

NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE PLAYERS FROM NORTH AMERICA ARE MORE VIOLENT THAN THOSE FROM EUROPE¹

SCOTT GROSSMAN AND TERENCE HINES

Pace University

Summary.—It is commonly believed by hockey fans that European hockey players rely more on skill while North American players are more violent. The number of penalty minutes garnered by European and North American players in the National Hockey League's 1995–1996 season was examined. When corrected for the low proportion of European players, North American players had significantly more penalty minutes than European players.

The sport of hockey is well known for the aggressive nature of its play, so much that the joke “Last night I went to the fights and a hockey game broke out” is well known and old. The sport has developed differently in North America compared to Europe. Hockey is generally regarded as a more aggressive game in North America than it is in Europe. For years, European hockey teams, especially the Russians, have been regarded as relying much more on skill and finesse than on aggression.

The fact that the game has evolved quite differently on the two continents may be a result of cultural differences as well as in the way in which hockey is publicized. As the game has grown more popular in North America, certain aspects of the game have been played up by the media. Hockey fights make great footage on the evening news and thus are frequently shown, often at some length.

Perhaps because of this, the popularity of hockey players began to be influenced not by their skill but by their aggressiveness. Smith (1974) studied aggression that resulted in penalties among high school hockey players. The amount of their aggression was significantly related to the amount of aggression they perceived characteristic of the professional players they judged to be their favorites. Russell (1979) studied provincial all-star hockey players' ratings of their favorite professional players and teams. Among these players, amount of aggression expressed by their favorite professional players did not correlate with their own scores for aggression on the ice. However, a team's popularity was, in part, influenced positively by the number of penalties received. These findings suggest that aggressive play begets aggressive young players.

While the findings of Smith (1974) and of Russell (1979) are important

¹Address enquiries to T. Hines. Ph.D., Psychology, Pace University, Pleasantville, NY 10570.

and interesting, neither author examined their data to assess whether there were differences in the amount of aggression as measured by penalty minutes between players with a North American or a European background. We have analyzed all the penalty minutes accumulated by all players in the National Hockey League for the 1995–1996 regular season to examine this issue.

Method.—Data on the number of penalty minutes for every one of the 871 players in the National Hockey League for the 1995–1996 regular season were obtained from the official National Hockey League Web page on the Internet.

Results and discussion.—There were a total of 44,659 penalty minutes during the 1995–1996 season. The 701 players from North America accounted for 38,622 penalty minutes, while the 170 European players accounted for 6,037 minutes. Based on the uneven proportions of North American (80.5%) and European (19.5%) players in the league, had there been no differences in penalty minutes as a function of players' background, North American players would have accumulated 35,950 and European players 8,709 penalty minutes. These values are significantly different from what was observed ($\chi^2_1 = 397.2$, $p < .001$).

This finding confirms that the North American players in the National Hockey League are more violent than players with a European background. It would be interesting to examine this question further by examining measures for players from other sports to judge whether this result is specific to hockey or is a more general difference between European and North American sportsmen and women actively engaged at this level of competition.

REFERENCES

- RUSSELL, G. W. (1979) Hero selection by Canadian ice hockey players: skill or aggression? *Canadian Journal of Applied Sport Science*, 4, 309–313.
- SMITH, M. D. (1974) Significant others' influence on the assaultive behaviour of young hockey players. *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 3/4(9), 45–56.

Accepted August 15, 1996.