious dominance in this sport. Any trace of being too self-assured in success on the ice is condemned, which might be more indicative of Canadians' fear of losing the dominance and the need to reassure and reclaim it, than them judging themselves simply for being ostentatious about it.

Some might argue the idea that Canadians have built a national myth out of turning their struggle with the cruel nature into a victory, but hockey might be good evidence for that: they have mastered the game and yet made it an imperative to stay humble. Maybe they are a perpetual underdog after all: no matter how many times they win, or how far back behind their opponents are, they might feel that every time they have to prove and claim their status again. It remains to be seen when and how, and whether at all, the social and political changes, or the evolution of the game itself, will have an effect on such Canadian narratives.

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