The Early Specialization in Hockey of Professional NHL Players from Winnipeg

By

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Abstract

Early career sport specialization has become increasingly popular among today's youth athletes. Despite its increasingly prominence, this athletic trend has not been historicized in the Canadian context. The goal of this thesis is to determine when and why youth athletes began to pursue a certain sport, forgoing other athletic opportunities, as a means to achieve elite-level success. It focuses specifically on hockey players from Winnipeg, Manitoba, who played in the National Hockey League. This qualitative research study uses semi-structured interviews and secondary material to explore the socio-historical factors that resulted in young male hockey players in Winnipeg being encouraged to exclusively participate in hockey year-round. This study historicizes the shift in youth sport in the post-Second World War period in Canada to better understand the reasons for early sport specialization and the forces that shape contemporary youth sport.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In late July, 2015, Winnipeg minor hockey league standout Riley Stotts received a unique scholarship to participate with the EC Red Bull Salzburg under-16 team for the 2015-2016 season. Stotts, the 10th overall selection in the 2015 Western Hockey League (WHL) draft was originally planning to play with the Winnipeg Wild AAA hockey team for the upcoming season. However, as many hockey enthusiasts would agree, the opportunity to regularly practice and train in a brand-new 133,000 square foot Red Bull hockey and soccer academy in Salzburg, while travelling across Europe and North America to compete against other teams, could not be denied.

At the time, former NHLer and head of international recruiting for the Red Bull Hockey Academy, Brian Savage, said he would also be sending his son Ryan, a fellow WHL draft pick, along with Riley to Salzburg. Savage suggested the offer on the table for these young players was too tempting to pass by claiming "these kids are going to be seeing the world on Red Bull's dime…they get a chance to go to all these places and mature…become men" (cited in Billeck, 2015, p. C8). Len Stotts, Riley's father, agreed with Savage in that the opportunity in Europe was far too great for his son to decline. Mr. Stotts said "there's an experience over there in Europe. He is going to compete against kids that, hopefully, he will see in a few years time in the world junior championship" (cited in Ibid, p. C8). As Manitoba had six first-round WHL draft picks in 2015, it appears Len would be accurate with crediting Winnipeg's minor hockey system for turning his son into a top WHL draft pick. Len acknowledged that his son will be fulfilling his destiny of playing in the WHL after his year in Europe by claiming his son has "always been a WHL guy, ever since he was about nine" (cited in Ibid, p. C8).

Being a former competitive hockey player with experience and knowledge of the Winnipeg minor and Canadian junior hockey systems, I commend Riley on receiving this scholarship and appreciate the effort and time he must have put into the game to be given this opportunity. He and his parents should be extremely proud of his accomplishments to date and I wish him nothing but the best in the future. Furthermore, I respect and understand the aspect of goal setting and having the desire to play in the top level of competition available. However, as a graduate student with knowledge in the field of athlete development, I cannot help but feel uncomfortable when I see a parent describing his son as being a "WHL guy" by the fourth grade. Perhaps my discomfort is unwarranted. After all, it is extremely common for a young boy to dream of one day being a professional athlete. However, I do believe there is an issue with determining your junior hockey career path before you have graduated from elementary school. Much can happen to a young boy before the onset of his junior hockey career, and perhaps it is best to be more open to other potential opportunities as opposed to being so focused so early on a single direction. This is not to say I know the best method for youth athlete development, far from it. However, there are numerous potential risks associated with the growing trend of early sport specialization among youth athletes across Canada.

It is well publicized that the trend of youth sport specialization has increased over recent decades. In Canada, the game of hockey has become so popular that from a very early age, young players are essentially playing the sport year-round (Hagen, 2015). However, little consideration has been given to the potential historical factors that have resulted in the increasing rates of early sport specialization among Canadian male hockey players. Also, no clear indication of precisely when this trend became more prevalent for these athletes has been determined. Coakley (2010) offers an explanation to when and why youth sport specialization

became such a popular method of athlete development in the American context. His socio-historical perspective on youth sport specialization focuses predominantly on two significant societal impacts: the privatization and commercialization of youth sport and new ideas concerning parenting.

Coakley (2010) argues that America's newly established emphasis on individualism and personal responsibility in the early 1980s played a role in youth sport specialization. When the United States government put a halt to funding a full range of recreation and youth sport programs, private sport programs led by entrepreneurs wanting to establish a career in youth sports emerged. As this occurred, youth sport became a primary source of income for some adults and led to the promotion of year-round membership and participation as being essential for children's athletic success. Furthermore, as ideas of individual responsibility grew during the 1980s, Coakley suggests ideas concerning parenting altered. Parents now became completely responsible for their children's actions at all times as the definition of what constitutes a good parent now included their child's success or failures. He argues these views of parenting became included in the world of athletics as parents increasingly were praised for their child's athletic success. The new ideas of connecting parenting and sports, he suggests, led to the belief that focusing on a single sport would increase the chances of success in a child's athletic career, reflecting the positive upbringing the child received.

Although Coakley's work adds to literature on sport specialization, it does not speak to the Canadian context. This study was designed to fill this gap by examining sport specialization in Canada following the Second World War, with a specific focus on male National Hockey League (NHL) players from Winnipeg. Focusing on NHL players from Winnipeg provided a local context to illustrate the trajectory of sport specialization for young male athletes and was

appropriate for this project for several reasons. First, for the sake of feasibility and proximity, this study allowed for a realistic opportunity to gather and collect relevant data. Second, Winnipeg has produced both successful hockey teams and talented hockey players. Throughout the city's history, every major hockey championship in the world has at one point been won by a Winnipeg team including the Stanley Cup, Allen Cup, Memorial Cup, gold in the Winter Olympics, and World Championships. Most importantly, numerous players from Winnipeg that have gone on to play in the top level of professional hockey in North America, the NHL, graduated from various local minor hockey teams (Brignall, 2011). The city has a well-established hockey system, both in terms of its size and its historical longevity, for developing successful male hockey players.

Along with focusing on male players from Winnipeg, selecting the game of hockey and its NHL participants after 1945 was appropriate for such a project. According to Morrow and Wamsley (2013), due to the international success and nationwide popularity of the sport, by the Second World War Canadians were convinced that "hockey was our game and the best male hockey players were icons of Canadian popular culture" (p. 6). They note that although the Second World War resulted in the elimination of some men's and women's sports, NHL hockey thrived. The post-Second World War period witnessed the increased significance of elite-level sport competition as advancements in the fields of technology, athletic training, sport science, professional coaching, and government involvement in sport funding were created. They suggest a new sporting culture emerged in the post-Second World War era with an emphasis on sport performance, national competition, and pride. In no other sport was this more prominent in Canada than men's ice hockey.

Objectives

My research ultimately focused on hockey players born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, who played in the NHL following the Second World War. The project was created primarily to determine when, at what ages, and why these individuals began to specialize and focus strictly on hockey. Also, this thesis was designed to address numerous questions: how did changes in the Canadian sport system influence young hockey players to focus exclusively on hockey year-round? Were there significant changes in the organization of competitive hockey in Canada that led young players to believe they had to play hockey year-round and to the exclusion of participating in other sports? When did the NHL and the amateur leagues that develop players with an eye towards careers in the NHL begin to expect its players to strictly play hockey?

Thus, the main objective of this study was to determine the post-Second World War socio-historical factors in Canada that resulted in youth being encouraged or feeling pressured to pursue a certain sport, forgoing other athletic opportunities, as a means to achieve elite-level success. In doing so, this project highlights how these factors impacted the landscape of youth sport in Canada and more importantly, how they influenced the early specialization of children in sport.

By examining different perspectives on youth sport specialization and expert performance training, while analyzing the historical developments and changes in youth sports, the Canadian sport system, and competitive hockey in post-Second World War Canada, I specifically attempt to determine how these changes influenced Winnipeg hockey players to exclusively play and train for hockey year-round. In doing so, an understanding of when and why specializing in hockey became the popular and desired method of athletic development for young boys in Canada is constructed. This study historicizes the shift in youth sport in the post-

Second World War period in Canada to better understand the reasons for early sport specialization and the contemporary youth sport landscape.

Rationale

The rationale for this study was threefold. First, the early specialization of children in sport is a topic of great interest to quantitative and qualitative researchers. Children specializing in a particular sport at early ages have been researched from biomechanical (Mattson & Richards, 2010), physiological (Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010), sociological (Coakley, 2010), and psychological (Gould, 2010) perspectives. However, this issue has not been thoroughly examined from an historical perspective. It is important to add an historical dimension to the debates over sport specialization in order to understand how the organization and pressures surrounding youth sport in Canada has changed and progressed. Examining the post-Second World War socio-historical changes of youth sports, athlete development, Canadian sport system, and organization of competitive hockey in Canada sheds light on why young athletes feel pressure to specialize in a single sport and aids in the understanding of the current landscape of youth sport in Canada.

The second rationale is that it has become increasingly popular among today's youth to specialize in one particular sport at earlier ages in order to compete at the highest levels. External pressures from parents, coaches, as well as various athletic organizations have been recognized to influence early specialization in sport despite the fact that it has not been proven to lead to elite-level success (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick & LaBella, 2013; Landers, Carson & Blankenship, 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar, Best & Myer, 2013). This study helps provide insight to address why and what caused young hockey players to participate and train exclusively for hockey at such early ages by including the voices of NHL players and other key individuals involved in competitive hockey organizations in Canada that are missing from

the scholarly literature on sport specialization. Their experiences expand the historical understanding of how sport specialization, athlete development, training programs, and competitive sport structure have changed over time in Canada.

Thirdly, this project helps contextualize the increasing rates of youth male hockey players quitting the game. Currently, this is a major issue across Canada, including Winnipeg, as the number of youth male hockey participants has decreased in recent years (Martin, 2015). Hockey Canada claims a major reason for this issue is a result of athletic burnout due to the growing trend of youth hockey players strictly participating in hockey-related activities year-round. Corey McNabb, Hockey Canada's senior manager of coach and player development, recently advised hockey parents, leagues, and associations to allow youth hockey players the opportunity to take longer breaks away from hockey and play other sports in order to prevent the increasing rates of player burnout (Hagen, 2015). Hagen (2015) observes that "Canada is still producing some of the best players in the world. But for every kid off to play junior, college or pro, there's a bunch who burned out in their teens" (para. 12). Therefore, it was important to understand when, why, and how hockey specialization became a popular method of player development in Canada in order to potentially prevent the growing numbers of youth player burnout.

Contribution

This project offers insight into what post-Second World War socio-historical factors resulted in young male hockey players in Winnipeg being encouraged to exclusively play hockey year-round. Not only does my research contribute to increased public knowledge about early hockey specialization in Winnipeg, but it contributes to existing literature on sport specialization among young athletes in general. More specifically, with this study I analyze the historical shift in youth sport specialization by focusing on male hockey players from Winnipeg as a way of exploring

this larger issue. Examining the historical factors that have resulted in children and youth being encouraged to pursue a certain sport, forgoing other opportunities, as a means to achieve athletic success adds significantly to our understanding of this topic. This project adds an historical component to previous research, specifically in the context of young male hockey players from Winnipeg in the post-Second World War period, to shed light on why young athletes are specializing in a single sport.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The review of literature focuses on post-Second World War Canada and begins by discussing the history of youth sport. Following this section, I review the historical significance of hockey in Canadian culture and the dominance of the National Hockey League (NHL). Also considered are the federal government's involvement in athletics and the development of high performance training in the post-Second World War period. This section ends with a discussion of gender and its connection to hockey participation during this time period. The review of literature then analyzes different methods of physical training for the purpose of expert performance in sport. I then summarize various perspectives on youth sport specialization. Finally, this chapter concludes with a brief summary and a discussion of any gaps in the research.

The History of Youth Sport in Canada

Today, youth sports are considered to be highly organized, structured, competitive, controlled or influenced by adults, and predominantly played in teams as opposed to individual competition (Dyck, 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012). Dyck (2013) describes youth team sports as sources of both positive and negative outcomes for children. Positive in that they offer an opportunity for enjoyment, good health and fitness, chances to make friends, and skill-acquisition experiences that could potentially lead to future scholarship or professional contract opportunities. On the contrary, the intensification and competitive design of organized youth sports are so focused on athletic achievement, they may also lead to various harmful physical, emotional, and social impacts on children. Despite these opposing views, organized and competitive youth team sports have grown in popularity in the post-Second World War period and are now one of the most

common extra-curricular programs and forms of physical activity for young children (Dyck, 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012). However, one of the biggest negative impacts that have resulted from the increased popularity of youth sports is the growing trend of early sport specialization (Merkel, 2013).

Although there is little literature on the history of youth sport in post-Second World War Canada, Wiggins (1987; 1996) sheds light on the growth of youth team sport in this time period from an American context. He notes three major reasons why organized and competitive youth sport programs began to flourish in the middle of the 20th century. First, there was a growing belief from many parents that competitive athletics offered numerous benefits to children such as sportsmanship, character development, and increased levels of physical fitness. Secondly, with the increasing amount of media coverage dedicated to covering sports teams and top-level athletes, children, and their parents, became drawn to the possibilities of athletic and financial success. Wiggins (1987) states parents believed "early involvement in competitive sport might put children on a similar path to fame and fortune" (p. 10). Finally, the changing lifestyles of adults, such as the increased involvement of women in the workforce, contributed to the growth of organized sport for children (Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins, 1996). Similarly, Van Rheenen (2012) argues that the growing numbers of single parent families and families in which both parents worked beginning in the mid-20th century resulted in the need for greater adult supervision for children. This adult supervision was found in the form of coaches and led to an increase in preference of highly organized team athletic activities.

Wiggins and Van Rheenen point to the prominent role parents had in the growth of youth team sport in the mid 20th century. Dyck (2013) also highlights the significance and impact parental involvement had on the increase of youth team sports during this time period from a

Canadian perspective. He suggests that a drastic shift in the patterns of child rearing and how children and youth were viewed occurred in Canada by the early 1960s. Although children commonly played forms of unsupervised sport outdoors at this time, Dyck argues increased pressure was placed on the shoulders of parents as they started to look at the needs of their children more so than parents of children in previous generations. Children became monitored more closely as their attitudes and actions were recognized as a reflection of their families and parents. Also, parents viewed organized team sport as not only a source of good health and opportunity to build character, but an opportunity for their children to make friends with other kids involved in sport. Participation in organized team sport became viewed as a chance to create friendships with "good" kids as opposed to the presumably troubled youth on the streets who were not involved in competitive athletic programs. Although these values attached to organized athletics date back to the early 20th century, the role of parents grew in significance in the context of youth sport in post-Second World War Canada as they became increasingly influential in shaping their children's athletic activities that were believed to be proper for child development (Dyck, 2013).

Coinciding with the positive outlook parents felt competitive team sports offered to children, Wiggins (1987) notes this time period also witnessed the changing attitudes toward children's sport by professional educators, administrators, and physicians. These individuals had now taken a more favorable position to the role of sport for children by recognizing the potential benefits acquired through competitive athletics. Meetings dedicated specifically to children's athletics were held to look at youth sport from various disciplinary areas such as motor learning, exercise physiology, motor development, sport psychology, sports medicine, and sport sociology (Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins, 1996). As professional academics from various disciplines across

North America attended these conferences, research ideas were shared and literature in different fields of study were eventually produced with a specific focus on youth sport. Wiggins (1987) also notes that as the significance of sport for children was researched and promoted during this time, a large emphasis was placed on the relevance of quality coaching for youth sport. He suggests the 1970s witnessed the idea that well-qualified coaches were necessary to properly teach athletic fundamentals and techniques in a particular sport and were also responsible to ensure that young athletes had an overall positive athletic experience.

In addition, Wiggins (1987; 1996) notes the 1970s was a significant period for youth sport as this decade finally saw young girls enter the field of youth team athletic competition. Although the impact this had on athletics for females was unprecedented, Van Rheenen (2012) suggests the increase of youth females participating in organized and competitive team sports also had significant effects on youth male athletes. He argues that as growing numbers of young girls began to compete and prefer participating in organized team sports, young boys "shifted their preference for games with ever heightened activity - games characterized by enhanced speed, aggression, and role specialization…this shift has coincided with a marked increase in the popularity of major sports, particularly team sports" (p. 425). On that note, it is important to consider that no other major team sport and organization was as popular or influential to Canadians in the post-Second World War period as men's ice hockey, especially in the NHL (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Kidd & MacFarlane, 1972; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013).

Despite the increased popularity of major team sports in the post-Second World War period and the growth of youth sports in America, Dyck (2013) claims children's participation rates in youth sport programs are now declining in Canada because of two main reasons: the cost to participate and the time-consuming schedules of athletic programs. He argues the financial

burden to play organized youth sports has now limited the number of participants to those with certain family structures as well as parents with certain salaries and educational backgrounds. In addition, the demanding schedule of competitive athletics has resulted in children having difficulty playing more than one sport. This often results in the child or parent having to select participating in only one particular sport at a young age (Dyck, 2013). This is reflected in Canada's and Winnipeg's minor hockey scene as the number of youth male participants have declined while those playing are neglecting to participate in other sports (Hagen, 2015; Martin, 2015). To help understand this youth hockey landscape, it is important to examine the history and significance of the sport in our nation.

Hockey

In Canada

According to Morrow and Wamsley (2013), mythologies and ideas of national identity have been created by Canadians throughout our country's history for the purpose of identifying a distinctive "Canadianness." A common myth shared by many Canadians is the idea of our nation connected through the sport of hockey. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) argue hockey has been socially constructed by Canadians to be more meaningful than a simple game. Hockey, they claim, has become "one of the country's most significant collective representations - a story that Canadians tell themselves what it means to be Canadian" (p. 13). Francis (1997) indicates that "lovers of the sport impose on it a terrific weight of significance" as "hockey allows Canadians to be proud of ourselves, to puff up our chests and feel we are the best at something" (p. 167). To Canadians who are passionate and enjoy various forms of sport, the nature and uniqueness of hockey involving a combination of speed, aggression, physicality, skill, and creativity has made it stand alone as the most popular sport in this country (Kidd & Macfarlane, 1972). Although not all

Canadians may share this passion for hockey, Morrow and Wamsley claim "one cannot overstate its historical significance in creating a Canadian national identity" and "sustaining the Canadian national narrative" (p. 236).

Although the game has been played for well over a century across the country, it was the post-Second World War period in Canada that Morrow and Wamsley (2013) describe as the era of men's hockey supremacy. However, it was specifically the popularity and supremacy of professional men's hockey, represented by the monopolistic National Hockey League (NHL), that dominated the Canadian sport culture and heavily impacted minor hockey leaguers across the country. Post-Second World War Canada saw the most popular and influential men's professional hockey league take a firm grip on hockey in Canada, and more specifically, its young male hockey players (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Wong, 2005).

Wong (2005) notes amateur hockey, controlled by the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA), became a subordinate, feeder system to the NHL. Due to heavy financial strain in the 1930s, the CAHA, while maintaining control of amateur hockey, made an alliance with the NHL to adopt its league rules, acknowledge it as having authority over all commercial hockey in Canada, and give it a claim to all amateur players under the CAHA's jurisdiction. This gave the NHL control of the entire player market in Canada as they owned the CAHA junior hockey players' rights and were able to recruit them upon completion of their junior years (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Kidd & Macfarlane, 1972; Wong, 2005). However, due to increased financial difficulties following the Second World War, Kidd and Macfarlane (1972) note the CAHA's only chance of survival was to receive financial assistance from the NHL. In order to receive the desperately needed financial support, the CAHA signed two agreements with the NHL in 1947 and 1958, giving the latter control of all amateur hockey across the country. By

creating an NHL controlled sponsorship system, giving the NHL control of amateur hockey, Kidd and Macfarlane claim the CAHA became an active partner in the development of a country-wide NHL farm system and "came to believe – and to teach thousands of young players whose activity it regulated – that what was good for the NHL was good for hockey in Canada" (p. 55).

Along with controlling Canadian amateur hockey players through the NHL-CAHA sponsorship system, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) suggest the NHL continued to grow in popularity and dominate the entire hockey labour market following the Second World War by both integrating all minor professional teams into its feeder system and through the use of television. By the mid 1950s, NHL hockey became a significant part Canadian culture as people were now able to watch star players from their country on TV every week on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's (CBC's) "Hockey Night in Canada." Although "CBC's radio broadcast of NHL games attracted two million Canadian listeners in the early 1930s," Morrow and Wamsley (2013) state "by the early 1960s, the so called original six teams drew television audiences of more than five million" (p. 250). They add to this by noting "Hockey Night in Canada" "helped sustain the NHL's monopoly over professional hockey" and "maintained the highest television ratings in the country" (p. 6), resulting in salary increases "from thousands of dollars for star players to millions" between the 1960s and 1980s (p. 7).

During this period, several changes occurred in hockey in Canada courtesy of the NHL. Although the league's control of amateur hockey players in Canada through the NHL-CAHA sponsorship system resulted in young teenagers being bought and traded amongst various junior teams following the 1940s, the control of young players changed in the 1960s. As an attempt to balance the skill level amongst the NHL, each team was granted the opportunity to acquire the

rights of hockey players through the first NHL amateur draft in 1963. Six years later, the sponsorship system was officially replaced by the universal draft system. Also, due to the NHL's growing need of players through league expansion in 1967, the NHL and CAHA agreed to change the maximum age for junior hockey from 21 to 20 (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Kidd & Macfarlane, 1972).

Along with the draft, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) note the increasing salaries and growing popularity through televised games resulted in young boys at this time aspiring to be a future professional NHL hockey player. They argue being an NHL player became the most popular dream for all Canadian boys, more so than being a professional athlete in any other sport. The idea of a lucrative and fulfilling life courtesy of a career in the NHL was publicly promoted in 1969 by a member of the Toronto Maple Leaf Gardens public relations staff, Jack McMaster, who gave the following words of advice to young Canadian hockey players:

> For every boy capable of playing junior hockey in Canada, at some point he is going to have to make the big decision – aim his sights at the National Hockey League, at Canada's National Team or towards College hockey. The record speaks for itself. Any boy who wants to be a professional hockey player should keep his sights firmly fixed on the NHL without wavering or diverting for, once diverted, he might never get back on track again…The choice is of course up to the individual. However, if a player has any aspirations at all of making the NHL, he should set his sights and not falter. It could be one of the most rewarding decisions he ever made (cited in Kidd & Macfarlane, 1972, pp. 63-4).

As the NHL was viewed and promoted as the ultimate career path for young Canadian boys, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) highlight the public perception of Canada's major junior hockey system. They note Canada's major junior hockey leagues were "widely seen as the best possible preparation for a professional career" (p. 165). Young players in minor hockey were taught that being scouted, invited to junior camps, and playing junior hockey were critical steps

in their young athletic careers. Also, the significance and pressures of professional scouting became more influential during this era as the NHL's Central Scouting Bureau was created in 1975. In addition to scouting and ranking top prospects for their annual entry draft, the age of draft eligible players dropped from 20 to 18 in 1979 (Render, 1994).

Morrow and Wamsley (2013) suggest the NHL, with more league expansion in 1970, 1972, 1974, and after successfully "weathering a challenge from the World Hockey Association from 1972 to 1979" (p. 250), continued to change during this period. More violence and fighting entered the game as teams strategically implemented intimidation tactics, aggression, and toughness to win games. Teams started to acquire certain players for specific roles and tasks on each team. As salaries continued to increase, star NHL players placed more emphasis on scoring, skill, and speed while other, 'role-players', players focused on strength and aggression (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Morrow & Wamsley 2013). However, either serving as a 'role player' or offensively gifted player, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) claim it became expected from professional hockey players of this time to dedicate more time to training by partaking in "systematic off-ice and off-season conditioning" (p. 112).

Gruneau and Whitson (1993) suggest these changes of the NHL not only influenced professional players in Canada, but also junior and minor hockey league players as well. They argue methods of aggression to win games trickled down to junior and even minor league teams. Developing young players in a manner that would best suit the NHL style of play was promoted by the CAHA as their purpose was to "organize and regulate competitive hockey for aspiring young professionals" (p. 154). Macintosh, Bedecki and Franks (1987) add to this by suggesting "encouragement and enticement to young athletes to pursue sport as a career became much more prevalent" (p. 49) at this time courtesy of the impact and influence professional sport had on

young athletes. The intensified training regimes adopted by professionals "meant that practices and games came more to resemble work and less to resemble play. This transformation applied not only to professional sport, but increasingly…amateur sport" (p. 50). Similar to professional NHLers, the CAHA's "Minor Hockey Development Program" was created to encourage on and off-ice specific training for young amateur players at this time:

> One of the most significant developments was the Beginners Program which came about from the realization that the traditional approach of learning by playing the game resulted in many players lacking fundamental skills. Young players were rushed into competition before they had learned to skate, pass, shoot, or control the puck. The Beginners Program is based on the principles that the fundamentals of hockey will be mastered faster and more efficiently if a good teaching method is used and if the basic skills are taught in a logical progressive manner in a friendly fun-like atmosphere without premature exposure to competitive pressures. The program consists of 15 one-hour lessons covering warm-up techniques and a series of progressive drills enabling a youngster to learn to skate and handle a puck. Once past the Beginners Program there is a Hockey Development Guide for youths between 8 and 18 years of age. This program allows for progressive development and emphasizes skating, puck control, checking, shooting, and positional play. For those wishing to concentrate on skating there is a specifically developed Dynamic Skating Program. To supplement these activities there is also an Off-Ice training program consisting of a series of drills designed to improve a player's proficiency on ice but which may be done at home (The Editors of Canadian Consumer Magazine, 1978, pp. 18-9).

Although athletic training programs intensified for minor and professional male hockey players in the later post-Second World War era, Morrow and Wamsley (2013) argue these changes were not solely due to the influence of the NHL. As the league's popularity grew and its players became cultural icons across the country, greater emphasis was placed on high performance sport, international competition, and national pride on a global scale. They suggest "with the exception of the space program, there has never been a cultural field so hotly contested…as in and through sport during the Cold War period" (p. 305). As global tensions

increased during this time, high performance sport became a site for not only athletic competition, but ideological and political supremacy (Macdonald, 2011). While the NHL solidified its position as the major sport league in our nation, Canada's lack of international athletic success in a sport Canadians felt belonged to us and defined us as a nation led to what Morrow and Wamsley (2013) label as a time of "significant federal government involvement in and funding of elite sport" (p. 288).

Canadian Sport Policy

As television ratings and salaries increased for the NHL and its players, so too did the cultural importance of these athletes amongst the Canadian general public. With the growing popularity of the NHL and significance of high performance sport in the Cold War context, Canadians idolized their best professional hockey players and viewed them as heroes of our nation (Howell, 2001). Unfortunately, as "the world of sport and sport in the world had assumed greater cultural significance" (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013, p. 230), Canadians saw their men's hockey players struggle in international competition. As hockey became increasingly televised, Canada's perceived dominance, represented by talented NHL players and numerous international championship victories prior to the Cold War, became nationally troublesome as the Soviet Union entered the scene of international men's hockey competition. With the Soviets claiming victory at the 1956 Winter Olympics, watching the loss of their international status as men's hockey world champions resulted in Canadians losing a sense of pride (Macdonald, 2011).

According to Morrow and Wamsley (2013), the federal government avoided the idea of supporting amateur sport prior to the 1960s. Although, they note Canada's lack of success specifically in men's international hockey was viewed by members of parliament as a national embarrassment. "In the cold war era," adds Howell (2001), "sport was regarded as an

important…component of Canada's foreign policy" (p. 136). However, Morrow and Wamsley highlight the significant position of elite male athletes in the cold war context. They appeared to represent their respected countries on an international level and "provided the symbolic capital to advance their respective political ideologies" (p. 305).

Largely because of Canada's men's international hockey failures, the federal government officially became involved with the nation's athletics and sports programs in 1961 through Bill C-131; The Fitness and Amateur Sport Act (FASA). The Act was established to promote and develop fitness and amateur sport in Canada and improve the country's international sport performances (Macintosh et al., 1987; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990). According to Macintosh et al. (1987), sport leaders also hoped Bill C-131 would increase fitness levels and the number of sport participants in Canada. Through the Act, the federal government provided indirect financial assistance, stimulating existing sport governing bodies without interfering with their autonomy. The federal government acknowledged the importance of sport, yet continued to allow provincial governments to dictate the direction of sport in Canada through the funding they received from federal/provincial cost sharing agreements (Macintosh et al., 1987). Also, Howell (2001) notes "Bill C-131 created the National Advisory Council on Fitness and Amateur Sport (NAC), whose members were knowledgeable in the areas of physical fitness, recreation, and sport" (p. 136).

The FASA "signalled the federal government recognized the cultural significance of sport, its place in international relations, and its potential for the promotion of national unity" (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013, p. 253). Howell (2001) adds to this by noting the Act "marked the beginning of massive federal funding of programs to raise Canada's profile in international sport as a form of nation building" (p. 136). With some Quebecers promoting ideas of separation from

the country, ideas of nation building were significant at this time as members of parliament were concerned with Canada's culture and unity.

With Canada's poor performances in international competition, the growing popularity of men's ice hockey, and the state of Canadian unity and culture in peril throughout the 1960s, the federal government turned to high performance sport as a solution (Macintosh et al., 1987; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990). Nation building through sport, argues Gruneau and Whitson (1993), was used to unify French and English speaking Canadians. They claim "there was no other cultural form, no other practice, that brought two solitudes' into regular engagement with each other in quite the same way" (p. 101). However, it was ideas of nation building through elite sport, or more accurately, men's international hockey that was promoted. What more appropriate sport could unify the country better than, what Morrow and Wamsley (2013) argue, many Canadian's felt defined them as a nation?

As Canada's best male hockey players, NHL professionals, were banned from international competition, the Soviet Union routinely defeated the country's top senior amateur teams. Therefore, in the year following the creation of the FASA, the CAHA allowed the assemblage of Canada's top junior, senior, and university players to form a National team with two goals in mind: regain the global status as the champions of men's ice hockey and combine hockey with education for those on the team (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). According to Kidd and Macfarlane (1972), the time-consuming schedules of the Canadian junior hockey leagues made it difficult for players who wanted to attend school to do so. Therefore, the National team seemed desirable to those players interested in competing in international competitions and furthering their education.

The National team failed to succeed in international competition throughout the 1960s: the first decade a Canadian hockey team did not place first in men's hockey at the Winter Olympics since its inception (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Howell, 2001). However, Kidd and Macfarlane (1972) note the National team did not fail on its own, but failed due to the threat it posed on the NHL's control of Canadian hockey players. The NHL refused to cooperate with the National team by preventing it from getting the country's top players from the junior and college leagues. They suggest the CAHA, with its relationship with the NHL, never granted the financial support to the National team it so desperately needed to survive. The collapse of Canada's National team, they argue, showed the NHL's control of hockey and its refusal to accept combining hockey with education or a separate career.

After witnessing the struggles of the National Team, Macintosh et al. (1987) suggest that some members of Parliament blamed the NHL, and its control over hockey in Canada, for the nation's poor international performances. Although the amateur draft was established in 1963, Prime Minister Lester Pearson highlighted noticeable issues that continued to occur through the NHL-CAHA sponsorship program. In 1965, he stated "every good player under the age of 10 is on the negotiating list, at least, of some professional club" (Macintosh et al., 1987, p. 35). The request from members of Parliament to protect young players from the NHL-CAHA relationship was carried out by the NAC and their *Report on Amateur Hockey in Canada* in 1967. Identifying several problems associated with amateur hockey across the country, the Report specifically labelled the relationship between professional and amateur hockey as "the most important single influence upon the post-war development of hockey in Canada" (NAC, 1967, p. 7).

Through it's Report, the NAC highlighted the NHL's complete control of amateur hockey following the 1958 NHL-CAHA agreement. The NAC (1967) indicated that "the

viewpoint of the NHL owners seems to be that the aim of all hockey players is to make a living with their hockey skills" and "since amateur hockey is the training ground for professional hockey, the NHL appears to feel that it must, in certain key respects, concern itself with the operations of the CAHA in order to ensure the affective achievement of its aim" (p. 10). After analyzing the NHL's control of hockey and young amateur players, the NAC recommended that the CAHA be independent of the NHL. They argued "amateur hockey is based upon a different set of values and objectives from those of professional hockey" and "what was good for the NHL was not necessarily good for hockey in general" (p. 10). Also, the NAC identified problems with the Canadian hockey system in terms of combining hockey and education at the junior level. By looking at the intense demands of Canadian junior hockey, they concluded hockey-playing students struggled to achieve academic excellence primarily due to "lengthy seasons, frequent out of town trips and playing schedules which conflicted with school examination periods" (p. 28).

As a result of the Report, John Munro, the Minister of National Health and Welfare, publicly stated minor hockey was controlled and influenced by "the interest of professionals in maintaining a successful business operation" (Munro, 1968, p. 10). Munro argued that from the earliest opportunity, the NHL was pressuring young players to join the professional system as teams were signing, buying, and selling minors "as if they were pieces of property" (p. 11). To its credit, Macintosh et al. (1987) note the Report served as the basis of a new agreement between the CAHA and the NHL that saw the latter "cease sponsoring teams within the CAHA structure and…abandon the controversial C player contract clause (which bound adolescent players to a particular club) in favour of a universal draft" (p. 91). However, Kidd and Macfarlane (1972) note the draft system did not force the NHL to lose control of amateur

hockey, but rather changed the rules so all NHL owners could evenly divide and select from the young hockey talent.

In the year following the Report, Canada's newly elected Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, represented the federal government's increased commitment to high-performance international sport and developed a Task Force to investigate amateur sport in Canada, with a specific focus on hockey (Howell, 2001; Macintosh et al., 1987; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). Along with ending the federal/provincial cost sharing agreements created in 1961, Trudeau's Task Force was specifically important for hockey in Canada as it looked "into the control and effect of professional hockey on the lives of young Canadians" (Macintosh et al., 1987, p. 59). The Task Force on Sports for Canadians (1969) showed that hockey had become the perfect example of how professional sports organizations were affecting Canada's national sporting landscape. "The demands of professionalism" they suggest, "and the primarily American orientation of the National Hockey League, have gone too far to destroy the network of local and regional amateur hockey leagues that once contributed so colourfully to the richness of Canadian Sport" (p. 12).

The 1969 Report reviewed four serious issues associated with hockey across Canada: social and practical problems of Canadian hockey, the CAHA and its relationship with the NHL, player contracts in the NHL, and Canada's National hockey team. The Task Force recognized enormous drop-out rates in hockey after the age of 15 as a major problem within the Canadian hockey system. Similar to the NAC, the Task Force also highlighted education problems for hockey players of this age, arguing "by 15 years of age, the emphasis upon a high level of skill rather than upon play by many demands so much practice time and long schedules that the combination has a bad effect, or is thought to have a bad effect upon studies and success in

school. Many teachers and school authorities frown on late teenage hockey players" (p. 27). Also, they recognized noticeable negative effects of hockey in terms of an over-emphasis on winning causing stress to young players, and physical injuries through violence. They came to the conclusion that "hockey in Canada is now a game for two groups of people; young boys in large numbers and a few highly skilled players, almost all of whom have the objective, hopefully, of playing professional hockey" (p. 27).

Agreeing with the 1967 Report's recommendation that the CAHA be independent of the NHL, the Task Force on Sports for Canadians (1969) also recommended the creation of two non-profit organizations: Hockey Canada and Sport Canada. With its control over hockey players across the country, the NHL was identified by the Task Force as the main reason for Canada's poor international performances, claiming that "professionals have resented the effort of the National team because it has and will deprive them of the services of some outstanding NHL prospects. The NHL has also been reluctant to release any professional players who sought to be reinstated as amateurs in order to qualify for the National team" (p. 30). Therefore, Macintosh et al. (1987) claim Hockey Canada was created to oversee all ice hockey operations in Canada and "manage and finance Canada's national hockey teams" (p. 59) while Sport Canada was created "to provide Canadians with an opportunity to pursue excellence in competitive sport, and to improve the level of Canadian performances in international sport competitions" (p. 79).

According to Macintosh et al. (1987), the Task Force legitimized the federal government's new direction and involvement in amateur sport. Their increased commitment and new sport policy initiatives were illustrated in John Munro's 1970 white paper, titled *A Proposed Sports Policy for Canadians*. Munro introduced the new policy by stating:

> Our policy is about people – the greatest number of Canadians possible – increasing their participation in sports and recreational activities, and

> improving the benefits they can enjoy from such participation. If, along the way, it also serves to upgrade the caliber of Canadian participation in the world sports arena – which we are completely confident it will – then we will be able to really take pride in ourselves for having achieved something that very few other nations have been able to develop – a successful yet balanced total national sports program (Munro, 1970, p. 2).

Promoting mass participation, the policy outlined potential benefits of sport, recreation, and fitness participation such as increased national unity, international success, greater quality of life, as well as mental, social, and physical health (Munro, 1970). Furthermore, Munro claimed the pursuit of international excellence should be viewed "as a consequence and not as a goal of mass participation" (p. 23). However, Macintosh et al. (1987) argue "the Proposed Sports Policy clearly signalled the government's intension to put more effort and resources into the improvement of Canadian performance in international competition and the development of elite athletes" (pp. 64-5). They claim the programs proposed in the policy were primarily directed toward competitive, elite sport rather than mass participation. With its "overall goals of mass participation and social development" (p. 36), they suggest Monro's policy more accurately allowed competitive sport to "reap the benefits of a wider based, increased participation, quality athletes, and greater international success" (p. 64).

Despite increased funding and support for elite amateur sport in the early 1970s, Canada's international hockey problems continued as the Soviet Union won gold in the 1972 Winter Olympics. However, in the same year, the Soviet Union agreed to partake in an exhibition series against Canada's best professional hockey players to determine what country truly had the best men's hockey players (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). Although the Summit Series was the first time Canadian professional hockey players represented the nation in international competition, Kidd and Macfarlane (1972) claim Hockey Canada was forced to look

to the most powerful hockey league in the country, the NHL, to assemble Team Canada. As they note, “Team Canada meant Team NHL” (p. 91), as the WHA’s top Canadian players were restricted from the series despite Trudeau’s highly publicized plea to NHL’s commissioner Clarence Campbell.

Despite the NHL controlling Team Canada’s roster and the far superior play from the Soviets, Canada emerged victorious. Howell (2001) claims “Paul Henderson’s series winning goal…has been replayed more than any other Canadian sporting moment” (p. 99) and resulted in “an outpouring of national feeling that reminded us what hockey meant to us as Canadians” (p. 77). Morrow and Wamsley (2013) state “the media interpreted Canada’s victory in the Summit Series as the most significant measure of Canada’s international reputation since the Second World War. For hockey enthusiasts, it presented an opportunity to reaffirm that Canadian hockey was the best hockey in the world” (p. 253).

Following the Series, Macintosh and Whitson (1990) note the federal government now had direct influence on Canada’s high-performance athletes and played a role in the pursuit of international sport success. As elite athletes were encouraged by the federal government to pursue competitive athletics for the purpose of excellence and superior performance, this era witnessed the development of increased training schedules, athletic facilities, and coaching programs. Through Sport Canada funds, these advanced training facilities were created to “bring promising youth athletes from around the country to centres…where they can train under national coaches and have access to the best in facilities and sport sciences support” (p. 125). Macintosh et al. (1987) claim the art and science of coaching became viewed as essential for athletic development in the early 1970s as the federal government established the Coaching Associations of Canada (CAC): an organization designed to oversee all coaching in Canada and

improve the effectiveness of coaching techniques and strategies for Canadian amateur athletes. In 1974, the CAC further recognized the significance of coaching by creating the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) to specifically educate coaches on how to effectively instruct and work with athletes.

With the intensification of coaching and establishment of high performance facilities, by the 1970s the federal government was heavily promoting the importance of high performance athlete development and competitive sport success. This hyper-competitive sporting culture of the mid-to late 20th century that defined the direction and purpose of athletics in the Cold War era, entailed a "directive toward full-time training, weightlifting, dieting, extensive drug taking programs, physiotherapy, and physical rehabilitation" (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013, p. 306). However, this Cold War sport culture and significant position of men's hockey emerged at a time when social constructions of gender hindered athletic opportunities for Canadian females.

Gender and Hockey in Canada

While noting that women and men have played the sport for almost as long as each other, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) argue "hockey developed as a distinctly masculine subculture, a game played (at the organized level) almost exclusively by men and boys, and a game whose dominant practices and values have been those of a very specific model of aggressive masculinity" (p. 191). "Hockey in Canada" they suggest "developed historically as a male preserve" (p. 168) as the professional game that many Canadians believe defines and unites our nation has been promoted for exclusively male participants for almost a century. These NHL participants "have been held up as exemplars of a particularly Canadian kind of masculinity; and minor-hockey arenas have been 'fields of dreams' where Canadian boys have tried to emulate their favorite stars" (pp. 168-9). In post-Second World War Canada, they argue a drastic shift in

social expectations occurred that not only witnessed minor and junior hockey leagues became ideal avenues for men to teach young boys "the codes of masculine behavior" (p. 169), but also increased pressure on women to give up sport and return to the domestic sphere.

Despite the popularity and organization of women's sport in the 1920s and early-1930s and the Cold War emphasis on sport competition, Morrow and Wamsley (2013) note Canadian women in the post-Second World War era faced numerous challenges to participate in athletics. They argue the "Canadian public insisted that its female athletes maintain their wholesome image" while those who refrained from participating in sports were encouraged to "return to their homes as wives and mothers, their 'rightful' place" (p. 202). As the Canadian government and press pressured women to return to these traditional domestic roles, Howell (2001) notes these gendered stereotypes discouraged women from participating in inappropriately "masculine" sports such as ice hockey while those who did were "criticized for their tough behavior and unladylike attitudes" (p. 118). He argues a "gendered representation of sports" (p. 120) emerged in the post-Second World War era that saw certain sports become categorized as distinctly "feminine" or "masculine" and their respected participants labelled as such. Morrow and Wamsley (2013) add this "gendered ideological framework constructed for sports in this era" (p. 202) resulted in the feminization of male athletes who participated in "feminine" sports such as figure skating.

Morrow and Wamsley (2013) note this feminization process of sport in post-Second World War Canada "served to channel women into artistic and aesthetic sports in the post-war era, while others strove to maintain the image of beauty and domesticity in the press" (p. 202). No other female athlete of this era, they add, personified this socially constructed image of femininity more than Canada's figure skating champion Barbara Ann Scott. Despite her work

ethic and accomplishments, Scott's "excellence was produced within a particular social context that often masked her tremendous athleticism" (p. 143). This perception of her "kept her an athlete in disguise" (p. 145) as "the primary focus of her public and press attention was never on her athletic achievements; rather, her fame was embedded in a carefully constructed set of images, all tied to prevailing cultural perceptions and social constructions of femininity" (p. 148). Scott was the most popular female athlete participating in the ideal "feminine" sport in a time when Cold War sport culture provided the ideal "passage from boyhood to manhood, a construction of masculine identity that seemed uncomplicated when framed in terms of binary opposition represented by 'good' and 'evil'" (p. 202). In the prevailing social construction of masculinity at the time of the Cold War, coinciding with the increased popularity of the NHL, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) suggest young Canadian boys were strongly influenced by "our" game's skilled and tough hockey players such as Maurice Richard and Gordie Howe.

Along with the increased social pressures and gendered stereotypes connected to sport, Howell (2001) suggests females faced difficulties attaining resources to participate in organized hockey in post-Second World War Canada. Although some girls would use public rinks for figure skating, he argues that males were given greater opportunities to participate in hockey as a majority of rinks and available ice in Canada were reserved for boys and men. Further evidence of this female gender discrimination during this time is shown in the 1969 Task Force Report as it noted "girls have no role in hockey, even as cheerleaders" (p. 27).

Gruneau and Whitson (1993) argue the perception of hockey as a male game was further reinforced during this era as the "organization of minor hockey was overwhelmingly influenced by the fact that the CAHA had committed itself to be a feeder system for the pros" (p. 170). With the position of CAHA, along with the growth and influence professional men's hockey during

this period, Morrow and Wamsley (2013) claim “a masculine subculture normalizing bravado, when it came to issues of health, or perpetrating violence to protect a teammate or as a strategy to win became widely acceptable and actively endorsed”. They add “men retreated further, it has been argued, into the fraternal comfort of combat sports…during the 1970s and 1980s, on the heels of the feminist movement and social gains by women in other areas of society” (p. 202).

According to Howell (2001), the emergence of second-wave feminism in Canada resulted in women striving for equal athletic opportunities. For instance, “in 1972 the Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women made a number of recommendations relating to sport for women and identified systematic inequalities that needed to be addressed” (p. 121). The Report found that Canadian female sports were underfunded and contained low numbers of athletes, coaches, and administrators. Although he claims these problems continue, he notes significant advancements were made in female sport programs following the Report. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) add to this by suggesting the old sexist stereotypes of females participating in “Canada’s sport” have slowly dissipated as we have seen a rise in popularity of girls’ hockey in recent decades. However, they are quick to note that “the old ideas and the old ways of doing things are persistent. This is particularly clear in the intensity of the responses to anyone who challenges hockey’s longstanding status as a preserve of robust, even aggressive, masculinity” (p. 173). They argue the masculine traditions of Canada’s game has a “mythic and ideological character. In hockey, the existing gender order is made to appear ‘natural’ rather than something that has been socially and historically constructed and thereby open to change” (p. 196).

On a final note, it is important to consider these cultural perceptions and social constructions of gender occurred not only as men’s hockey dominated the Canadian sport scene, but also in a time when female athletes were influenced to participate in feminine sports at

younger ages. According to Morrow and Wamsley (2013), “the channeling of women and girls into feminized sports gave rise to the challenge to sustain these sports over the long term, in the face of the dominance of measurable and quantifiable performance sports” (p. 306). By the 1970s, they claim it “became evident that once women’s bodies reached a certain age or stage of physical maturity, physical growth and bodily shape impeded movement in space” (p. 306). In order to show progression in these feminized sports, younger and more flexible females were recruited and began to demonstrate more difficult body movements and routines. This resulted in a process of “kindertraining” as these elite female athletes “competed at younger and younger ages, and with smaller physical frames” (p. 307). Coinciding with the increased pressure placed on younger elite female athletes in the 1970s, athletic development models for the purpose of expert performance in sport emerged.

Expert Performance in Sport

Long-Term Athlete Development Model

According to Balyi, Way and Higgs (2013), athlete development models were first introduced in the 1950s and remained relatively unchanged until the late 1980s. These traditional pyramid development models were exclusively based on chronological age and focused strictly on those athletes who successfully advanced to the next possible athletic level. It was not until Sanderson’s (1989) athlete development model that the biological growth and maturity of young, developing athletes were taken into consideration. They claim Sanderson’s model must not be overlooked as it was the first to include development age as a significant factor in athletic development as opposed to merely chronological age.

Côté and Vierimaa (2014) note a growing number of athlete development models have been produced since the late 1980s. These models have been constructed to promote different

methods for individuals to gradually acquire athletic skills. One of the most well-known models, they argue, that has been implemented by national sporting organizations in Canada is the Long-Term Athlete Development model (LTAD).

Balyi et al. (2013) note the LTAD is a model designed "to make sport more inclusive, more integrated, and of higher quality, while making the development of high-performance athletes more systematic" (p. 2). Initially constructed as a four-stage model by Balyi and Way (1995), the LTAD was revised in 2005 into a seven-stage model to "improve the quality of sport programs so all participants, including top athletes, could reach their potential" (p. 7). Designed to "provide positive experiences for all participants of all abilities" (p. 7), the LTAD refers to the seven stages as a guide for developing physical literacy, excellence, and lifelong physical activity. The seven stages, and their corresponding ages are referred to as active start (0-6), fundamentals (girls 6-8, boys 6-9), learn to train (girls 8-11, boys 9-12), train to train (girls 11-15, boys 12-16), train to compete (girls 15-21, boys 16-23), train to win (girls 18+, boys 19+), and active for life (any age). Furthermore, the seven-stages are built on ten factors that include physical literacy; specialization; age; trainability; intellectual, emotional, and moral development; excellence takes time; periodization; competition; system alignment and integration; and continuous improvement (Balyi et al., 2013).

Contrary to the traditional pyramid models of athlete development, Balyi et al. (2013) note the LTAD serves as both a development guideline for elite athletes aspiring to reach their full athletic potential "as well as a catalyst for lifelong physical activity" (p. 10). The seven stages of the LTAD provide both "participation and performance-oriented pathways in sport and physical activity, preceded by the fun-based development of physical literacy in the early years" (p. 10). As the model's first three stages promote physical literacy, stages four, five, and six

provide a guideline for those individuals choosing to train and compete in high performance athletics and achieve excellence. Those who forgo the pursuit of excellence have the opportunity to leave those stages and enter the active for life stage. They label the LTAD as a holistic approach to athlete development as it not only recognizes physiological progression throughout its seven stages, but also psychological and sociological development. While striving to improve the quality of sport and physical activity, the LTAD uses a "sport for life philosophy" so "each athlete develops as a complete person" (p. 12).

Deliberate Practice/ Deliberate Play

At the same time a growing number athletic development models were produced, Ericsson and colleagues introduced new research on the acquisition of skill. According to Ericsson (2003) "there are no-known short term methods to enhance an expert's performance beyond his/her current level. Elite performers reach their best potential through extended periods of practice and preparation" (p. 380). The development of skill acquisition, he suggests, occurs gradually through the accumulation of training and practice activities that become increasingly difficult and complex over time. The main difference "between the attained level of performance of amateurs and experts" he notes "can be accounted for in terms of the quality and quantity of engagement in practice activities that are designed to improve specific aspects of performance" (p. 391). These characteristics of expert performance identified by Ericsson are central to his well-known theory of *deliberate practice*.

The deliberate practice theory proposed by Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) has been influential for the development of expertise. According to Ford, Ward, Hodges and Williams (2009) "the main proposition that expert performance is closely related to the amount of domain-specific deliberate practice accumulated by performers during their careers has

withstood several tests across diverse fields, including sport" (p. 65). Deliberate practice "is a highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance" (Ericsson et al., 1993, p. 368). This method of formal learning requires tasks with defined goals, error detection and correction, full attention, maximal effort, opportunities for repetition, complete concentration, and supervision and feedback typically from an instructor or teacher (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003; Ford et al., 2009; Malina, 2010).

Ericsson et al. (1993) suggest deliberate practice hours must take place over at least a 10-year period and total at least 10,000 hours to result in expert performance. They note expert performance abilities take time to accumulate and deliberate practice should therefore start at early ages. "Those who reach elite levels of performance have started practice at a very young age" and have "had the opportunity to accumulate more time for deliberate practice and attain a higher level of skill than their peers who started at later ages" (Ericsson, 2003, p. 70). Mattson and Richards (2010) argue this 10-year and 10,000 rule of deliberate practice promotes the idea that children should focus solely on one sport at an early age where skill-specific training methods are designed to improve areas of weakness in order to become an elite level athlete. Malina (2010) adds the 10-year or 10,000-hour rule has become so well-known that it "probably has contributed to early specialization. Parents thus may see an early start in a single sport as essential, often to the exclusion of other childhood activities and sports" (p. 366).

It is through the accumulation of deliberate practice beginning at an early age, rather than genetics and natural ability, that Ericsson (2003) argues as being the key to achieve expert performance in sport. He notes "reviews on expert performance have been unsuccessful in finding any evidence of innate talent as being critical to expert performance" (p. 56). With the

exception of height and body size, he argues "reviews have not uncovered any firm evidence that innate characteristics are required for healthy adults to attain elite performance" (p. 56).

However, six years following Ericsson's initial deliberate practice theory, Côté introduced another crucial component in the development of elite-level skill. While recognizing the importance and benefits of deliberate practice for expert performance, Côté (1999) suggests children can also develop athletic skill-sets necessary for elite sport through a term he introduced known as *deliberate play*. Deliberate play is characterized as "a form of sporting activity that involves early developmental physical activities that are intrinsically motivating, provide immediate gratification, and are specifically designed to maximize enjoyment" (Côté, Baker & Abernethy, 2007, pp. 185-6).

Côté et al. (2007) label deliberate practice as not very enjoyable, requiring adult involvement, occurring in specialized facilities, and strictly conducted to achieve a future goal or skill. On the contrary, deliberate play is enjoyable, occurs in various settings, done for its own sake, and does not require the assistance or guidance of adults. Also, while a deliberate practice environment is organized, structured and formal, "deliberate play situations allow children the freedom to experiment with different movements and tactics and the opportunity to learn to innovate, improvise, and respond strategically. It also allows children to perfect skills that would not be practiced in organized situations" (p. 186).

Although Ericsson (2003) primarily identifies deliberate practice as the critical method to achieve expert performance, he also suggests individuals can learn skill development through deliberate play. However, he is convinced that formal learning through "deliberate practice provides more appropriate improvements than engaging in play" (p. 388). On the contrary, Malina (2010) suggests deliberate play provides children the opportunity to acquire sport related

skills through “street games”. As frequent repetitions of trial and error transpire, this method of informal learning occurs without awareness or explicit knowledge of the skills. Although not designed for the specific intent of improving performance, Gould (2010) notes high amounts of deliberate play should occur during an athlete’s early years of sport involvement to help young athletes “develop a range of motor and cognitive experiences that children can ultimately bring to their primary sport” (p. 36).

Development Model of Sport Participation

In the same year of introducing and promoting the benefits of deliberate play, Côté (1999) identified a method of athletic progression known as the Development Model of Sport Participation (DMSP). In his DMSP, Côté suggests that expert adult athletes pass through three consecutive developmental stages upon first entering sport. These three stages are referred to as the sampling years (ages 6-12), the specializing years (ages 13-15), and the investment years (ages 16+). Children who later become elite level athletes participate in a large number of hours of deliberate play activity in a variety of sports during the sampling years. During this stage, these children dedicate a low amount of time to deliberate practice. Following this stage, these individuals participate in a relatively similar amount of time of both deliberate practice and deliberate play in only one or two sports, including their primary sport. Finally, the investment years stage sees these athletes participate in a low amount of deliberate play across other sports and dedicate a majority of their time to deliberately practicing their primary sport (Côté et al., 2007).

Although initially only recognizing three development stages in the DMSP, Côté et al. (2007) added to the DMSP by including a second pathway to skill acquisition from first entering sport to expert performance in adulthood known as the *early specialization* path. As previously

outlined, the *early diversification* pathway describes a three-stage gradual progression from spending greater amounts of time deliberately playing to increased amounts of time deliberately practicing. Furthermore, it suggests that as children age, they should gradually progress from playing various sports to eventually specializing and focusing on their one, primary sport. In this athlete development model, children who later become expert performers in sport avoid specializing in their primary sport until later in development (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Ford et al., 2009). On the contrary, the early specialization pathway proposes "expert adult athletes enter the sport at an early age (e.g., six years old) and participate in a large number of hours in deliberate practice in their primary sport into adulthood, but a low amount of play across other sports" (Ford et al., 2009, p. 66).

In the DMSP, Côté et al. (2007) describe three probable outcomes for both of the two pathways regarding expert performers' entry into sport. In the early diversification pathway, probable outcomes for these individuals are listed as elite performance, enhanced physical health, and enhanced enjoyment of sport. On the other hand, three probable outcomes that fall under the early specialization pathway are elite performance, reduced physical health, and reduced enjoyment. Despite these outcomes, the early specialization pathway to expert sport performance has become a popular approach to sport participation (Côté et al., 2007).

Birthplace Effect

Côté and Lidor (2013) suggest that another significant factor linked to the development of expertise in sport is the location of birth, known as the *birthplace effect*. The birthplace effect refers to certain geographical areas influencing and producing different numbers of different types of elite-level athletes. City size, location and quality of the developmental environment, and cultural aspects are all linked to athlete development and future sport performance. They add

to this by suggesting the high rates of Canadian NHL players are not uncommon as ice hockey is ingrained within the sport culture and climate of Canada. As Canada contributes more NHL players than any other country in the world (Imtiaz, Hancock, Vierimaa & Côté, 2014), Curtis and Birch (1987) note the "top players are more likely to come from communities large enough to build rinks, but not so large that the demand for ice time outweighs opportunities to skate" (p. 239). They found that for Canadian NHL players, regions with populations greater than 500,000 and less than 1,000 produced smaller proportions of elite athletes. In addition, Côté and Lidor (2013) suggest "cities between 1,000 and 500,000 are more effective at producing elite level athletes because they provide optimal resources (eg. number of arenas) for youth to participate, and offer a safer environment to play" (p. 202).

According to Côté, Macdonald, Baker and Abernethy (2006), the quality and quantity of play and practice are greater in smaller cities as the physical environment of these regions are "more conducive to unstructured play activities" and "to experimentation with various forms of sporting activities" (p. 1072). As smaller cities offer greater access to athletic spaces and fewer competing leisure-time activities for children, they "might present more opportunities for the type of developmental experiences and practice known to be associated with expert performance" (p. 1072). In addition, Imtiaz et al. (2014) argue "smaller cities might facilitate greater and more diverse sport involvement at younger ages, which may in turn lead to increased investment in sport in later years" (p. 235). On the contrary, "larger cities are associated with decreased sport participation and higher dropout rates in youth ice hockey" (p. 242). With this in mind, along with high rates of Canadian NHL players, it is important to review Hockey Canada's player development model.

Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development

Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) model is the "hockey specific response to Sport Canada's Long-Term Athlete Development model" (Hockey Canada, 2013, p. 4). Hockey Canada's (2015) mission statement is "to lead, develop, and promote positive hockey experiences" (p. 2) and its LTPD model is a "framework to maximize a player's potential and long term involvement in sport over the course of their life" (p. 4). At the same time, its "philosophy sets out a vision for hockey in Canada that takes advantage of the history and culture of the game to increase participation and to lay the foundations of international success long into the future" (p. 4).

Hockey Canada's (2013) LTPD model outlines nine stages based on "the physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive development of children and adolescents" (p. 8). The model promotes "hockey for excellence" and "hockey for life" (p. 8) while refers to the nine stages as an outline for hockey development and progression. For young male hockey players, the nine stages, and their corresponding ages, are referred to as discovery (0-4), fundamentals 1 (5-6), fundamentals 2 (7-8), learn to play (9-10), learn to train (11-12), train to train (12-16), train to compete (16-17), train to win (18-20), and excel (21+). Hockey Canada suggests each stage of the LTPD model "reflects a different point in developing the player" (p. 8). The model emphasizes physical literacy, a broad range of sport experiences, and hockey specific basics during the first five stages while the four stages that follow promote hockey specific skill-development with a focus on competitive excellence.

Although the LTPD model emphasizes a gradual progression from participating in a variety sports to eventually focusing on specific hockey skills for competition, Hockey Canada (2015) acknowledges several drawbacks through its development system. These include "chronological rather than development age is used in training and competition planning, adult

programs imposed on children, over-competing" (p. 10), and "early specialization is demanded" (p. 11). Despite Hockey Canada (2013) noting "hockey is a late specialization sport" (p. 16) and early hockey specialization can be detrimental to children, they suggest hockey skills "are best introduced and refined prior to the growth spurt. Delaying this will mean much more work further down the road when the player is attempting to play at higher levels" (p. 21). Also, they advocate the work of Ericsson et al. (1993) by claiming "research has concluded that it takes a minimum of 10-years and 10,000 hours of deliberate training for a talented player to reach elite levels" (Hockey Canada, 2013, p. 11). As this research is linked to sport specialization (Malina, 2010; Mattson & Richards, 2010), it is important to now examine different perspectives on this method of athlete development.

Early Sport Specialization

Mattson and Richards (2010) define early sport specialization as "participation in specific, intense training for a single sport at a competitive level at an early age" (p. 26). Jayanthi et al. (2013) add to this definition by labelling sport specialization as "year-round training in a single sport to the exclusion of other sports" (p. 252). As this project focuses on elite level hockey players with NHL experience, these definitions are used in conjunction with Malina's (2010) definition of sport specialization as "systematic training in a single sport at a relatively young age with the goal of attaining elite status" (p. 364).

In addition to briefly historicizing sport specialization within the American context (see Chapter 1), Coakley's (1992) sociological perspective on this topic shows early sport specialization can potentially interfere with normal identity development. He claims that focusing on a single sport from an early age may result in "a constrained set of life experiences leading to the development of a unidimensional-self concept" (p. 276). He argues it is healthier

for children to diversify in athletics in order to develop various "identities" rather than strictly labelling or identifying themselves as a player or athlete in a single sport. Consistently participating and training for a single sport could potentially lead to an imbalanced lifestyle, he suggests, as these athletes fail to experience various forms of social interaction. On the contrary, he argues children who participate in and interact with a number of different athletes, coaches, and forms of physical activities develop stronger social and mental skills that transfer and apply outside of athletics.

Like Coakley, Gould (2010) identifies various potential detriments associated with early sport specialization from a psychological perspective. These include "increased stress, later burnout," as well as "interference with normal childhood development" (p. 36). Encouraging youth sport diversification, he claims "early sport sampling is linked to a longer sport career and provides a range of experiences, coaches, and contexts that allow participants to maximize positive development and experiences that allow them to discover their talents" (p. 36). While recognizing the growing trend, Gould argues "early sport specialization is no guarantee for later sport success" (p. 36).

While Coakley and Gould suggest sport diversification is more beneficial for youth athletic development and overall health, others have promoted the benefits of early specialization. From a biomechanical perspective, Mattson and Richards (2010) argue early sport specialization may be necessary for certain athletic events if future elite level competition is desired. Also, they give reason to believe that if appropriate recovery time is allowed during training, the benefits of sport specialization outweigh the risks as specialization can lead to enhanced sport performance. Finally, they add "there is no evidence that early specialization causes injuries or hinders growth and maturation" (p. 28).

Acknowledging limited research is available that compares the physiological effects of diversified versus specialized sport training, Kaleth and Mikesky (2010) note the difficulties of accurately determining the extent of injuries caused by sport specialization to young athletes. Furthermore, they suggest differences in individual physical maturation as well as training volume and methods associated with sport specialization result in different interpretations of sport related injuries in young athletes. However, "despite the wide variability in reported injury rates," they claim, "a consistent finding is frequently noted: with increased participation in sports, including more frequent training and competition, comes a greater risk for injury" (p. 31). They note a majority of injuries for young athletes are related to specific, repetitive movements that result in damage to muscle tissue and occur when an athlete does not allow sufficient time to rest.

From a physiological standpoint, Kaleth and Mikesky (2010) encourage sport diversification for young athletes as "there is no direct research evidence supporting the physiological benefits of early sport specialization over those of a more diversified sport and physical activity approach" (p. 31). They argue participating in various sports will most likely result in fewer injuries and "improve skills that are important for success in multiple sports, result in a well-rounded athlete, and increase the likelihood of achieving lifelong physical fitness and enjoyment of physical activity" (p. 32). In addition, they oppose Ericsson's (2003) view of genetics in sport by noting: "the physical potential of an individual is dictated by his or her genetic makeup" and "no amount of intensive practice or sport specialization can compensate for genetic endowments that do not match the demands of the sport. An elite athlete is a rare combination of genetic, physical, and mental characteristics" (Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010, p. 32).

Early sport specialization has also been recently examined with specific focus on motor skill development (Branta, 2010) and coaching (Brylinsky, 2010). According to Branta (2010), early specialization in sport may limit a child's acquisition of fundamental motor skills (FMS). "Children who specialize early in a sport," she argues, "will most likely not develop a wide variety of FMS" (p. 20) and may have greater difficulty living an active lifestyle as adults. "Specialization limits the accrual of a repertoire of FMS that provides the basis of all future motor development" and "the development of a solid base of FMS should not be sacrificed for the sake of specialization" (Branta, 2010, p. 28). She argues that skill development and biological maturity of each individual need to be recognized in order to make decisions regarding sport specialization. In addition, Brylinsky (2010) highlights the significant role of coaching by claiming "many of the negative consequences of early sport specialization may be avoided with appropriate coaching and sport skill instruction" (p. 22). Like Kaleth and Mikesky (2010), Brylinsky also argues "we know that elite athletes come from good genes, and a common idea about how best to develop elite performance is to identify talent early, create a specialized environment, and watch talent grow" (p. 22). However, early talent identification is not a reliable factor to determine future athletic potential (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Merkel, 2013).

Although various disciplines have analyzed youth sport specialization, not enough research has been done to conclude whether it is best to specialize in one particular sport at an early age or to diversify in various sports in order to attain the elite-level status (Landers Carson, & Blankenship, 2010). However, two recent studies examining high-level, male hockey players suggest early sport specialization is not necessary, does not guarantee elite-level success, and potentially leads to increased chances of burnout (Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wall & Côté, 2007). Examining the amount of time four top-level junior hockey players had engaged in deliberate

practice, deliberate play, organized play, and other sports from the ages of 6 to 20, Soberlak and Côté (2003) found that these athletes gradually progressed from playing various sports and dedicating less time to practice towards eventually specializing and practicing in their primary domain: hockey. Furthermore, Wall and Côté (2007) found that among eight current and four former elite-level minor ice hockey players, those four who dropped out began off-ice training at younger ages and invested significantly more hours of off-ice practicing during the ages of 12-13. These results are consistent with previous research that early diversification does not hinder sport specific skill development and may be more preferable than early specialization (Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wall & Côté, 2007).

Malina (2010) argues that several factors have contributed to the idea of believing the best way to produce or become a superior elite-level athlete is to strictly play one sport at an early age virtually year-round. One factor he mentions that has "contributed to the perceived need for early specialization" (p. 364) was the well-known international athletic success of the former communist countries of Eastern Europe in previous years. "The relatively young ages of competitors in several sports were highlighted by the media and reinforced early specialization as a requisite for success" (p. 364). He claims it "has been perceived in the West that systematic training in Eastern Europe began at early ages and involved year-round participation" and "the perception of early specialization was reinforced by coaches and sport scientists who migrated to Western countries and often became involved in elite programs" (p. 364). Mostafavifar et al. (2013) add to this by stating the success of these Eastern European athletes "has led to early talent identification and developmental programmes focusing on a single sport, globally" (p. 160).

Other potential factors that have resulted in an increased rate of early sport specialization include children being labelled as talented early, pressure to keep up with competition, pressure from parents driven for their children's athletic success, pressure from coaches, pressure from teammates and peers, the pursuit of scholarships and professional contracts, societal emphasis on specialization, well-documented stories of elite athletes who specialized early, and the desire of young athletes to participate in championships (Gould, 2010; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Mostafavifar et al., 2013). Mostafavifar et al. (2013) connects the current trend of early specialization to today's professional contracts by noting "more athletes are turning professional at a younger age" (p. 160). However, despite the potential detriments, difficult odds of become a professional athlete, lack of media attention to those athletes who specialized in a single sport at early ages and failed to make it to the professional ranks, and numerous studies showing athletic ability at early ages as being inaccurate in determining future athletic performance in a sport, early sport specialization continues to be a common method of athlete development (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013).

Summary/Research Gap

In summary, the review of literature reveals that post-Second World War Canada witnessed youth sports change from "child-driven, recreational free play for enjoyment to adult-driven, highly structured, deliberate practice devoted to sports-specific skill development" (Jayanthi et al., 2013, p. 251). In addition, the growing cost and demanding schedules of youth sports eventually resulted in more young athletes exclusively playing one sport (Dyck, 2013). These changes occurred in a time when men's NHL hockey came to dominate the Canadian sport landscape. Controlling young players originally through the CAHA-NHL sponsorship program and eventually draft system, along with rising popularity through CBC's televised games, the

NHL solidified its position as the pinnacle of professional sport in Canada (Dyck, 2013; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Kidd & Macfarlane, 1972; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013; Wiggins, 1987; 1996).

With the rising financial contracts and celebrity status of these players, Wiggins (1987) suggests children and parents began to look at early involvement in competitive sport as a means to reach the elite-level. Also, the dream of one day playing in the NHL was more common for young boys than being a professional athlete in any other sport (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). The culture and significance of athletics changed with the onset of the Cold War that not only heightened socially constructed definitions of "masculinity" and "femininity", but "encouraged female domesticity at the expense of competitive involvement" (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013, p. 144). During this time, the NHL, a league dominated by male participants, continued to grow in popularity when sport, particularly hockey, was also viewed by Canadians as politically significant (Howell, 2001; Macdonald, 2011).

In the context of the Cold War, members of parliament began to view success in international sport, particularly men's ice hockey, as critical. The significance of elite sport and international success, growing popularity of NHL, and the rise of televised sporting events all contributed to Canadian sport policy during this era. Federal funding beginning in 1961 was used to develop amateur sport in Canada and eventually led to the creation of Hockey Canada, Sport Canada, and the Coaching Associations of Canada. High performance training facilities were constructed while quality coaching became viewed as essential for elite-level success for international competition (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Macintosh et al., 1987; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013; Wiggins, 1987).

After defeating the well-conditioned and highly-skilled Soviet Union men's team in the 1972 summit series, hockey changed in Canada. With continued expansion in the NHL,

European players entered the league while methods of violence became regularly used to succeed in competition. Greater emphasis was placed on skill development and off-season training for professional NHL players. New methods of training and on-ice tactics to succeed trickled down into the junior and minor hockey leagues in Canada. Also, participating in the country's junior hockey leagues, although limiting young players' educational opportunities, were viewed as the best path to eventually play in the NHL (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013).

As training methods appeared to intensify, athletic development models and research for skill acquisition originated. A majority of research appears to favour multiple-sport and activity participation as there is little evidence that intense training and specialization before puberty is required to achieve elite-level status (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010). However, Merkel (2013) highlights a recent change in youth sport participation has taken place as "more young athletes are choosing a single sport to participate in all year-round at younger ages, with infrequent breaks and rest" (p. 155).

Some of the potential risks of sport specialization include stress, anxiety, social isolation, overdependence, burnout, overuse injuries, compromised growth and maturation, anti-social behaviors, and a lack of cooperation skills, yet it continues to be used today as a means to achieve elite-level status (Gould, 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013, Mostafavifar et al., 2013). At the same time, sport diversification has also been linked to elite athletic success, increased overall motor skill development, decreased physical injuries, and greater involvement in physical activity throughout life after competitive sport (Jayanthi et al., 2013; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013; Wall & Côté, 2007). However, early

hockey specialization has become a common trend in Canada for young male players (Hagen, 2015; Martin, 2015).

Kaleth and Mikesky (2010) label sport specialization as "a very costly venture, both monetarily and in regard to substantial injury rates" (p. 32). They suggest "coaches and parents would be well advised to exchange 'youth sport specialization' for 'youth sport diversification,' and the hopes of 'big bucks and notoriety' for the 'enjoyment and lifelong physical benefits' that an active lifestyle can offer" (p. 32). However, given the research on the amount of time it takes to develop athletic expertise, most experts agree athletes must eventually specialize to achieve elite-level status (Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013). Although, the question of what age such intense, specific, and exclusive training and participation in a single sport a young athlete should be when this method begins remains debatable.

From reviewing the relevant literature, it is evident that there is a gap in the research addressing youth sport specialization. This topic has not been thoroughly historicized, especially within a Canadian context. The minimal literature available dedicated to the history of youth sport in post-Second World War Canada fails to include the detailed experiences of these young athletes. Without these detailed experiences, reasons for early specialization among Canadian male hockey players from their perspectives remain relatively unknown. Also, literature describing personal training experiences and methods of sport participation among Canadian NHL players in different time periods is unavailable. Finally, information from individuals with knowledge and experience in Winnipeg's minor hockey system and hockey-specific skill development has not been researched. Therefore, given the body of existing literature, it is important that we analyze when and why NHL players from Winnipeg begin to specialize and focus strictly on hockey in order to add to existing knowledge on youth sport specialization.

Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

This chapter begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework within which the research was conducted. It outlines the methods that were used to gain insight into former and current hockey players from Winnipeg with National Hockey League (NHL) experience and how the athletic and training experiences of hockey players from different time periods have changed since the Second World War. Also described is the justification for including to incorporate the perspectives of key individuals with experience and knowledge of hockey-specific skill development in Winnipeg. This chapter also explains how, why, and what type of secondary material was used throughout the research study. In addition, I describe how the data collection, participant recruitment, and data analysis was handled within the research process. A description of the study's limitations, delimitations, and chapter layout conclude this chapter.

Methodology

As my research focus involved a historical perspective on sport specialization among Canadian male youth hockey players, an historical methodology was selected as my qualitative research tradition. Berg (2001) describes this methodology as being more than the effortless regurgitation of facts from the past and greater than the simple process of combining historical pieces of information. More accurately, it "attempts to systematically recapture the complex nuances, the people, meanings, events, and even ideas…in order to uncover accounts of what happened in the past" (Berg, 2001, pp. 210-1). This methodology, argues Iggers (1997), deals "with a real and not an imagined past" (p. 15) and "sees history no longer as a unified process, a grand narrative in which many individuals are submerged, but as a multifaceted flow with many individual centers" (p. 103).

This project was designed to contextualize historical developments and trends which transpired following the Second World War that potentially influenced young male athletes from Winnipeg to specialize in hockey. In doing so, the project aimed to provide a contextual analysis and understand the research topic of sport specialization in its cultural context, which Polley (2007) contends is the most in-depth and thorough "type" of sport history. Polley argues that sport is "interrelated with social, political, religious, economic, and cultural trends" and it is the role of academic historians to explore "what sport was like in the past in relation to the society in which it was taking place" (p. 8).

Berg (2001) notes that "understanding the historical nature of phenomena, events, people, agencies, and even institutions" (p. 212) cannot be fully appreciated without knowledge of the context within which these events occurred. According to Polley (2007), Booth's constructionist model of historical inquiry applies to this contextual analysis method of sport history as it goes "beyond face value of facts and narratives…in analyzing sport's past" (p. 8). For the purpose of historicizing athletics, Booth (2006) argues "constructionists privilege empirical methods, accept historical evidence as proof that they can recover the past, and insist that their forms of representation are transparent enough to ensure objectivity of their observations" (p. 27). Therefore, this study was performed from a constructivist epistemology.

Booth (2006) indicates that the objective of historical constructionism is to interpret historical trends that happened over time and interpret how and why these trends occurred. Therefore, as this study examined when, how, and why the expectations placed on young hockey players from Winnipeg changed over time to show the rise of early sport specialization, it was appropriate to draw on ideas about interpretivism as a theoretical perspective. An interpretivist perspective "looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social

life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). This perspective applied to my study as I interviewed hockey players who played in different time periods (described below in Methods). Also, interpretivism works well with a constructionist epistemology and an oral history method because it recognizes that realities and meanings are socially constructed by human beings that can be studied through qualitative inquiry (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Silverman, 2000).

Methods

This section describes the study design and methods that were used to examine former and current professional hockey players' experiences of sport specialization as well as the perspectives of key individuals from Winnipeg. It explains the justification for selecting the participants and how they were recruited. It also addresses how the interviews were conducted, the lens through which the interview questions were constructed and selected, and how the interviews were transcribed, interpreted, and analyzed. To begin, I will explain the two methods of data collection – oral history interviews and secondary research – and why I chose to use these methods for this research project.

Data Collection

Oral History Interviews

This study used oral history as a method to aid in understanding the experiences and perspectives of former and current hockey players from Winnipeg who played in the NHL as well as key informants with knowledge of youth hockey development. Shopes (2003) argues the value and potential of oral history for "restoring to the record the voices of the historiographically—if not historically—silent" (p.2). For this project, oral history interviews were valuable in revealing both the experiences of the players and those involved in the organization of competitive hockey in Winnipeg that textual sources cannot describe. By giving

these individuals a voice, this method was used to ensure that the participants produced as rich descriptions as possible about their experiences and allowed their perspectives and stories to be heard. For this study, oral history is understood as:

> A self-conscious, disciplined conversation between two people about some aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical significance and intentionally recorded for the record. Although the conversation takes the form at the interview, in which one person- the interviewer asks questions of another person – variously referred to as the interviewee – oral history is, as its heart, a dialogue (Shopes, 2003, p. 2).

"Locating experience" though oral history, argues Sangster (1997), offers "an understanding of experience as 'lived reality'" (p. 318). However, this is not to say responses to the interview questions were interpreted as facts. Shopes (2003) notes "oral history interviews are not an unproblematic source" and "historians must exercise critical judgment when using interviews" (p. 5) as they are "inevitably an act of memory" (p. 6). Therefore, Silverman (2000) recommends against using a realist interpretation of interviews, and suggests instead a "narrative" approach that abandons "the attempt to treat respondents' accounts as potential 'true' pictures of 'reality'" (p. 823). This acknowledges that the content of the interviews is in part a construction of memory. However, memory is a part of historical meaning, and to disregard something just because it may not be "factual" is also problematic. Portelli (1991) argues that "what is really important is that memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings" (p. 52). This statement from Portelli, indicates that although memory is not completely reliable in objective terms, truth does exist for the individual remembering (Abrams, 2010).

For this study, the interviews were semi-structured in order to allow a degree of flexibility in the interview process, while providing guidance to encourage authentic responses.

Interview guides were created (see Appendix A and Appendix B) while the questions were designed to be primarily open-ended and non-assumptive. Questions were designed as such to give each participant the opportunity to provide as much detail about their experiences or opinions as they felt necessary. Also, this interview format provided me the opportunity to ask the participants probing questions in order to elaborate or clarify a generated response (Kvale, 1996).

Participant Details

The oral history component of the study included interviewing six participants. Four were former and current hockey players from Winnipeg with NHL experience while two participants were key informants with specific knowledge on youth competitive hockey and athletic training in Winnipeg and the Canadian hockey system (see Appendix C). Both of these informants are also from Winnipeg, former junior hockey players, and are working in positions that have allowed them to gain extensive experience within and knowledge about Winnipeg's minor hockey system, Canada's hockey system, and hockey-specific training for young male players. The former and current hockey players with NHL experience from Winnipeg consisted of four players who played hockey in different time periods following the Second World War. Each player interviewed played minor hockey in Winnipeg, followed by playing junior hockey in Canada before advancing to the NHL.

As oral history can be used to "explore an individual's life and the broader athletic and historical context of her or his time" (Cahn, 1994, p. 595), interviewing these six participants was done to demonstrate changes in athletic participation and training expectations for young hockey players from Winnipeg in different time periods. Rather than explicitly compare and contrast athletes of different time periods, this historical research project was designed to identify

patterns and changes over time. Any stark contrasts or similarities were noted, but the reason for interviewing hockey players in different time periods as well as key informants was to collect as much data as possible about the shifts in sport specialization for male hockey players in post-Second World War Canada.

The oral history interviews were conducted using two different sets of questions, a set of questions for the four former and current hockey players (see Appendix A) and a different set for the two key informants (see Appendix B). Interviews for the former and current hockey players were more personally in-depth to get a sense of their experiences of sport specialization in different time periods. The data from these interviews added significant information for this project as personal experiences of athletes are missing from existing literature (see Chapter 2). Similarly, the data from the interviews with the key informants benefited this project as they provided insight into changes in Winnipeg's youth hockey landscape over time, adding a perspective that is also missing from the literature. The data from both sets of interviews were used to show personal experiences of athletic participation and shed light on when and why youth sport specialization became so prominent for young male hockey players in Winnipeg.

The original intent was to interview eight participants for this study: two key informants and six hockey players with NHL experience from Winnipeg. To my surprise, after recruiting six participants (using the recruitment methods described below) I felt I had exhausted all of my options and would not find any more participants. However, due to each of their career lengths playing hockey, I was comfortable in this decision as the four participants in my study with NHL experience played in every decade since the Second World War, with some overlap. Charmaz (2006) argues a qualitative study's aim determines its design and sample size. Therefore, while I did not reach my initial target goal of six hockey player participants, the specific years of playing

experience of my four hockey participants allowed an appropriate method of historical inquiry for this study's aim. Their specific years of participating in sport helped identify shifts in sport specialization for male hockey players following the Second World War.

Participant Recruitment

Recruitment of participants for the oral history component of the study began following the receipt of a certificate of approval by the University of Manitoba's Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). As I already had personal connections with certain individuals who fit the participant criteria (described above), this study used purposeful sampling to include those that I knew "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). In addition, snowball sampling was used by asking initial participants to help identify other potential participants for my study (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Despite these two recruitment methods, I was initially unable to locate enough individuals willing to participate in this study. Therefore, I also searched through Sport Manitoba's online database for other former hockey players from Winnipeg with NHL experience who played junior hockey in Canada. After conducting this search, I personally contacted Sport Manitoba's Heritage Manager via email, who was generous enough to provide me with the contact information of another individual that fit the participant criteria.

I began scheduling interviews with participants shortly after I received approval from ENREB. All participants were sent a participant recruitment letter (see Appendix D) via email that outlined the details of my study and informed them that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. After participants responded to me about participating in the study, I sent them each an informed consent form (see Appendix E) via email to review prior to the interview. Face-to-face interviews were set up with participants currently living in

Winnipeg while those outside of the city had their interviews conducted via the telephone. Locations of the interviews varied from a hockey rink, a restaurant, one participant's place of work, one participant's place of residence, while two interviews were conducted by phone (Participant 1 and Participant 3). Each participant selected the date, time, and location of where the interviews took place based on their preference.

Participants were asked to review and sign a physical copy of an informed consent form at the commencement of each interview. For the two interviews conducted by phone, those participants were asked to mail a copy of their signed informed consent form to my personal residence. Before each interview began, all participants were given the option to choose whether they wanted to be identified by name or by pseudonym for confidentiality. The informed consent form clearly states that participants were given this option because they are all over the age of 18 and have the right to share their names and stories with the public, as well as indicates the risk of waiving confidentiality. All participants chose to be identified by their names. Finally, before each interview, participants were given the opportunity to review the questions from the respective interview guide they would be asked during the interview. The interview guide helped direct each interview, but was not strictly adhered to in order to allow new topics and ideas to be discussed (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

The duration of interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to one hour and three minutes. Each interview was recorded using a digital recording device. Immediately following the interview, participants were informed that a transcribed copy of their interview would be sent to them via email or mail based on their preference, as indicated in the informed consent form. Once interviews were transcribed, an email was sent to the participants thanking them for their time and attaching their interview transcript. One participant (Participant 1) was sent a hard copy

of his transcript and thank you letter by mail. All participants were sent a thank you email or letter and a copy of their transcribed interview within one week of each interview. Along with thanking them, each participant was again asked if they wanted to be identified by their name or if they would prefer to be identified by pseudonym. Also, interviewees were encouraged to add, delete, or change any details or statements contained in the transcript if they desired within a three-week time period. However, none of the participants chose to be identified by pseudonym or made changes to their transcripts.

Secondary Material

In addition to oral history interviews, secondary material was collected throughout the course of this study. This material was predominantly found in the form of newspaper articles, online articles, and biographies: all forms of secondary sources that can be useful when conducting historical research (Berg, 2001). I came across useful material from these sources on a day-to-day basis and stored the material in a file in my house throughout the duration of my study. However, I also examined the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame and Museum archive in Winnipeg for this project. After personally contacting the collections manager via email, I was allowed to physically explore the archive in search of any material that was related to my study. Berg (2001) notes that relying solely on archives as a method of data collection can be difficult as it is not uncommon to find several pieces of information missing. As a result, textual evidence from this archive, as well as various other sources, are incorporated in narrative format to supplement the information acquired from the oral history interviews.

Data Analysis

Berg (2001) observes that the final phase in historical research is to "analyze the data and develop a narrative exposition of the findings" (p. 215). To analyze the data from the interviews

with the participants, the interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings. Each interview was transcribed onto my password-protected computer and the audio files were stored on a USB drive locked in a secure filing cabinet in my home, to which only I had access to. As previously mentioned, transcripts of the interview were sent by email or mail to each participant to allow them to remove or change any details or statements contained in the transcript if they wished to do so. Known as member validation, or member checking, this process ensured that the transcripts were a trustworthy and accurate reflection of each participant's thoughts and memories (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Data analysis began after I received the member-checked transcripts from the participants.

For this project, the data analysis also incorporated information gathered from the secondary research material and the review of literature discussed in chapter 2. This information was significant for this project as Berg (2001) notes the analysis phase of historical research requires "the researcher to return to the original literature review" as this "will allow the researcher to identify patterns within and between sources" (p. 219). Also, Berg (2001) claims "the analysis in historical research is deeply grounded in both the data and the background literature of the study" and will result with "writing a narrative account of the resulting patterns, connections, and insights uncovered during the process of the research" (p. 219).

The original literature review and secondary material were used in conjunction with the data acquired from the oral history interviews to reveal patterns, relationships, commonalities or disparities over time (Berg, 2001). This method of data analysis is appropriate for an historical research project as it allows the researcher to "link the experiences of the individuals to social processes, social circumstances, and sociohistorical context" (Leavy, 2011, p. 66). Therefore, the analysis for this historical study was presented in a narrative format using the personal

experiences of my participants as well as the secondary material and literature review to better understand the early specialization of hockey players from Winnipeg.

To begin the analysis, I became immersed in the data by reading all six transcripts and secondary material repeatedly to understand the research content as a whole. According to Leavy (2011), this allowed me to "get to know the data" (p. 58) and was accompanied by making personal notes as ideas began to emerge from reading the transcriptions. Next, open coding by hand occurred as Hsieh and Shannon (2005) note the next step in qualitative research is to read the data word-by-word and highlight "the exact words from the text that appear to capture key thoughts or concepts" (p. 1279). Codes were then grouped together to form categories and sub-categories based on their common or different characteristics. These categories and sub-categories were used to represent larger overall themes and sub-themes from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). During and after the coding and categorizing processes, personal notes, referred to as memo-writing, continued to be made based on ideas that emerged from reading the data. Leavy (2011) urges the researcher to "always document everything" (p. 58) throughout the entire data collection process as "coding, categorizing, and analytical memo writing generally occur simultaneously, as a back-and-forth or cyclical process" (p. 65).

To develop a narrative for this study, I used a content analysis based upon my coding, categorizing, and memo-writing from interview transcripts and secondary material. Content analysis is described as, "a process for systematically analyzing messages in any type of communication" (Kondracki, Wellman & Amundson, 2002, p. 224). A conventional content analysis was used for this study. This type of content analysis worked well with my project because it is allowed me to develop a narrative for a topic with limited available research literature. Also, it allowed the data to primarily reveal themes rather than using my own

preconceived themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Tufford and Newman (2010) note preconceived themes can be limited through the use of reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Booth (2006) argues qualitative researchers are unable to approach information and gather evidence without having some sort of previous assumptions. He also claims that "identifying historical patterns invariably involves some form of abstract thinking and…interpretations" (p. 32). Similarly, Rambaree (2007) notes the impossibility of personal detachment and argues that the interpretation of data should be accompanied in qualitative research by a degree of researcher reflexivity. "Reflexivity refers to active acknowledgement by the researcher that her/his own actions and decisions will inevitably impact upon the meaning and context of the experience under investigation" (Horsburgh, 2003, p. 308). Also, reflexivity allows readers to understand what prompts the researcher's interest in the specific topics they investigate, how they might interpret the obtained information, and what they personally stand to gain from the study (Creswell, 2013).

It is important that I acknowledge that my own actions, decisions, as well as pre-existing thoughts and ideas related to this project inevitably impacted the manner in which this study was conceived and designed and the ways in which the data was collected, interpreted, and analyzed. These pre-conceived ideas are associated with my personal history as a hockey player. It is crucial to include a brief description of my own experiences and beliefs as I anticipated many of the results generated by the data collection process in this study. This is not to say I expected everything that was uncovered, far from it. However, the personal experiences from the NHL players and opinions from the key informants highlighted shifts in sport specialization over time

and recently increased training expectations for young male hockey players from Winnipeg in ways that I anticipated.

These results were expected due to my knowledge of and experience within the Canadian junior and Winnipeg minor hockey systems. As a former Manitoba junior "A" hockey player and a current on-ice and off-ice instructor, I have been involved in competitive hockey for over two decades in Winnipeg. I also played on what was then one of the city's only youth spring hockey teams over 15 years ago and have personally witnessed the growth of local off-season hockey. As a hockey instructor today, I have seen exclusive, year-round hockey participation at the youth level become more common among young players. Furthermore, my experiences have allowed me to personally witness the influence of parents, coaches, and Canada's junior hockey draft system, all of which appear to be pressuring young male players to specifically play and train for hockey.

Strictly from a skill-development standpoint, I have come to believe that an intensive and exclusive hockey-specific training and focus is now necessary at younger ages for those aspiring to participate in today's NHL compared to former players in previous years. Looking at the fundamental components of the game, as well as the increase in skill-level that I feel has occurred in recent years as a result of specialized training at younger ages, I believe that today's NHL is the most difficult major North American professional sport league to participate in. At the same time, I believe that of the four major North American professional sports, NHL players of today are the worst all-round athletes as so much focus and practice must be put into hockey-specific skill development at younger age.

I also realize the numerous potential risks associated with early sport specialization and would encourage all-round athleticism and multiple sport participation. This personal

contradiction is precisely the reason why my thesis was on this particularly subject. I find early sport specialization to be a complicated issue, but in my opinion, it is especially complex for young male hockey players in Canada. As a firm believer that the potential benefits of physical activity and competitive sport outweigh the potential negatives, and as someone who genuinely wants to help young athletes, I feel we need to understand this topic more thoroughly.

Limitations and Delimitations

The first limitation of this study is the language in which the interviews were conducted. I only speak English; thus I was limited to only interviewing English-speaking participants. As a result, I was unable to include someone who played or plays in the NHL from Winnipeg but does not speak English in my sample. Second, as a graduate student with minimal interview experience, another potential limitation is the possibility that I was unable to get the participants to elaborate their responses to certain interview questions during the data collection phase of the study. Although the semi-structured interview questions were designed as open-ended and accompanied with probing questions, some participants chose to provide fewer details about their personal experiences than others.

However, this is also linked to the study's third limitation as participants were aware of my background as a hockey player. At times, it was difficult to expand their responses to certain questions as they appeared to feel I had extensive knowledge on the subject at hand due to my previous experience as an athlete. However, this limitation did not hinder the study's results as the participants did provide descriptions of their personal experiences. These experiences are included in chapters 4 and 5 to show when and why early hockey specialization occurred and highlight the contemporary hockey landscape.

The fourth limitation is the participants I interviewed are well-known professionals, each of whom has achieved an elite status as a hockey coach/instructor or professional athlete. This potentially influenced the amount of detail they chose to provide as they may have responded in a certain way that concealed certain aspects of their lives they did not desire to become public knowledge. Although all participants were given the option to be identified by a pseudonym, twice, and all chose to waive confidentiality, their generated responses perhaps failed to include certain experiences or opinions they felt uncomfortable sharing with me. In fact, there were specific details and experiences some participants did not share, despite me having previous knowledge about these experiences. Out of respect to those who were willing to participate, a limitation to the study is the conclusions that are drawn are strictly limited to what the participants felt comfortable sharing with me. However, the amount of detail each participant chose to provide discussing their personal experiences in sport was in their control as they were not asked to divulge any information they were not comfortable sharing. Furthermore, the personal experiences they potentially failed to share was not a major issue as the responses generated by all participants revealed information that helped shed light on the study's objectives and purpose.

Also, the availability and selectivity of former and current hockey players for this specific project was a limitation as I was only able to include those who were physically capable and willing to be interviewed that fit the study design criteria (described in delimitations). Similarly, the availability and selectivity of material during the secondary research process was also a limitation to this study as the material used strictly consisted of what I was personally able to locate. Unfortunately, an historical research method involves strictly working with material and

participants that can be found. While this often results in accepting a lack of completeness, as previously mentioned, the data gathered was appropriate for this study's objectives.

Self-imposed limitations in this research study, also known as delimitations, helped set the scope and parameters of my project. The delimitations of my study were that I interviewed former and current male hockey players from Winnipeg. As I am interested in the specialization of young hockey players who have played in the NHL, a league populated by males, men's voices were needed to provide their experiences and memories. This is not to say Canadian women have not participated or been successful in ice hockey. Women across Canada have participated in hockey for over a century and recent gold medal performances in international competitions indicate that Canada's female hockey players are prominent athletes in their sport. However, in the post-Second World War era, men's professional hockey, represented by the NHL monopoly, reigned supreme (see Chapter 2). Therefore, the data collection and analysis process of this study primarily focused on male hockey players.

Furthermore, the hockey players interviewed were those who strictly played junior hockey in Canada prior to playing in the NHL. Although this method eliminated the detailed experiences of any Winnipeg players who played college hockey in the United States prior to advancing to the NHL, for example, and drastically decreased the selectivity of potential participants to interview, it kept the study more focused on a Canadian perspective. By doing so, it made comparisons and patterns between interview participants possible by ensuring a consistent path to the NHL occurred. This also means the hockey players from Winnipeg interviewed played in different junior hockey leagues in Canada as this study was not restricted to players whose junior hockey career took place in Manitoba. Because of the nature of team trades and the junior hockey draft system, numerous NHL players from Winnipeg played their

junior hockey outside of Manitoba prior to advancing to the NHL. Also, this gave me a greater selection of potential participants to interview, which was important for this project as locating former and current professional athletes willing to participate in this study, who fit the above criteria, was more difficult than I anticipated. A final delimitation was the decision to eventually restrict the sample size to six participants to allow me to focus on the quality of the lived experiences of the participants.

Chapter Layout

This thesis includes three more chapters. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the results from the data collection process described in chapter 3. Findings of what was discovered through the oral history interviews and content from the secondary material is provided in a narrative format. Stemming from my ideas recorded through memo-writing during the data collection and analysis processes, themes and sub-themes are provided to illustrate how the data was interpreted. Also included in each chapter is the relationship of my findings to the relative information presented in the review of literature in chapter 2.

More specifically, the information in chapters 4 and 5 are presented in a manner to suit this project's original goal and design: to determine when and why male hockey players from Winnipeg began to specialize and focus strictly on hockey at young ages. Chapter 4 specifically looks at the current landscape of competitive hockey in Canada as well as highlights the experiences of the participants in my study. Their personal experiences with sport and training are primarily shown through their own words to demonstrate changes in athletic participation over time and illustrate when early hockey specialization originated. Chapter 5 looks at the various factors playing a role in the growing trend of early hockey specialization. This chapter also includes secondary material as well as the voices of my participants to analyze why young

hockey players are exclusively playing and training for hockey year-round. Chapter 6 brings together the major conclusions drawn from the material presented in chapters 4 and 5. To illustrate the contemporary hockey landscape and current trend of early hockey specialization, this chapter examines how the factors presented in chapter 5, as well as the material in chapter 4, are interconnected. This chapter also includes recommendations and ideas for future research on youth sport specialization.

Chapter 4: Hockey Development

This chapter examines the current landscape of competitive hockey in Winnipeg and highlights the experiences of NHL players who participated in different eras in post-Second World War Canada. It begins by illustrating Winnipeg's current year-round hockey landscape. Next, a periodization of athletic participation among male hockey players is analyzed. These two sections highlight when male hockey players in Winnipeg began to exclusively and intensively partake in hockey year-round at young ages by integrating secondary literature with the personal stories of my six participants. Their personal experiences with organized hockey and training are primarily shown through their own words to provide first-hand accounts of changes over time in athletic participation and illustrate the onset of early hockey specialization. The following section includes a description of the contemporary elite-level hockey landscape. Highlighting the current trend of hockey specialization, this section shows how changes of athletic participation among male players appears connected to recent changes of the game of hockey. Sub-sections illustrating the complexities of hockey specialization as well as the negative consequences associated with early specialization specifically for Winnipeg hockey players concludes this chapter.

Local Landscape of Youth Specialization

> It's changed so much probably in the last 10, 12, maybe 15 years…back then, the hockey season ended and baseball season started, or soccer, or going to the lake, and the hockey equipment was put away until the last week of August…nowadays, I don't know if there even is an off-season. Now, it goes from winter league to spring league to summer camps to pre-season tryouts to tryouts to the winter league, and all the off-ice training and exercising. It just, it seems like now there's absolutely no break for kids when it comes to hockey…and it's not just elite juniors, pro's, or college kids. It's seven, eight-year-olds, it's even six-year-olds. Everybody seems to be on the ice and in the gym gearing towards the

> next thing, whatever that is for hockey, whether it's their spring team, their winter team, their high school team. So, it's really changed a lot, it's now, you know like I said, there's no off-season it seems (Smith).

When asked to describe how hockey has changed, especially in terms of the expectations around training for young male players, current Western Hockey League coach and part-time hockey instructor Ryan Smith describes the intensified era of specialized hockey development that exists today. His words reveal recent and dramatic changes in Winnipeg's hockey landscape as he identifies a substantial increase in year-round hockey-specific programs and participation for male players of various ages and skill levels.

According to Smith it not uncommon today to find local players, potentially as young as six years old, playing and training on and off the ice for hockey 12 months a year. Full-time hockey instructor and current Manitoba Junior Hockey League coach Billy Keane observes the same trend occurring in Winnipeg, stating "kids are doing it a lot now, I see it all the time, they're playing and training for hockey year-round…they're not playing other sports." As to the number of youth males in Winnipeg partaking in year-round hockey-related programs, both Keane's and Smith's approximations are almost identical. While Keane claims "virtually 100-percent" of the city's male minor hockey players participate in hockey-specific programs 12 months of the year, Smith notes year-round hockey has "become part of the hockey program for about 95 percent of the kids."

Several local examples highlight this current trend. Ten-year-old and recently crowned city A2 champion Max Braun announced, after finishing his regular season, "now in the off-season I train at The Rink" (cited in Westwood, 2016, p. 26). Similarly, fellow ten-year-old Winnipegger Jaden Waddell's off-season consists of spending a majority of his free time on his 800-square-foot artificial basement rink along with participating on two elite-level spring hockey

teams (Pauls, 2014). Furthermore, Scott Miller, CEO of NRG Athletes Therapy Fitness in Winnipeg, claims his clients who partake in their full off-season program offered from May to September range in age from ten-year-olds to NHL players (Lunney, 2015). Finally, while attending Miller's NRG training facility year-round, 13-year-old Winnipegger Kyle Wiltshire also plays AAA Bantam minor hockey along with two spring hockey teams in his "off-season" (Turner, 2013).

Reflecting the approximate timeline proposed by Ryan Smith, Billy Keane argues "early specificity and full-time commitment for young players didn't start happening until the early to mid-2000's." Prior to this era, Smith notes "hockey players did a number of different things throughout the off-season and it was very limited towards hockey." Smith does not suggest hockey players of the past failed to train, adding "I don't think that pros weren't working out in the summers a bit in the 70s, 80s and 90s, especially when it was there job" (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Macintosh et al., 1987). However, he again identifies an increase in hockey-specific training and commitment by current younger players by stating "but the 8-year-old wasn't working out because he wanted to make the 9-year-old team like you see today."

Today, early sport specialization appears to be entrenched in Winnipeg's hockey system as male players are exclusively playing and training for hockey in lieu of participating in other activities or sports. As Keane and Smith both note, this drastic change appears to be prevalent as well as recent at the youth level. However, the brief description of the current local hockey scene and examples of its youth male participants fails to show the evolution of this apparently recent emphasis on sport specialization. Therefore, it is important that we turn our attention to the individual experiences of the former and current professional hockey players from Winnipeg interviewed for this study. Their personal experiences in sport participation will allow us to get a

sense of the historical shift in youth hockey specialization and better understand how we arrived at this current era of exclusive year-round hockey participation.

Periodization of Athletic Participation

1940s-1960s: An Era of Play

> Playing sports now seems so much more specialized. Everything is structured. If you play hockey, that doesn't leave much time for anything else. Hockey was definitely my sport of choice, but I played whatever sport was in season. Athletically, I think it was good for me. The balance, speed, strength, and agility I developed playing different sports all contributed to what I could do on the ice. These days they call it cross-training, or at least they used to. There might be another name for it now. When we were kids, we just called it playing (Howe, 2014, p. 31).

Although commonly referred to as "Mr. Hockey," former and longtime NHL player Gordie Howe identifies himself here not only as a multi-sport athlete, but as an athlete who developed his hockey-specific skills predominantly through playing a variety of sports (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Gould, 2010; Malina, 2010). While the specifics of Howe's background in athletics and training are not included, the above quotation provides insight into the experiences of an elite-level hockey player who participated in an era when kids apparently enjoyed multiple interests and experienced physical activity through playing several forms of sport (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins, 1996). Like Ryan Smith, Howe highlights the full-time structure of today's year-round hockey system and suggests players during his years had greater opportunities to explore other athletic avenues as opposed to those currently playing competitive hockey (Dyck, 2013). Howe's methods and era of athletic participation appear strikingly similar with fellow NHLer and competitive hockey player from Winnipeg of the 1940s-60s, Gerry James.

Similar to Howe, James's background in athletics consisted of playing a variety of sports and activities that were "in season." For when asked to describe his experiences in sport growing up in Winnipeg, James responded with:

> Well I played every sport that I could…like I played hockey, I played football, I played basketball, and I did track and field, and I did soccer. I also played baseball…So, I was a multi-sport guy. And I really just loved playing them all (James).

James, who began participating in organized hockey with the onset of "playground hockey," has a personal history similar to Howe's as he seemed to have a passion for participating in multiple sports at the youth-level. Like Howe, James suggests playing various sports was the norm for young boys during his years growing up in Winnipeg as he noted "that's just the way it was back then" (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins, 1996).

Although the information is limited, Barton (1967) provides insight into James's initiation in organized hockey. Looking at Winnipeg's minor hockey system in the 1950s and 1960s, he reveals the first available year of organized hockey for young boys began when they reached the age of 11. He indicates 11-year-olds participated in what was referred to as "Playground C" hockey and eventually progressed to "Playground B" and "Playground A" when they reached the ages of 12 and 13, respectively. Following "Playground A," boys at the age of 14 would then advance to Bantam hockey, followed by Midget for players under the age of 16. After Midget, players would advance to either Junior or Juvenile hockey, depending on their skill level. Looking at the number of games per-season, Barton also indicates boys playing in both the Playground and Bantam levels only participated in one game of hockey per week for a total of 10 weeks.

Coinciding with organized hockey during his youth and teenage years, James claims his only method of hockey-specific training as well as his acquisition of hockey skills occurred strictly through play:

> We never did any training. And there was never anything called off-ice training. Like when I played minor hockey, I played all 60 minutes…and when I went to school, especially in the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grades, I went from school right to the rink, to the outdoor rink, and skated all day, all night. I just, I don't know, I was just driven…it was just something I did, it was in my DNA I guess, I don't know how else to explain it. And so, I skated as much as I could, and handled the puck. Like those were the days, back when they had maybe 15 or 20 kids on the ice playing shinny, in my first year I never touched the puck. The next year, I touched the puck once or twice. And in my third year, when I was playing shinny or pick-up with about 20 or so guys, I maybe touched the puck a little bit more. And that was the training that we had…and if I had to go to the indoor rinks, which would have been the Amphitheatre or the Olympic, I would have had to get on the street car. And that would have taken away all my time, travelling, instead of just playing and trying to get to what I was trying to be (James).

Like Howe, James points to the significance of play during his childhood and teenage years. Specifically, it was an accumulation of playing the entire duration of his minor hockey season games as well as deliberately playing "shinny" and "pick-up" outdoors that were the only methods of hockey training during his era. Also, he notes that his own individual drive and passion for playing hockey served as a crucial factor that enabled him to continuously play the game and develop his skills. There were never any methods of deliberate practice that led to his future athletic success. Rather, it appears his eventual status as an NHL participant occurred due to internal characteristics and an accumulation of play outdoors during his years as a youth (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Lidor, 2013; Gould, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Malina, 2010). He adds to this by highlighting the only form training during his time as an athlete:

> I would have loved to have been involved in off-ice or off-football field, or off-season workouts to achieve a higher standard of my excellence. But we never had that, ever. All we did was isometrics, just pushing against a stable object, you know? You get a bar that you do pull-ups on, and what you do is push up against the bar and try to hold it for X number of seconds. That was the training back then (James).

Revealing the minimal form of specific training professional athletes engaged in during his era, James indicates the intensified training that exists today would have been beneficial for him. Rather than merely playing hockey and a variety sports, James's words somewhat contradict Gordie Howe's as he argues the skill-sets of athletes in their era would have been greater if they had the opportunity to participate in methods of deliberate practice in which current athletes regularly engage (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003).

The quotation above also illustrates James's desire to deliberately train for two different sports. This is significant for this study as when James was asked to describe the moment in time in his career when he stopped playing other sports to strictly focus on hockey, he responded with "well I didn't, I played football and hockey all throughout my career." James, who played professional football and hockey simultaneously, is the only athlete in history to compete for the Canadian Football League's Grey Cup and NHL's Stanley Cup in the same season.

An accomplished athlete, James adds to Howe's initial quotation by providing insight into how he was capable of playing multiple sports throughout his hockey career in Winnipeg. Pointing to the athletic schedules of both sports, he claims playing both hockey and football "was okay even when I got to when it was in junior age hockey, in 16, 17 years old. Because the football season in high school was over when it was in October, so there was no conflict." Evidently, the schedule of Canada's major junior hockey system at the time granted James the opportunity to play competitive football in the same calendar year (Dyck, 2013). In addition to

athletic schedules permitting multiple-sport participation at the junior level, James again pointed to and connected his simultaneous athletic experiences as a professional to his personal motivation: “I really don’t know how to explain it. I was just driven to achieve my goals of playing professional hockey and professional football” (Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010).

A multi-sport athlete in the professional ranks, James’s experiences in sport resemble no form of any athletic development model nor reflect any definition of sport specialization described in chapter 2. His personal history indicates a background of participating and focusing in multiple sports as both a child and adult, while illustrating an era with almost no form of deliberate practice throughout his entire career. Like Howe, his background appears to represent an era where well-rounded male athletes achieved their eventual status as NHL participants predominantly through multiple-sport participation and deliberate play at the youth level. For James also noted “nothing” like year-round training for a single sport “was ever suggested” during his time as an athlete.

1960s-1980s: The Beginning of “Training”

> I started when I was 11 years old with the neighborhood guys I grew up with and we seemed to do all the sports together…and every weekend, every Saturday morning, we played. And at that time, it was Playground C, Playground B, Playground A, it went up by age groups, that’s what defined you. There was no A1 or that whole system. No elite guys playing on one team compared to A2 teams and all that stuff. So, I always played with the group of guys I grew up with (Miller).

Similar to Gerry James, former NHL player Perry Miller describes the organization and schedule of minor hockey for young boys in Winnipeg during his childhood years (Barton, 1967). Beginning his organized hockey career at 11 with the onset of Playground C hockey, he also recalls that his seasons consisted of playing only one game per week. He appears to highlight a lack of pressure young players felt in terms of making certain teams as Winnipeg’s

minor hockey system was not tiered at the time. Also, he reflects James by illustrating an era when it was common for male children to participate in multiple sports and develop their hockey skills through an accumulation of play:

> Before junior, up to 17, you are a normal kid. You're doing a lot of sports, and everything you're doing is kind of new to you and you're learning it, and you're having fun with it…like you played football, you played softball at school, and you did, you know, all the sports and activities, everything else that everyone was doing. But, the place to meet when you were a kid was the hockey rink, you know? You'd go there, and meet everyone there…you'd go play outside on the ice and all that, you know? That was the meeting place, it was harmless, it was free, it was fun. And, you know, you go there around 6 o'clock at night, it closes at 10, so you know you walk there then home in the dark…we did it all the time…it was the thing to do as a kid in the city. As an 11-year-old right up to junior, what else are going to do in the winter you know? You go to the rink, the outdoor rink, with your buddies (Miller).

Again, Miller echoes James by arguing that it was "normal" for a male child growing up in Winnipeg to enjoy learning and playing the numerous forms of sport and athletic activities that were in season during his era. Also like James, Miller recalls that his childhood frequently involved playing sports as well as unorganized and unstructured hockey during the winter months outdoors with his group of friends in an accommodating environment. His background reveals an era when male children acquired a variety of athletic abilities through playing a number of sports, as well as their primary sport, predominantly for the purpose of their own enjoyment (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2006; Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Lidor, 2013; Dyck, 2013; Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Malina, 2010; Van Rheenen, 2012).

Unlike James however, the quotation above indicates there was a time in Miller's career when all other forms of competitive sport came to a halt so that he could solely participate in hockey. At the age of 17, he points to a conflict in athletic schedules as the onset of his junior career resulted in him having to restrict himself to only playing hockey:

> At that time is when I decided I've had enough of football, because it would go until October, sometimes November, when I'm trying to do the other thing too with hockey. And so, after my last year of football I just said "you know, I've had enough of that, time to go to junior hockey." So yeah, it was at that time (Miller).

While James experienced no issues playing both high school football and junior hockey in the same calendar year, Miller indicates he was unable to do so during his days as an athlete in Winnipeg. Although the conflict in schedule precluded his participation in both sports, he also indicates that it was his decision to play only hockey rather than play only football. It was also at this moment in his athletic career where he began to deliberately and specifically train for hockey during both his seasons and off seasons:

> Well at the time I'm working, and I'm working in a laboring station…at 17-years-old, and a lot of guys would use forklifts and all this stuff. And once in a while I wanted to lift stuff myself because I wanted to continue to build strength, you know? Thinking that I'm going to benefit somehow out of hockey from doing it, because I never went to the gym. So, it was my way of getting stronger…and when I was in Junior, from about the start of August until training camp started, I wouldn't go out on the weekends. And I would put on football cleats that had metal tips on the bottom, and I'd go over across to the school with a pair of sweat pants on and four t-shirts, and a towel, and I would run the goal posts. And I used to do that…I'd say four or five times a week, I'd run those. And we lived in a small story and a half house…and I'd also do the stairs there, from the main floor up to the top floor, and there's only about 14 stairs or whatever, but I figured I was doing the right thing, you know? I was trying to do stuff and I was doing it at that time thinking that I would have an advantage over the guys that didn't do it, and that was the only reason I would do it. Once training camp started, then all that stuff stopped. But I used to try to prepare that way for it, and you know, I thought it would have given me more of an advantage when the puck dropped (Miller).

Although Miller suggests his methods of training might have appeared somewhat unconventional, it is important to recognize that they were completely self-motivated. While he refrained from attending the gym, his own systematic method of hockey-specific training

occurred strictly because he felt it was going to be beneficial for his on-ice performance. Unlike James, Miller's experiences in sport and training illustrate the beginnings of male players deliberately practicing as well as gradually progressing from playing multiple sports to specifically focusing and participating in hockey (Côté et al., 2007; Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003). Miller also describes his methods of hockey-specific training during his NHL off-seasons:

> At the NHL level, well, summer times, I didn't do much. I used to work on my legs a little bit…I used to go to a gym once in a while in the summer time, but not a whole bunch, didn't work out a whole bunch …there wasn't a bunch of working out back then. You'd try and get in some workouts, you know? Starting in like late August, because you want to go to camp with some sort of legs. But, you go to camp back in those days to get in shape, that's just how it was back then…and I'd skate a little bit in the summer but not a whole bunch, it was kind of a fun thing. It wasn't a camp or league or A division league. It was more of a group of guys saying "hey we're going to skate this Thursday, we're going to play, so bring four bucks," you know? So, if you had four bucks you could play, you know? (Miller).

Although Miller would occasionally partake in mild forms of hockey-specific deliberate practice at the professional level during his off-seasons, it was uncommon for NHL players of his era to regularly participate in organized and regimented training in the off-season. NHL players "back in those days," would use their pre-season training camp as a method "to get in shape." Also, it appears his only form of pre-season, on-ice activity at this level primarily occurred for the sake of enjoyment. Miller also describes his experiences with in-season training during his years in the NHL:

> In Detroit, we used to have days off, and so you'd come in and practice, and days when you didn't have a game the next day, after practice was over, you had to go to the weight room, and you go do weights…but you'd take your coffee and donuts and watch the Price is Right while you're there, you know? Because at the time, there was a group that

> would work out, and there was a group that would watch the Price is Right…that's how it was back then (Miller).

While Gerry James only performed "isometrics" as a professional, in a humorous way Miller shows he was required to spend time in the weight room. Although he admitted he was not personally "very regimented in the working-out side of it" and again shows this was common for some professionals during his era, his experiences indicate some NHL players during this time would indeed participate in forms of deliberate practice (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

Despite his methods of deliberately training for hockey during both his seasons and off-seasons beginning at age 17, Miller was quick to note the idea of playing and training specifically for hockey year-round throughout his career was "never, never brought up." Also, as he claimed on two occasions, his experiences with relatively moderate methods of training as a professional were simply "how it was back then." However, Miller's athletic experiences do reveal an era where the expectations to train for hockey originated. Yet, his personal history also indicates a time when it was "normal" for youth males growing up Winnipeg to play multiple forms of sport and activities.

1970s-1990s: The Final Years of "Athletes"

> Well I played all sports, everything, like I was a sports fanatic. I loved playing every sport, including hockey I played baseball…and I played basketball in elementary school, played soccer in elementary school, played volleyball in elementary school, and of course I played all of these sports in high school too. Like I played everything, all sports, all the way up until and in high school…right when elementary started and they allowed us to play in competitive levels in school, I was playing every team sport. Every sport they offered I played, all of them. And all of the track and field, high jump, everything. I participated in it all and played on all of the teams. I played them all man, I loved playing everything (Neufeld).

Looking at the background of former NHLer Ray Neufeld as a child and teenager, labelling him as a multi-sport athlete may be an understatement. Like James and Miller, Neufeld played numerous forms of competitive athletic activities in both elementary and high school and shows a strong interest for doing so (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Dyck, 2013; Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Malina, 2010; Van Rheenen, 2012). Similar to Gordie Howe, he compares his background in sport and the organized structure and schedule of athletics during his era to those currently playing minor hockey:

> In high school and elementary, I had time to play volleyball and other stuff too because hockey, back in those days, didn't start until probably around October or November, if I remember correctly, you know? It wasn't like it is today with the young kids when September comes around and you're at the rink for your season to start. So, you always had time for soccer season, then volleyball, then it was "okay now it's basketball and hockey season, so let's move into that," you know? We had time for all of that back then. I could play all of those sports prior to hockey (Neufeld).

Suggesting limited opportunities for today's youth male players exist due to demanding schedules, Neufeld's childhood experiences further relate to James's and Miller's as his first year of organized minor hockey also began at the age of 11. Beginning at this age, his experience with the sport also predominantly consisted of forms of play:

> I was really busy playing a lot of hockey, I remember I played a lot of, and I don't see kids today doing what we did, we played street hockey constantly, all the time. Like we put the goal posts up, the snow goal posts up on the road, and on the other end we'd do the same. And whenever a car drove by we would go to the side, the car would drive by, then we would go back to playing, right? So, we played constantly outside, on the streets or the outdoor rinks, we always played games. And in the spring, we played ball hockey on the asphalt, we played everything. So, from the time I was about 12 I had a hockey stick in my hands a lot (Neufeld).

Like James and Miller, Neufeld's "busy" childhood schedule consisted of deliberately playing various forms of hockey-related activities outdoors with other children. Also, his youth consisted of learning and acquiring a variety of athletic abilities through playing a number of sports and hockey games solely for the purpose of enjoyment (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2006; Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Lidor, 2013; Gould, 2010; Malina, 2010). Furthermore, he again identifies recent changes in youth sport participation since his time as a young athlete as he suggests a current lack of unorganized and deliberate play taking place among children today (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012). However, Neufeld also reveals he partook in hockey-specific training beginning when he was 15 years old and, like Miller, retired from other forms of competitive sport at 17 due to the onset of junior hockey:

> For six weeks in the summer, I spent my whole time at the Canadian Professional Hockey School at Gimli and Detroit Lakes…so I was 15 then. And then the following summer, I did it again but only for three weeks because I knew I didn't want to go to a want to go to a junior camp that year. And then the following summer I went to Falcon Lake to work a job so I never participated in a hockey school that summer. But I did some training at Falcon Lake doing whatever, you know? Some running, some push ups, just different stuff on my own. And then I went off to play with the Flin Flon Bombers. I was 17 then…I had just finished grade 11, so I was going into grade 12…and when I felt I was ready, I went to Flin Flon and made the Bombers…like that's pretty much when all other sports stopped for me, they had to at that point, you know? It's pretty much full-time hockey at that point…and during the seasons it's all practices and games and road trips, you know? You're busy with hockey all the time now (Neufeld).

Unlike James and Miller, Neufeld's experiences show a drastic change in youth hockey training as he participated in hockey-specific methods of organized, on-ice, deliberate practice during his off-seasons at the ages of 15 and 16. While Miller began to train on his own at 17, Neufeld's training beginning at 15 seemed to occur in a highly-structured environment with the goal of improving his hockey-specific skills while being supervised by instructors (Ericsson et

al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003; Ford et al., 2009; Malina, 2010). Established in 1964, the off-season hockey program in which Neufeld participated was one of the few available to hockey players in Manitoba at the time (Retrieved from www.canadianprofessionalhockeyschools.com, October 15, 2016). Like Perry Miller, however, the beginning of Neufeld's training experiences was a result of participating in an autumn junior hockey camp. Also, Neufeld's personal decision to begin specifically playing hockey at 17, in the "full-time" junior hockey system, occurred when he felt he "was ready." He elaborates on this by highlighting his experiences with the junior hockey recruitment process prior to this age:

> Before I was 17, I was a little naïve, as any young player can be right… Because I'd get all of these invites, tons of teams would invite me in the Manitoba junior league, the Saskatchewan junior league, and the Western hockey league. So, I wasn't really pressured. I guess I just didn't realize like, "okay, this is how we have to do it, we have to go through this system," you know? (Neufeld)

While noting he never felt pressure to strictly focus and play hockey from the junior system, Neufeld illustrates the influence of Canada's major junior leagues. Although it was his decision to play junior hockey at 17, he acknowledges participating in the major junior hockey system was a necessary and required step in his hockey career (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Although, Neufeld again describes and compares his experiences at this age to those of junior players today:

> But we had no dryland, no gym, there was none of that in junior back then, you didn't have anything like what players have today, not even close. Like we trained by going to the parking lot and running up to Phantom Lake Golf Club, that was our off-ice training, right? You know, maybe doing 100 push ups or 100 sit ups, or maybe going to the pool and they might have one little universal machine that we took turns doing stuff on, you know? There were no bikes, there were no treadmills, there was none of that stuff (Neufeld).

Similar to Miller, mediocre forms off-ice deliberate practice (what today would be called, as Neufeld notes, "dryland" training) existed during Neufeld's junior hockey seasons. Unlike Miller however, Neufeld's experiences reveal junior hockey players beginning to exercise as a team with the goal of increasing their on-ice performances (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). He adds to this by pointing to one situation in his final year of junior hockey where the expectations for him to focus and train specifically for hockey increased:

> I mean my draft year I definitely felt the pressure of being drafted. But again, I don't remember anybody ever pressuring me and saying "hey this is what you have to do, you have to focus on hockey and train and blah blah blah," you know? But when I was drafted, being drafted, you do feel it becomes a more serious matter, you know...like I think when I was about 15, I really started wondering if I could play, and by the time I was 17 I thought "okay, I'm on the right path," and by the time I was 19 I remember thinking "wow, I got a chance at playing professional hockey." Like I actually didn't realize it until I was 19 (Neufeld).

While Neufeld was never influenced to strictly focus and participate in hockey, he experienced a form of pressure at age 19 when he, unlike James and Miller, was drafted to the NHL. He highlights the impact of being "drafted" as it was this moment in his career when training became "a more serious matter" and the possibility of an NHL career became a realization. Although, despite playing major junior hockey and being drafted to the NHL, Neufeld describes his off-season training methods at both of these levels of hockey:

> You know how they say in the old days, guys used to come to training camp to get into shape? Well I was sort of one of those guys, but I wasn't quite as bad as some other guys. Like I did do some training, in both junior and as a pro. I'd usually workout some time between 10 and noon…me and another hockey player, Kim Davis, we trained together. Like we'd go running and go to the gym and lift whatever weights were there, that kind of thing on our own, you know? Pretty easy stuff to be honest…I did this in junior and as a pro, it was basically the same. But as a pro, what we did is we skated towards the end of summer. We went back to Flin Flon actually, there'd be a bunch of us. And we'd go back up to Flin Flon for the last two weeks of summer, and we'd skate up

> there as a group. We did some dryland, mostly running, during the mornings for a bit, like an hour or so, then take the afternoon off, then we'd go skate from about seven to nine in the evenings, and then we'd just go to the bar. And that's what we did every day for those two weeks. That's about all the training we did (Neufeld).

Similar to Miller, Neufeld shows it for common for NHL players during his era to arrive at pre-season training camps with the goal of getting "into shape." Also, his training methods with another player during his junior and professional hockey off-seasons were fairly mild and unchallenging. However, unlike Miller's pre-season on-ice preparation that was merely "a fun thing," Neufeld's on-and off-ice training program was done with a group of players intentionally for the purpose of preparing for the upcoming seasons (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003). Although these methods of exercise were short-lived and included regularly socializing in the evenings, Neufeld offers this when asked if ideas of playing and training specifically for hockey year-round was ever suggested during his time as a hockey player:

> You know, I missed out on that era. When I stopped playing pro, I think that's when things and ideas like that sort of started, after I played you know? It was just starting to come into the game when guys were going "holy crap, these kids are coming to camp in way too good of shape, we got to change what we're doing," right? But I didn't see any of that in my time, like maybe I just started to see something like that towards the end of my career, maybe that last year, last couple of years there was more stuff like after practice. You had to hit the gym for a bit, or you had to go for some sort of dryland and stretching. And I mean me, I thought "like okay, I've played over 10 years of pro, like come on, we don't need to do this, we haven't done this our whole lives," you know? (Neufeld).

While he participated in somewhat mild methods of physical exercise at the NHL level, noticeable changes in player training during Neufeld's final seasons in the league occurred. Although he felt they were unnecessary as professionals of his time trained in "fairly easy" fashion, younger players began entering the league in better physical shape (Gruneau & Whitson,

1993). It was shortly after his retirement, however, when "things and ideas" related to exclusive year-round hockey participation and training originated. Finishing his professional hockey career in 1990, Neufeld claims he "missed out on" the "era" of hockey specialization that exists today (Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013, Mostafavifar et al., 2013).

1990s-current: The Onset of Specialization

> That's what I wanted to do, just play hockey, you know...it was just my passion. Like whether it was playing hockey video games, mini sticks, street hockey, playing hockey outside with my buddies, that's all I really wanted to do. Even collecting hockey cards, it was strictly hockey, all the time…and everyone, well, all of my buddies played hockey. And as a kid with the river in the backyard, I had a rink right there in my backyard, so I just always played hockey (Boyd).

Current professional hockey player Dustin Boyd describes a far different personal history in sport than those of the three former NHL players in this study. Although this was primarily the result of methods of deliberate play that he found enjoyable, his individual passion and interest in sport as a youth seemed to be more singularly focused as he predominantly participated in hockey-related activities (Coakley, 1992; 2010; Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2006; Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Lidor, 2013; Gould, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Malina, 2010).

Growing up in Winnipeg, Boyd was involved in other forms of athletic and recreational activities. However, it appears his athletic opportunities were limited by the city's elite minor hockey system:

> Growing up, like even in middle school and a bit of high school too, I played volleyball, badminton, but just rec stuff at school, during gym or lunch, you know? Nothing crazy though, nothing that would take up too much time. Because before junior it was A1, AA then AAA hockey. Which is pretty busy, but it's only busy during the fall and winter, and a little bit of spring (Boyd).

Like Gordie Howe, Boyd's participation in the top-levels of minor hockey today appear to have played a role in his athletic decisions and opportunities. He highlights the time-consuming schedules of playing in these elite-level programs and suggests his participation in other sports during his seasons throughout these years was restricted to "just rec stuff at school" as this did not take up "too much time." As Billy Keane notes, the top-levels of Winnipeg's minor hockey now include "five or so ice-times per week," so Boyd's opportunities to participate in multiple forms of competitive sport were limited compared the other three hockey players in my study (Dyck, 2013). Unlike James, Miller, and Neufeld, Boyd participated in Winnipeg's tiered-minor hockey system which was initially introduced in 1976 (Lunney, 2013).

Boyd's initial experiences as well as the moment in time when he stopped playing all other competitive sports to focus on hockey are also much different than the former hockey players from previous eras. Before the age at which each of James, Miller, and Neufeld had begun their first year of organized minor hockey, Boyd had already decided to strictly focus on this sport from a competitive standpoint. He began playing hockey at the age of six and considers himself "a late bloomer" for doing so. Also, Boyd was merely nine years old when he quit playing competitive soccer to participate solely in organized hockey. This decision reflected the local organized and structured minor hockey system in which he played: "I stopped playing soccer around nine because that's when summer hockey started, and that's what I wanted to do."

Although Boyd was a multi-sport athlete in his early childhood, his experiences in sport indicate a shift towards exclusive hockey participation and demonstrate the changes in the landscape of competitive minor hockey in Winnipeg in the mid-1990s. During Boyd's childhood, local male hockey players between the ages of 8 and 13 were granted greater opportunities to participate in hockey as the city witnessed the birth of organized and unregulated spring hockey

(Lunney, 2016; Turner, 2013). Boyd discusses the influence of these newly created elite, off-season minor hockey programs:

> When I stopped playing soccer and started playing summer hockey, I was one of the top players for hockey at my age. And so, I think I just wanted to keep doing that, and that probably also made me really focus on hockey. And, you know, you start playing with the top kids in the city for the summer teams, and different summer teams start calling you and wanting you to play for them, you know? (Boyd).

At nine years old, Boyd shows the influence of being contacted to participate with other top-level players across the city. Unlike James, Miller, and Neufeld, Boyd's background reveals early talent identification had an impact on his athletic decisions as his early success in hockey played a role in his desire to solely participate in the sport (Merkel, 2013). Lunney (2015) adds to this by noting Boyd was one of the first minor players involved in this local off-season hockey program: "when spring hockey was in its infancy and there were only a couple of teams operating out of Winnipeg, only the cream of the crop were invited to play on these clubs…such as…Dustin Boyd" (para. 43). However, Boyd noted his introduction to this off-season hockey program at nine did not result in year-round hockey participation:

> I played summer hockey then, as a kid. But there weren't too many tournaments, it was a lot of down time. I'd take about two months off every summer at least to go to the lake, you know? Do stuff like that…but then usually before AAA would start, I would go to one hockey camp (Boyd).

In addition to participating in spring hockey, even while taking a significant amount of time away from the game, Boyd participated in methods of structured, organized, on-ice deliberate practice before his AAA minor hockey seasons (Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003). Unlike Miller and Neufeld who began deliberately training prior to participating in a junior hockey program (at ages 17 and 15, respectively), Boyd's on-ice hockey-specific training began

at the age of 13. It was around this age when he became heavily influenced to place an even greater focus on his hockey career:

> At 14, when I got drafted, that's kind of when you start actually thinking of the NHL a bit more seriously…like I think as a kid, you know, you dream of playing in the NHL, but you just want to play at the highest level and play as good as you can. And I probably didn't realize, until I was like 13, that you get drafted to, you play Junior A or the Western Hockey League, I didn't know any of that until I was like 12 or 13. But once you get drafted to the Western Hockey League, you start thinking about the NHL. Like obviously it's a dream, but it doesn't really become a possibility until you get drafted to junior, and you start seeing actually like how the hockey ranks work. As a kid, you're pretty much oblivious to it all, you know? You just try to have fun and score as many goals as you can. But then, you see how the system works (Boyd).

Similar to Neufeld, Boyd reveals the impact being drafted had on his mentality as a young player. On two occasions, he notes being selected in a draft resulted in his initial thoughts of one day playing in the NHL. Unlike Neufeld, however, Boyd perceived the NHL as a future career opportunity at an earlier age as he experienced being drafted at 14-years-old in the Western Hockey League's bantam draft. Similar to participating in tiered minor hockey, Boyd was the only player in my study to be drafted at the bantam-age as this method of junior hockey player recruitment was not established until 1990 (Kennedy, 2015). His experiences indicate an era when younger hockey players became not only more aware of "the system," but influenced to strictly play and train for hockey. For it was also at this age when an idea of year-round hockey training and participation emerged due to the bantam draft:

> I wouldn't say year-round, but I'd say once the season is over you take a couple of weeks off, and then you start working out pretty much every day…and it was probably at 15. 14 or 15. That's when it really sunk in, after the junior draft. That's when I really knew it was playing and training for hockey full-time. Cause I mean at that point it was just common knowledge that you have to work out, stay in shape, you know? You have to be physically active, whether you're playing other sports or working out or whatever. But if you want to put on muscle or get

> faster, especially before junior starts when you're playing against older and bigger guys, you got to hit the weights. Because once you're in junior, you definitely need it. You need that extra step. And I mean, I was pretty scrawny so that was probably my biggest thing, I needed to (Boyd).

Unlike the other three players in this study, there was indeed a moment during Boyd's years in athletics when he specifically dedicated himself full-time, with the exception of "a couple of weeks," to participate and train for hockey. He specifically notes the WHL bantam draft as the primary cause of his decision to deliberately practice for hockey in an intensified manner. After this moment, the idea of an exclusive and specific hockey-development focus almost year-round "really sunk in." He also recalls that his own physical stature and biological maturity required him to partake in a specialized and intensified form of hockey-specific training at this age (Branta, 2010; Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Malina, 2010; Mattson & Richards, 2010).

Boyd's off-season training beginning at 14 or 15 was not done alone. His training schedule that he claims consisted of attending "the gym for about two or three hours a day, about five days a week" as well as going to "skate at The Highlander with a few buddies" shows an intensified manner of hockey-specific training for younger players of his era. Also, his nearly year-round commitment to hockey, both in the gym and on the ice, increased to a greater extent when he was 19 as he began to train with an off-ice personal trainer. His hockey-specific focus and methods of training appear to show an era where players of younger ages, although playing other sports as children, specialized earlier and developed their skills primarily through forms of hockey-specific practice and play (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2006; Côté et al., 2007; Côté & Lidor, 2013; Ericsson et al., 1993; Ericsson, 2003; Gould, 2010; Malina, 2010). As a 31-year-old

professional hockey player today, however, Boyd notes changes in hockey participation and training since his time as a minor player:

> Like, I played summer hockey, but it wasn't summer hockey like they do now, like the two months or whatever it is. It was, you play an extra two or three weeks and that was it. You play in like one tournament, and then hockey wouldn't start up again until late September. So, you'd have a couple months off to do whatever. Like ride bikes, go to the cabin, stuff like that, you know? Stuff that kids do…and I mean, the personal training wasn't as important until I was 19, for me, you know? Young guys weren't really going to these types of gyms when they're 12 or 13 like you see today, having a personal trainer and all (Boyd).

One of the "cream of the crop" players selected to participate on one of Winnipeg's original spring hockey teams, Boyd's experiences in sport are different from today's current youth hockey players. Unlike the spring hockey system today that Ryan Smith claims often requires "full-time commitment from the end of your winter season right up until the end of the school year, or July," Boyd's minor spring hockey career and schedule were less demanding as he spent time away from the game to participate in other forms of child-related recreational activities. Also, his experiences with "personal training" at age 19 fail to resemble the local examples of children currently partaking in the extreme forms of specific, off-season training that were discussed above (Lunney, 2015; Pauls, 2014; Turner, 2013; Westwood, 2016).

Although primarily focused on a single sport with an athletic background that suggests an era of young players exclusively participating in hockey programs at a young age, Boyd's minor hockey career nevertheless occurred before the time when Winnipeg witnessed the onset of early and year-round hockey specialization. It was the turn of the 21st century, when Billy Keane and Ryan Smith suggest youth males from Winnipeg began exclusively participating and training for hockey year-round. Although his statement is brief, Turner (2013) highlights the current era of year-round athletic development that originated shortly after Boyd's childhood years and has

now come to dominate the local youth hockey scene: “in Winnipeg, minor hockey has become a 12-month-a-year sport, where a plethora of camps, tournaments, training programs and teams have spawned – and proliferated – in the last decade” (para. 10).

Contemporary Hockey Landscape

> “Hockey is a 365-day sport now. For some young players, it’s all they do” (Rick Nash in Friedman, 2016, para. 3).

Like Keane and Smith, current NHLer Rick Nash recognizes the specialized athletic development and full-time commitment by youth male players today. However, Nash argues this intensified method of hockey-specific skill development and year-round dedication among young players has altered the landscape of professional hockey. He claims a faster and more skilled game originated approximately a decade ago as it was then that younger-aged players began entering the top-level of professional hockey due to an “increased emphasis on skill development at the youth level” (Friedman, 2016, para. 5). Similarly, Braden Holtby of the Washington Capitals argues the increased level of hockey-specific skill development among younger players today has “changed the game” as “kids coming up are so skilled and so much more prepared for this level” (cited in Ibid, para. 11). Current Toronto Maple Leaf’s head coach Mike Babcock shares a similar perspective by suggesting “it’s the combination of skill and physical development in today’s young players that makes them able to contribute faster than those in the past” (cited in Siegel, 2016, p. D2).

The current NHL landscape consisting of youth, skill, and speed has not gone unnoticed by Winnipeg’s local professional hockey players. Jonathon Toews, Travis Zajac, and Ryan Reaves all indicate recent and distinctive changes in the modern NHL as they each recognize the league now consists of younger, more talented players. Toews comments on these specific

changes by noting "with the majority of the league getting even younger, the speed is picking up every single year" (cited in Sawatzky, 2016, p. D3). Likewise, Zajac claims "the game has gotten way faster…When I came in 11 years ago, there was speed, but it wasn't throughout the lineup like it is now. From the top forward to your 12th guy, everyone has speed, everyone can contribute and everyone has skill" (cited in Sawatzky, 2016, p. D2). Similarly, Reaves indicates today's NHL landscape has witnessed a rapid decrease in fighting in favor of a more skillful game by noting "there's a lot less fighting, a lot more skill, a lot more speed" (cited in Pinkert, 2016, para. 8).

Former Winnipeg Jet Drew Stafford directly connects the now faster, more skilled, and younger NHL with year-round hockey-specific training amongst young players: "it's the way it is now…it's getting faster. The way the training is now with the young kids coming in, they're training 12 months a year – it's non-stop" (cited in Sawatzky, 2017, P. C3). Even current NHL player Tyler Seguin who, at 22-years-old, claimed "you've got to see what 15-year-olds today can do with their speed...when I look back to when I was 15, it wasn't nearly as intense as it is now...the kids are getting so much better; and the game is getting so young and so fast" (cited in Duhatschek, 2014, para. 30-32).

Tait (2016) labels this new NHL landscape as the "youth movement" (p. D1) and notes the pattern is now "a reality of pro sports." Likewise, Siegel (2016) connects today's NHL that "relies on speed and skating more so than ever before" (p. C4) to the youth movement outlined by Tait by noting "almost half of the league's 30 teams (14) have at least one teenager and eight teams…have at least two. Only a decade ago, there were almost none. In fact, only one teenager played a full season in the 2005-2006 campaign: Sidney Crosby" (p. D2). As shown by the current NHL, this "reality" of today's professional sport landscape, appears to be due to the

growing trend of year-round and exclusive sport participation and training at younger ages (Mostafavifar et al., 2013).

Hamilton (2017) connects the current trend of year-round hockey participation to an increase in the skill level of today's local male junior-aged players: "the dramatic change in the hockey landscape has created an improved talent pool of players in the province, many of whom dream of pursuing hockey as a career" (p. D1). Kim Davis, commissioner of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League and former training partner of Ray Neufeld, adds "everyone talks about how great the NHL game is and how fast it is, and they're absolutely right…the thing is, it's the same at our level. It's not the same quality, of course…but as the NHL has improved…the same thing applies here in our league" (p. D1).

It appears the recent trend of year-round hockey specific development has played a role in altering the game of hockey and the on-ice skill level of its increasingly younger participants. Due to these recent changes in specialized training at earlier ages, younger, faster and more skilled hockey players exist today as opposed to previous years. However, I argue below, using Keane, Smith and other secondary sources, that this trend in the NHL also highlights some of the dangers associated with sport specialization discussed in chapter 2. Not only are players changing the landscape by participating and training in solely hockey-related activities at younger ages, they also appear to now have less overall athletic ability and are potentially hindering their future chances of athletic success.

Complexities of Hockey Specialization

> It is amazing what's happening now…there are some players between the ages of 16 and 20 that have never played a baseball game in their life, they can't hit a slow pitch, they have trouble just throwing a ball. And many of these players will admit they never played that because they've been strictly in hockey, they focused on hockey, hockey, hockey, hockey. And that's the top-level of junior in Canada, that's the

> Western League, guys that have been drafted to the NHL, can't hit a slow pitch. And you know, they have never even thought about it. They're always, their minds have always been set on hockey their whole lives (Smith).

According to Smith, the specialized athletic trend is not only recent, but unmistakable among some of the current male players in Canada's major junior hockey system. Although he acknowledges their status as "top-level" players in the country, Smith shows their singular and specific approach to hockey development from their early childhood years has resulted in them acquiring fewer all-round athletic abilities (Branta, 2010; Côté et al., 2007; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Mattson & Richards, 2010). Keane notices an almost identical trend among some of today's top-level young hockey players in Winnipeg:

> You know, are better athlete's hockey players now? I don't think so. You know, I watch some of these guys, great young players, you watch them sprint, run, and the biomechanics are terrible, you know? You watch them throw a ball, and it's awkward, it really is. You watch them kick a soccer ball, and their leg spazzes, the athletic ability isn't there, you know? Unless these kids had some background in soccer, or lacrosse or something else, and had some dexterity and other athletic development, like, I think, because of the early specificity that's happened recently, they are not better athletes, but they are better hockey players. And that's the tradeoff. And the better hockey players have a better shot with hockey down the road (Keane).

"Now," as both participants claim, early specialization and full-time commitment solely dedicated to mastering hockey-specific skills, as opposed to acquiring all-round athletic abilities through playing other forms of sport, is becoming more common among young players (Côté et al., 2007; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013). Although they have failed to acquire transferable athletic skills, some elite-level male players have achieved their elite playing status and developed their skills, Keane and Smith argue, by specifically focusing and participating in hockey-related activities (Ericsson et al., 1993;

Ericsson, 2003; Mattson & Richards, 2010). For it is hockey skills rather than all-round athletic abilities, which Keane in particularly notes, that now appear to be essential for future hockey success. Current 20-year-old NHLer Connor McDavid who, as Sawatzky (2016) argues may already be the best player in the NHL seems to fit this trend by recently admitting "when it comes to off the ice, I'm not very athletic" (cited in Ibid, p. C3).

Although McDavid follows the recent pattern, NHL strength and conditioning coach Chris Schwarz labels the existence of unathletic elite-level hockey players today as "an epidemic" (cited in Scanlan, 2017, para. 3). Like Keane and Smith, Schwarz argues this lack of athleticism among today's highly skilled youth on-ice participants is a direct result of these players failing to play other sports or activities as children (Balyi et al., 2013; Branta, 2010; Côté et al., 2007; Gould, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010). However, Scanlan notes "in this era of the professional who trains year-round, some very good hockey players have come through the system, only to hit a wall at a certain point because their hockey aspirations lacked a foundation" (para. 6). Pointing to the LTAD, Schwarz claims it is the noticeable lack of multiple-sport participation and acquisition of fundamental movement skills in their early childhood years that are eventually hindering these elite-level hockey players' on-ice performances: "I get kids here, they missed this stage, because they're not catching, running, throwing. They don't process it, they can't be creative…now, kids are coming to me at the NHL level, and they don't have the movement skills. There's no basis" (cited in Ibid, para. 8-11).

Like Schwarz, Ryan Smith also promotes multiple-sport participation at the youth level and the importance of acquiring various athletic abilities for hockey players:

> But I do think the better athlete makes the better player in hockey and in any sport, I really do. I think the guy with hand eye, the guy with hockey sense, the guy with athletic ability, the guy with a quick start, the guy that can run fast, jump high, you know? The guy that can shoot

> a basketball, the guy that can hit a golf ball. I think all of those things make a better hockey player, because a lot of that stuff happens on the ice, right? I mean there's lots of anticipation, there's lots of quickness, there's lots of heavy lifting and moving attributes in the game of hockey and all of that, so I personally think a better athlete makes a better player (Smith).

Although noting some of the country's top-level, unathletic, junior-aged players reached their status by strictly participating in hockey "their whole lives," Smith now shows the importance of sport diversification at the youth level. Acquiring a foundation of overall athleticism through multiple sport participation at the youth level is crucial to developing hockey-specific skills and attributes that will eventually lead to on-ice success (Balyi et al., 2013; Branta, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wall & Côté, 2007). He adds:

> I think exposing kids to many sports when they're young is way better, I don't think a seven-year-old needs to be on the ice or training for hockey all the time, I think he needs to play some different sports…like I don't think you're going to fall behind at 10 or 11, for taking some time off or playing another sport in the off-season, I just don't believe that (Smith).

Smith again highlights the benefits and importance for male hockey players of participating in a variety of sports during their childhood years. He also argues allowing sufficient time away from hockey during the "off-season" at this age will not result in undesirable outcomes for these individuals (Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010). However, Smith also notes the eventual necessity of hockey specialization:

> When kids start to mature, and hit puberty, once their bodies have changed…and they can handle the physical training a bit more…I think that puberty, and I think that's different for everybody but I'm going to say 13 to 15 is when most people hit that, kids hit that. And that's kind of when you, if you're really serious about hockey, that's when you should take that next step…that's when you have to put a bit more emphasis on hockey training…So, I think it's individual and I think it's different for everybody, and it's all on what you're looking to get out of

> the sport. But, when you get serious and your goal is to keep going in hockey, then that's the time, that's the age, probably that 13, 14, 15 age (Smith).

Even allowing for multiple-sport participation at the youth level, Smith acknowledges that specialization for male hockey players is eventually required for those striving to "keep going in hockey" (Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010). Unlike the "six-year-olds" he previously mentioned that are currently participating in this method of development, the approximate age at which male hockey players "have to" place greater "emphasis on hockey training" appears to be in the early-to mid-teenage years (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté; 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Hockey Canada, 2013). Smith stresses the significance of physical development and biological maturity, which varies among individuals, as being indicators of an appropriate time to specialize in this sport (Branta, 2010).

Keane also claims "specialization will need to occur eventually" for hockey players striving to "compete in the NHL." Like Smith however, he also argues against this method of athletic development for hockey players in their childhood years and outlines the benefits of multiple sport participation:

> To become an elite-level player, year-round hockey and training is not necessary for kids…I don't think it has anything to do with it, I really don't…playing soccer, playing lacrosse, or playing baseball and competing against somebody else in a competitive environment, that's what's important to make it to the next or the elite-level for kids (Keane).

Keane previously noted elite-level young players today appear to be more skilled because of the recent trend of specifically training and playing for hockey at younger ages. Also, he suggested that mastering hockey skills are more required for future hockey success than all-round athletic ability. However, he now argues that being physically active and participating in

other competitive sports during the hockey off-season is more important for players during their childhood years. Like Smith, Keane indicates year-round hockey participation and training is unnecessary at the youth level and promotes sport diversification (Balyi et al., 2013; Branta, 2010; Gould, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Merkel, 2010; Mostafavifar et al., 2013).

Hockey Canada along with it's local branch in Winnipeg, Hockey Manitoba, also favours sport diversification over early hockey specialization for children. Corey McNabb (see Chapter 1) points to Hockey Canada's LTPD model to claim "our philosophy all along is summer time is a time to play other sports…play soccer, play golf, play lacrosse, play whatever…at the end of the day, we believe the best hockey players are the best athletes" (cited in Hagen, 2015, para. 6). Like Smith, he also highlights the importance of taking time away from the game by stating children "need the break, so they come back to hockey and they're refreshed" (cited in Ibid, para. 7).

Similarly, Hockey Manitoba recently created a "Better Athlete, Better Hockey Player" initiative to "add further awareness from an official standpoint regarding the importance of young players to develop a strong foundational base for physical literacy and athleticism" (Taylor, 2016, p. 10). The initiative suggests participation in multiple sports will not only increase physical literacy and athleticism, but will be beneficial for future hockey-skill development (Balyi et al., 2013; Branta, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wall & Côté, 2007). Pointing to Hockey Canada's LTPD model, Hockey Manitoba argues "the key stages of developing athletic potential is between the ages of 5-12, where it is critical for young players desiring to get better at the sport to partake in a variety of activities and other sports before specializing in hockey in their late-teen years" (Taylor, 2016, p. 10). Kyle Prystupa, Manager of Development & Communications with Hockey Manitoba, adds "the player

with the better athletic base is always going to have more potential for acquiring skill and dynamic skating ability" (cited in Ibid, p. 11).

Keane highlights this paradox of necessary multiple sport participation at the youth level being touted at the same time as the current increase in hockey-specific skill level due to earlier specialization:

> It's a complicated issue. Because yeah, they're better hockey players with all the training and extra practicing at younger ages now, and the better hockey players have a better shot at making it to the NHL. But it's not like there's a set blueprint to make it to the NHL, you know? Some multi-sport athletes still do get to the NHL eventually (Keane).

Connecting the increase in hockey talent to the "early specificity that's happened recently," while also arguing against early specialization, Keane argues the athletic development path to eventually compete at NHL level is not generic, but "complicated." As unathletic yet more-skilled hockey players exist and have a greater chance of NHL participation today because of earlier hockey specialization, specialized development is not the only route that will eventually lead to playing at this level (Branta, 2010; Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2007; Ford et al., 2009; Gould, 2010; Malina, 2010). Keane adds that this specialized method of hockey development is resulting in local youth players experiencing the detriments associated with early sport specialization.

Negative Consequences of Hockey Specialization

> Right now, kids are dropping out, they're quitting because of all of it…I see it all the time. They are burnt out. Burnout is becoming a significant by-product of playing at 11, 10, nine, even eight, year-round…I see it all the time, 11, 10-year-olds saying "I don't want to play hockey anymore," they're tired of it. It's terrible, just terrible. I see it all the time here. And on top of that…the biomechanics of skating all the time, you know? Kids not opening up their hips like they would do in other sports, skating all the time and doing hockey-specific training all the

> time, they're seeing a whole lot more hip injuries, a whole lot more, at younger ages. So, you have that, plus the burnout (Keane).

In discussing the Winnipeg youth hockey scene, Keane connects the current trend of earlier hockey specialization to the growing rates of youth burnout and overuse injuries. Scott Miller, who trains youth hockey players at his NRG complex year-round, adds "I do believe there is a time and place that one needs to be off the ice for a period of time. Going year-round is probably going to be detrimental to the athlete, causing one to burn out or lose the love for the sport" (cited in Lunney, 2015, para. 51). Similarly, Hockey Manitoba argues the benefits of multiple sport participation include:

> the eventual reduction of over-use injuries and increased resistance for non-impact injuries commonly seen with young players. The hockey player with a well-rounded athletic base who developed and mastered the keys of physical literacy will set themselves up for a longer and more enjoyable hockey career. Mentally the multi-sport transition benefits by reducing burn-out, which is one of the most common causes of players quitting hockey during teenage years, stemming from years of being driven to over-compete and over-train throughout the calendar year (Taylor, 2016, p. 11).

Keane, Miller, and Hockey Manitoba argue early sport diversification will reduce chances of hockey burnout, overuse injuries, as well as increase the opportunities of achieving longer playing careers (Balyi et al., 2013; Côté et al., 2007; Gould, 2010; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al. 2013; Soberlak & Côté, 2003; Wall & Côté, 2007). Executive director of Hockey Manitoba, Peter Woods, recently highlighted these current issues with Winnipeg's local youth hockey scene: "I think we're doing a disservice to our athletes. We're specializing too early in the game" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 29). Woods argues "that a one-dimensional, full-time approach can ultimately lead to overuse injuries, burnout and a lack of exposure to other social groups and coaching styles"

(cited in Ibid, para. 28). Kyle Prystupa adds "one of the most under-promoted benefits of multi-sports is the character development that kids learn as part of different team dynamics and roles" (cited in Taylor, 2016, p. 11). Like today's top-level junior players who Smith notes have had their minds "set on hockey their whole lives," Woods and Prystupa argue the current trend of young players exclusively participating in hockey at early ages, year-round, can also have detrimental psychological and sociological impacts (Coakley, 1992; Gould, 2010).

On the issue of young-athlete burnout that has become increasingly common in Winnipeg due to the current year-round minor hockey system, Smith adds:

> Like, there is room in the summer for training, and there is room in the summer for the camps, but I think, it's got to be the right way of doing it. Like, okay, here's something I want you to put down. When kids do too much hockey, when a nine or 10-year-old does too much hockey, when he plays winter hockey, he does power skating on Sundays, he wakes up early and does some academy during the week, and he does his spring team practices and games, and does three on three, and all the summer camps, what happens to this kid? In my opinion, no longer at any point does it become fun because it's not a game anymore, it's that feel of I'm going to the rink again. And I've seen it, I see kids that don't even know where they're going or what ice time they're at. They get to the rink and they just get on the ice and do whatever it is, and they're not having fun anymore…the game has to be important and fun. All the training and all the practicing and all the ice times can't overcome the game…so when it's just hockey all the time, or just always going to the rink, when it's not a game, like, you want to see when you tell your 10-year-old that he's got a game tomorrow that he's excited, that he wants to play. Not that "hey you got a game tomorrow," and he's like "well we just finished power skating tonight, and I know I have three on three tomorrow afternoon before the game," like, you got to watch. You got to watch carefully that you don't change the game that it becomes like a job, you know? And you can see it in the kids in the dressing room. The kids that are excited for the game, the kids that are pumped. And you can see the kids that are just there, that have already been on the ice five times this week already. They're just, they're burnt out, they are burnt out. And I think that playing and that competition has to be above all that training and practicing, at the kid's level, you know? Up until 13 or 14 or so. And if they get too much hockey, there's just that fine-line where it just becomes going to the rink, it becomes a job…it's not even

> hockey anymore, it just becomes skating or going to the rink again (Smith).

The extensive quotation from Smith illustrates the current and local trend of youth hockey burnout due to Winnipeg's year-round hockey landscape. Highlighting this intensified era of year-round hockey programs available to local young players, he demonstrates the delicate nature and susceptibility to athletic burnout by noting "you got to watch" as a "fine-line" exists between an appropriate and excessive amount of hockey for young players. As Smith indicates, this problem associated with early hockey specialization has recently embedded itself in Winnipeg's hockey landscape where a number of year-round programs have become available to young players:

> Like, there is so much more out there now. Like when I played you didn't have all of these summer camps, you didn't have spring hockey, you didn't have all this type of off-season training, and that's just the way it was. You played until the end of the winter season and then you played something else, baseball or soccer or whatever, and then you started hockey again. But now, hockey, you're able to play, you can find a game or ice time every day if you want…Like now they're on the ice at river heights with power skating, and now Kirkfield doing three on three, and now they're with their normal team doing a practice or game, and now they got a tournament on the weekend. It just, there's no break now, and there's no difference. It's all too much (Smith).

Once again, Smith notes recent and dramatic changes in Winnipeg's youth hockey landscape as minors today have "no break" in the era specialized hockey development. Unlike hockey players in previous eras who participated in sports that were in-season, the current full-time hockey system sees local players of all ages exclusively playing and training for hockey year-round. The personal experiences of the participants in my study reveal a gradual progression towards this era that exists today as athletic participation and training methods among young male players have become specifically and intensely dedicated to hockey at earlier

ages over time. In doing so, it appears earlier specialization for male hockey players is now required, or more importantly, is perceived to be required despite having negative consequences for these young athletes. For that reason, it is important to examine the various factors that have played a role in enabling the onset of this method of athletic development at the turn of the 21st century. These factors will allow us to see how we arrived at the current trend of year-round and full-time hockey participation and training at the youth level.

Chapter 5: Factors Influencing Early Hockey Specialization

This chapter explores the various factors influencing and enabling year-round and exclusive hockey participation for youth male players in Winnipeg. Specifically, it attempts to determine how and why this trend and method of youth hockey development originated at the turn of the 21st century. Three major themes resulted from an analysis of the collected data for this study: (1) Individual Influences, (2) Identity Categories, and (3) The Business of Professional Sport. To begin, the "Individual Influences" theme is described by illustrating two groups of key individuals currently influencing young male players to solely participate in hockey. Next, the chapter moves from individual influences to societal forces by examining the impact on today's specialized youth hockey landscape of the "Identity Categories" of socioeconomic status and gender. Finally, the chapter concludes by analyzing the "The Business of Professional Sport" theme. This section illustrates the large-scale structures of sport within which the individual influences and identity categories are operating by highlighting how the media and changing economics of hockey are now compelling early hockey specialization in Winnipeg.

Individual Influences

> It was then, I think, when parents really started pushing it. And then some coaches would say, "okay, you know what? You want to be a hockey guy, you need to decide what you want to do. If I'm going to work with you and train you," basically by the peewee years, "we need to know what you want to do." Which is too bad. And then it starts, all of the training starts. All of sudden you're 100-percent hockey at 12, 13 (Keane).

Referring to his estimation that specialization in Winnipeg hockey occurred in the "early to mid-2000's," Billy Keane points to two groups of individuals who were influential in encouraging

young male players to focus exclusively on hockey: parents and coaches. Keane suggests that in earlier years these individuals did not pressure their sons or male players to exclusively participate and train for hockey in the same way. However, he argues that the current year-round youth hockey landscape is now largely a result of these adult figures determining the athletic decisions of male hockey players at the youth-level. Examining the experiences of the professional players in my study, the section begins by analyzing how coaches and others working in positions within organized hockey institutions have played a role in shaping the current hockey landscape. The personal experiences of my participants help illustrate how the influences of these individuals have changed over time.

Hockey Personnel

> I was invited up to the Toronto Maple Leaf office, and Hap Day was the manager. And he threw a bunch of money at me, rolled up like a football…he threw it at me and he says "here catch, I hear you play football." Then he says to me "we want you to sign a contract." And unbeknownst to him I had already signed a contract to play football that year, nobody knew I had signed that contract. And so, I said "Mr. Day, I would really like to play another year of football." And so, he thought I was playing hardball. But then he looked at me and said "okay, well you sign a two-year contract and we'll let you play football." So, I said "well, okay." (James).

Even as an adult in the NHL, Gerry James failed to experience any form of pressure to only play and train for hockey from members within organized hockey institutions. He does acknowledge the control his team manager had over his athletic decisions as he was only allowed to play both hockey and football as part of a contract compromise. However, he reveals a time where an authority figure at the NHL level granted a professional hockey player the opportunity to simultaneously participate in professional football. His experiences with NHL personnel differ from Perry Miller's:

> Detroit flew us in there for physicals. So, in the off-season I had left Winnipeg and signed as a free agent with Detroit, and so they wanted to do physicals on everybody…so we went in there and did evaluations, and I guess I passed or whatever. And I remember my agent was Don Baisley and he said "you got to go there into some sort of shape" even though this thing was in the middle of summer, you know? Because they started testing at that time. But you know, back then you're a young pro. So, you're in relatively good shape, just from you know, living. And just from sort of the stuff you do (Miller).

Unlike Gerry James, Miller's experiences indicate it became expected that NHL players during his era would partake in off-season training regimes to meet the expectations of individuals working in the league (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Although fitness testing required minimal preparation, Miller's experience reflects a time when NHL personnel began to play a more influential role over players' hockey-specific training and physical conditioning. Ray Neufeld adds to this by when he recalls that it was NHL coaches themselves who began to encourage year-round hockey training shortly after his retirement:

> And the coaches were changing too because they were reading and studying and thought, well, it makes more sense if we train and do this training more year-round. But again, that all changed after I played. The only thing I remember as a pro is they watched your weight during the seasons, and that's it. You trained on the ice, you know? You'd get a bag skate and stuff (Neufeld).

The increased expectations of individuals working in the NHL for hockey-exclusive training occurred during Neufeld's final years in the league. However, the year-round and specific methods of training that Neufeld "missed out on," appears to have been implemented by NHL coaches after 1990. Although, unlike James and Miller, Neufeld also discusses the influence of coaches during his years as a minor hockey player:

> I remember things about how the coaches impacted me, even as a 12-year-old, my coach…he was really a terrific guy, he taught me that you have to be positive all the time. Come to the rink, try your best and enjoy

> yourself, something I always remembered…and my high school coach taught me discipline. Work hard and you'll get out of hockey what you put in. And he also taught me the dryland part of it. He taught me how to play my position, be a good positional player, and taught me how to prepare yourself physically to be able to handle a hockey season. He taught me that training and being in shape was an important component to being a good player. So, my coaches were great coaches growing up, they really helped me a lot (Neufeld).

Illustrating the positive roles his coaches played in his development, Neufeld's experiences appear to reveal the onset of well-qualified minor coaches, particularly at the high school age, teaching the fundamentals as well as the physical conditioning components of hockey during the early-to mid-1970s (Macintosh et al., 1987; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987). Neufeld also credits his high school coach for being the first person to claim he had "a legitimate chance" to eventually play professional hockey. However, despite the coach's comment and his initial experiences with hockey training, Neufeld still chose to participate in other sports at this age. This choice of sport participation, partially influenced by individuals within organized hockey institutions, is also evident in Dustin Boyd's background:

> When I was 12, I know that's when I started getting scouted, two years before the junior draft. And when I was 13, they start talking to you. And it's not like they tell you to stop playing other sports. But they say "keep at it," you know? "Keep at hockey," "we like what we see" or "you played a good game today," you know? Stuff like that, stuff that makes you feel good, stuff that makes you really focus on hockey…like when they start telling you, "you should keep at this," you know? "You got a shot at making it," stuff like that. So, when you start talking to scouts, get drafted at 14, it's all pretty exciting, you know? It gets really fun, it's a pretty cool feeling. You dream of being in the NHL as a kid, then when scouts start talking to you and everything, it's a fun time (Boyd).

Although he specifically notes that junior hockey scouts never advised him to only play hockey, Boyd was encouraged by their words and felt persuaded to "really focus on hockey" as a 13-year-old. Junior scouts may not have directly pressured him to train for hockey at this age, but

they clearly influenced and impacted his specific athletic ambitions and decisions. He credits these discussions with scouts, his personal NHL dream, as well as his experiences getting drafted at the bantam age as all playing a role in his decision to solely play and train for hockey. Boyd also felt the increased training expectations from members of the NHL community:

> It wasn't until my last year of Junior, when I was drafted by Calgary, when they told me that, they said "you need a personal trainer." Because usually I would just go to like the local gym here and work out for about two or three hours. So, it wasn't until I was 19 when they said "listen, you need to start going to a personal trainer, start working out a little more hockey specific" (Boyd).

Beginning to exercise with a personal trainer at 19, the direct influence of individuals working within the Calgary Flames organization resulted in Boyd participating in off-season "hockey-specific" training programs. While Gerry James was allowed to compete in professional football while still playing NHL hockey, Boyd's experiences reveal a time when NHL personnel expected "hockey-specific" training from players while also limiting the same players' non-hockey choices.

The experiences of the four players show a gradual increase in pressure and influence to focus on hockey from individual members at various levels of organized hockey. However, recall that it was the turn of the 21st century that witnessed the beginnings of Winnipeg's minor hockey coaches encouraging year-round hockey participation. Billy Keane notes that "because of schedules and commitment, they want full-time guys now." As the schedules of organized minor hockey became more demanding in Winnipeg at this time, so too did the requests of greater time-commitment from coaches (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013). However, Keane also discusses other issues

within Winnipeg's minor hockey coaching system that potentially influences young players to play hockey year-round:

> To me, our system, it's completely backwards. Europeans have guys working in youth hockey development that are getting 120 grand a year. They're pro's working with kids', and they're directly responsible for the development of kids, not the volunteers. Because to me, the development strategies, the foundational skill work, is done from ages 5 to 12. And our kids aren't getting AAA level coaching until they are 13…the Europeans have pros coaching kids, it's their full-time job…and they'll do advanced level activities with advanced level coaches at earlier ages, you know? They're pro guys looking after their 5-to 12-year-olds. And there's a reason why, the Europeans, their skill level is increasing so much, you can't argue with their skill level…and I'd suggest the Canadian skill level is not on the same development path as the European's skill levels…so, the Winnipeg hockey system, the Canadian hockey system, for player development, is backwards…the system is totally backwards. There's got to be professionals working with our young kids during the hockey seasons. Not volunteers working with kids, it's got to be pro's working with kids during hockey seasons so they can learn and develop properly (Keane).

In comparing Winnipeg's minor hockey volunteer coaching structure to Europe's professional structure, Keane suggests that the negative consequences of early hockey specialization could be solved with quality coaching during the minor hockey seasons (Brylinsky, 2010). The skill level of European male hockey players appears to have progressed and surpassed Canadian players as European youth learn advanced hockey techniques directly from full-time, paid coaches. In addition, they acquire these skills strictly during their seasons as minor hockey programs are not allowed to extend beyond nine months a year in Europe (Turner, 2013). By contrast, Keane argues Canadian youth only begin to receive a similar level of quality professional coaching after the age where proper and adequate skill-development fundamentals need to have been learned.

According to Keane, local youth are trained within a "coach mentorship program that started in 1999" which sees professional instructors like himself "support volunteer coaches." Keane suggests Canadian 5-to 12-year-olds could possibly take time away from hockey like minor European players if they had the opportunity to learn directly from professionals during their hockey seasons. However, he acknowledges that a professional coaching model would face difficulties reducing the year-round demands on our local youth players. He, and Ryan Smith, conclude that the implementation of a professional minor coaching structure in Winnipeg would most likely fail to overcome the expectations of year-round hockey participation by today's minor hockey parents.

Parents

> I think that there's a misconception that if you don't play spring hockey or do the summer camps or train for hockey in the off-season, you're going to fall behind. And I don't know what you're falling behind in at eight, nine, 10, 11, even 12 and 13. But, you know, people feel like they're missing out on something. I think that people, and its mostly parents, they feel that their kid is going to fall behind, you know? That little Johnny isn't going to be as good as little Jimmy because little Jimmy played on this spring team, you know? Parents, they think that if they don't do enough hockey to get them ready, they're not going to succeed. So, I think there is a lot of pressure put on the kids by the parents…and you know, I don't know how much you can improve in just the short spring season. But again, it's that misconception that you're going to fall behind (Smith).

According to Smith, parents today have become influenced by the recently developed year-round hockey landscape and feel taking a break from hockey will hinder their child's development. He again notes the unnecessary trend of year-round youth hockey, but adds that it is parents who feel participating in these programs are crucial for their children to eventually play at the elite-levels of hockey (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013). Similarly, Keane adds:

> When you're in your house league years, that's the honeymoon years, you know? At five, six and seven, it's all fluffy, you know? I call it the honeymoon years. But, you know what? The honeymoon is over when all of a sudden, the tryouts start at eight-A1. And I tell you what, the parents' mentalities completely change, in terms of the expectations of their children. In terms of, you know, if little Johnny isn't developing the way they think he should be (Keane).

Keane also uses "little Johnny" as an example to highlight the impact today's local organized hockey system has on the mentalities of hockey parents. He notes the influence of the tiered minor hockey structure as the onset of eight-year-old tryouts results in increased hockey-specific skill-level expectations from parents. In addition to influencing year-round participation, he argues parents today expect their children to perform at a certain level in order to play at the top-levels of minor hockey (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012). Turner (2013) demonstrates how these expectations and influences from parents have changed the landscape of Winnipeg's youth hockey specifically over the last 10 to 15 years:

> What happened? Simply put, it has been the birth of elitism in hockey. Parents grew increasingly frustrated with the geographical parameters - at least, in Winnipeg - of existing minor hockey teams, which are formed by catchment areas. Typically, each team, from those of eight-year-olds and up, has one or two players who dominate, scoring the vast majority of their team's goals. Dad and Mom think: This is a waste of time. Junior isn't developing. The other kids are pylons. He needs better competition, but we're stuck in this minor hockey democracy. As a result, in an era in which elite teams are being formed at younger and younger age groups - remember, kids are drafted by Western Hockey League teams as young as 14 - parents are taking matters into their own hands…Conservative estimates put the number of spring teams in Manitoba in the 60s - the vast majority for players between eight and 13-years-old. But no one really knows for sure, since any two or three parents can simply start up teams on a whim, advertise for tryouts to recruit players…and voila! There's your team (para. 33-49).

As parents are influenced by today's year-round and full-time hockey landscape, Turner notes they have also played a major role in creating such a system. Their expectations and

ambitions for their sons to play at the elite-level resulted in the creation and evolution of spring hockey to satisfy the belief that year-round hockey is necessary. Ryan Smith also notes this recent growth of spring hockey in Winnipeg: "you can find a spring team easily now, you know? There's so many of them now. They're everywhere in the city." Also, the Western Hockey League's (WHL) bantam-age draft appears to be further impacting the decisions of parents to encourage off-season hockey participation. As Keane notes:

> The bantam draft is at 14, and at the peewee level, there's discussion about it from parents. Like parents are acquiring with me at that age, asking me, "okay, so my guy is 12, what am I getting into? What's the process here? What do junior teams look for with regards to the draft?" You know? Because at 13, the next year, is a big year because they'll be drafted after their 13-year, as 14-year-olds…so that is requiring, for sure, two years prior, to prepare for the MJ draft and Western league draft (Keane).

As with the emergence of minor hockey tryouts, the junior hockey draft influences the mentalities of youth hockey parents in Winnipeg. Despite the fact that their children cannot participate in junior hockey until the age of 16, parents are influenced by the junior draft system potentially more than the young players themselves, according to Keane and Turner (2013). Turner notes that parents create and enroll their sons in off-season hockey teams where they feel the necessary elite-level competition exists in order to prepare them for the junior draft. Look no further than local 13-year-old player Kyle Wiltshire (mentioned in the chapter 4), who is training at NRG while participating on two spring hockey teams in the off-season. Wiltshire's mother pointed to the WHL draft as influencing Kyle's year-round hockey-specific participation: "that's what he's striving for. He's worked so, so hard" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 92).

However, the story of Kyle Wiltshire further illustrates the influence of parents as it was his mother who managed both of her son's off-season hockey teams by recruiting both players

and coaches (Turner, 2013). Similar to Kyle, ten-year-old Jaden Waddell's year-round hockey activities are possible largely due to the assistance of a parent. For it is Waddell's dad who asserts that his son participates on two elite-level spring hockey teams because it "allows him to play the game at a different level" (cited in Pauls, 2014, para. 6). Todd Thornton, with three sons enrolled in Winnipeg's spring hockey programs, also argues "the minor hockey system isn't giving the elite players what they need. They're bigger, they're stronger, they're faster. They need a place to play with players who are elite at a younger age" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 37). Fellow Winnipeg hockey parent and Winnipeg Jets Assistant General Manager, Craig Heisinger, describes his decision to put all three of his sons in spring hockey: "Unfortunately, if you're trying to play at a high level, I don't know if you're forced to do it, but you get sucked into it" (cited in Ibid, para. 137). Consistent with Smith's assertion that parents believe that their sons need year-round hockey is a "misconception," Keane claims that "parents think if their kids don't play spring and summer hockey, they're doing their kids a disservice."

Influenced by today's tiered and elite hockey structure, while attempting to help their children, parents appear to have played a significant role in the emergence and continued growth of off-season youth hockey. Smith believes that many parents who feel participating in year-round hockey is necessary for their children to have eventual success in hockey are motivated by their own failed aspirations:

> I'll be very honest here, what I see today, I think a lot of parents with kids that are pretty good hockey players, they're really trying to live through their kids. They think back, and some of them probably were excellent hockey players, but they didn't quite make it. They didn't quite make junior or didn't make the pros or something. And now, they're not going to let that happen to their son. Whatever they were missing, you know, they are thinking back saying "you know, dad didn't have me in that many camps, dad didn't get me a trainer in the off-season, that's probably why when I went to try out for this AAA team it didn't work," you know? I think a lot of parents are living through their kids, and they

> don't want to have any excuses at the end. They're going to say "I've given them every opportunity, I've put them in all these camps, I've given them one on one training, and I signed him up for those four summer tournaments." So, I just think there is a lot of influence on the kids from their parents (Smith).

Reflecting on their own personal experiences, Smith argues parents believe their child will only experience eventual success with year-round hockey participation at the youth level. Perhaps it was the lack of year-round or off-season hockey participation that they feel resulted in their failures. Now, "living through their kids," Smith argues parents will encourage their son or sons to partake in these programs to succeed where they did not. In doing so, parents appear to now be controlling the athletic decisions of young minor hockey players today:

> Parents are the biggest influence on kids because I'll tell you, there's not too many eight-year-olds that go online and sign up for hockey camps, or phoning a place and saying "I'd like to tryout for this team," you know? At seven and eight, kids don't make their own decisions. Dad drives them to the rink, or mom drives them to the rink, you know? (Smith).

Whether driving them to their hockey activities or registering them for a training session or tryout, Smith labels parents as the "biggest influence" who now inevitably determine their children's athletic experiences. Keane adds:

> It's 100-percent the parents…like I think, to me, the parents are the determining factor here. If there's seven days in a week, they're trying to fit in, they're getting in 14 hockey activities, you know? In the summers, they're working out off-ice, and then they're going to hockey on the ice. So, yeah, 100-percent I think it's the parents. It's the parents that are running the schedule (Keane).

Like Smith, Keane argues parents, rather than the young players themselves, believe year-round hockey participation is necessary. Both feel as though parents are controlling the athletic decisions of their children, determining if their child or children will participate in

hockey programs during the summer months, and are largely responsible for the year-round youth hockey participation trend occurring today (Dyck, 2013; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013; Turner, 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012). However, as shown by the experiences of the former and current professionals in my study, this influence on youth male hockey players from their parents has drastically changed over time.

Participating in multiple sports and regularly playing hockey outdoors, the only comment Gerry James shared regarding his parents directly impacting his athletic decisions was: "if my mother was looking for me, she knew I would be at the outdoor rink." In James's era, minor hockey players appeared to develop their skills primarily from unstructured play without the supervision or guidance from adults. His experience in sport at the youth level reveals an era where Canadian parents played a minimal, if any, role in the athletic decisions and methods of play for their children (Dyck, 2013).

Perry Miller also spent a majority of his youth participating in unorganized hockey where local outdoor rinks offered opportunities for unsupervised forms of play without the assistance from or need for parents. Unlike James however, Miller's background in organized youth hockey also shows the influence of parents who appeared to play a supportive role:

> Every Christmas I got new skates, Santa always brought me new skates. Starting probably, well as early as I can remember…and the comments around the house all the time when I was a kid, every time that I needed a new stick, the parents would go and get a new stick, but they would get the first cheque from the NHL. And that was just the joke around the house, it was just a fun thing…but they were supporting their kid you know? (Miller).

As his parents would humorously demand future compensation when he played in the NHL, Miller's parents supported him throughout his minor hockey career. Providing this supportive and positive influence during his early years, his parents assisted with his

development as a player. Yet, they had no role with his decisions to train or play sports as it was Miller's self-motivation and desire that resulted in his methods of training as well as his entry into organized hockey. Showing an even greater lack of parental influence in athletic participation, Ray Neufeld describes the roles of his parents during his minor hockey career:

> As a kid growing up, my father never came to the rink, and my mom never did either. And, my dad said "if you want to play hockey, here's your bag and here's your stick, the rink's over there," you know? So basically, I'd walk to the rink every day as a kid, I did that stuff all on my own, I never expected my parents to really be involved…they never came to watch me as a minor…they never made the time...and I was really fortunate in that there were other parents available that would drive me to games, you know? Because I mean I walked to the rink (Neufeld).

Like Gerry James, Neufeld's experiences playing hockey were predominantly independent and unsupervised by his parents. As his parents were uninvolved throughout his minor hockey career, he indicates they had a minimal impact on his youth athletic decisions. Similar to Miller, however, Neufeld also indicates his mother played a supportive role in terms of his ambitions to one day play in the NHL:

> But my mom was the influential one. She would listen to me when I would come home…I used to sit on the couch after school all the time and talk to her about playing in the NHL, and ask her "do you think I could do it, what do I need to do?" And every day I'd do this with my mom and she would sit there and listen to me for hours…she would listen to me day and night. Honestly, she never one time said to me "Ray, I don't think hockey is the way you should go" or anything. She just listened and encouraged me, and that really helped me (Neufeld).

Although she failed to watch him participate, Neufeld's childhood experiences show his mother played a supportive role at home that assisted his progression and desire to become a professional hockey player. Furthermore, Neufeld also acknowledged that it was his parents who sent him to the summer hockey school he attended at 15 and 16. Therefore, Neufeld's parents

appeared to eventually play a critical role in his progression as a hockey player as they became directly involved with his athletic decisions during his mid-teenage years (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins 1996).

However, Neufeld's experiences indicate his parents remained relatively on the outskirts of his athletic activities and choices during his time as a youth. For it was Neufeld who regularly walked to the rink and claimed he initially approached his parents and asked if he could play organized hockey as a child. This differs from Dustin Boyd's introduction to the game as he points to his father playing an influential role from the beginning:

> My dad would make the rink in the backyard, on the river, and I hated putting the skates on so I just wore my boots. And it wasn't until I guess he kind of forced me, he said like "hey, if you want to play hockey, you have to wear skates." So, that's probably why I started so late, cause of those skates. But yeah, I started when I was six…so, I mean, I was pushed a little bit, you know? But I wasn't forced to play (Boyd).

Unlike the other former players in this study, Boyd connects the beginning of his hockey career with his father. As he started playing at six-years-old, his dad played a key role in his introduction to the game. Although he notes his did "kind of forced" him to eventually wear hockey skates, he clarifies that his dad never forced him to play. However, his experiences indicate a fairly drastic increase in the involvement of a parent introducing their child to competitive sport. Unlike James, Miller, and Neufeld, Boyd was the only player in my study to experience being "pushed a little bit" to participate in hockey at a young age. Although he was not influenced by his parents to specifically play and train for hockey, Boyd's experiences, as well as the other five participants in this study, show an evolution of local youth athletes choosing to play sport themselves towards parents influencing their sons to participate in year-

round, highly-structured hockey skill-development programs (Dyck, 2013; Jayanthi et al., 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987; Wiggins 1996).

Like Keane and Smith, NHLer Jordin Tootoo connects today's era of early hockey specialization to the increasing pressure parents appear to be putting on their children:

> When you're young, you should enjoy hockey, you should have fun, that's what we did. Nowadays, kids are training twelve months a year and by the time they're teenagers they're f--king done with hockey because their parents pushed them through all of this shit for twelve months a year and didn't give them a break…To this day, in the off-season I put my gear away for a month and don't even look at it, because you want to miss the game a little bit. Growing up, that's how we did it. In the summer, we were out fishing and hunting and playing other sports. When I go home now, I tell the kids that as much as we love the game, you need time away from it (Tootoo & Brunt, 2014, p. 24).

Tootoo's blunt words reveal the current landscape of strong parental influence and control in youth hockey. Like Boyd, Tootoo is a current professional player who played minor hockey in an era when youth players would take a certain amount of time away from the game to participate in other sports and activities. He notes this is uncommon among today's minor hockey players who exclusively participate in hockey at younger ages. Like Keane and Smith, Tootoo points to parents as the main culprit to this recent athletic development trend as they appear to now be pushing their children to specifically play and train for hockey year-round.

Identity Categories

Although the above quotation from Jordin Tootoo highlights the influence that parents today have over their children to exclusively participate in hockey year-round, it is important to note that his personal experiences and background were most likely different from the players in my study. Not only did he not play minor hockey in Manitoba, but Tootoo is also the first Inuk player to participate in an NHL game. When examining the personal and athletic experiences of

elite-level male hockey players, ethnicity and race cannot be ignored. For instance, Ray Neufeld notes a personally race-related situation during his playing days:

> They asked Jordy Douglas, who I ended up being a good buddy with, they asked his billet family if they would be willing to take me too. My situation was different, right? No disrespect to anyone or anyone in hockey, but I was a black player and there weren't many black players, certainly not in Flin Flon. So, they had to check and get the right person or people, and the right teammate to be willing to bunk with a black guy. So, Jordy said "yeah, sure" and Stu and Emily, the billets, said "yeah, sure that's cool," so I was able to stay with them (Neufeld).

Being a black hockey player at this time, particularly with the Flin Flon Bombers, Neufeld indicates male hockey participants were predominantly white and certain arrangements were made for his living conditions because of his skin colour. Clearly, the example Neufeld provides shows that his personal circumstances and experiences with hockey would have been different than the other participants in my study because of race. However, Neufeld also adds:

> Being a kid, and I don't like to bring race into it, because every kid has to deal with stuff in terms of trying to be in the minor hockey system or whatever. But I just want to say that I was never treated any different than any other kid because I was black, you know? And I can say that about Manitoba. I can't say that about when I went up in hockey, there were definitely some challenges there. But, in Manitoba I don't recall ever being treated differently because of my skin colour with respect to my coaches, with respect to my teammates, with respect to my opposing players, you know? It was just a real fun and positive experience for me as a kid growing up being a hockey player…I say kudos to coaches and kudos to hockey in Manitoba for looking and treating all players the same from that stand point (Neufeld).

Although acknowledging he eventually encountered difficult personal situations in other locations as an adult, Neufeld compliments the individuals involved in his minor hockey career in Manitoba. While crediting Manitobans, his story does show race and ethnicity can potentially play a role in one's athletic experiences and decisions. However, Neufeld has positive memories

of his hockey experiences and recalls being treated equally during his youth career; nor did race and ethnicity apparently influence his childhood decisions and methods of sport participation. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, notions of race and ethnicity were not viewed as influential factors in sport specialization. The aspects of identity that did emerge from the data, however, were socioeconomic status and gender.

According to Dyck (2013), the influence of socioeconomic status on youth sport is reflected in the rising costs to participate in organized hockey in post-Second World War Canada as well as in the participation rates of youth participants from families/parents with certain education backgrounds, occupations, and income. In addition, the data gathered for this study reflects notions of gender surrounding the game of hockey and the gendered roles of parents in post-Second World War Canada (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Howell, 2001; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). These two analytic categories were involved in the athletic decisions of all four participants in my study with NHL experience and continue to play major roles in today's youth hockey landscape. Pointing to his days playing hockey as a youth in Winnipeg, Gerry James states:

> That's what enabled me to achieve somewhat, towards my goal, because I was on the ice so much. I'd spend every Saturday and Sunday at the rink at the outdoor, skating, playing pick-up, or whatever. So that helped me a lot, because the outdoor rinks, and the nice thing about it, the community club, Sir John Franklin, if you couldn't afford the 20-dollar fee to join the community club, they let you play anyway. So, they didn't knock you out or say "you can't play because you didn't pay your fee." It was 20-dollars, but if you couldn't afford to play they still let you play. And that helped me out a lot, because those community clubs were essential to my development (James).

James, who also admitted to having to borrow equipment during his time in minor hockey, demonstrates that playing the game was possible during his childhood years despite not

being able to afford the registration fee. He also reveals that his skill acquisition occurred in a setting that did not require young players to come from a family of wealth. Playing minor hockey, as well as developing the "essential" skills that were necessary for him to eventually become a professional athlete, was free. In addition, James claims:

> The only reason that I wouldn't have played a sport is because I couldn't afford the equipment…see we didn't have, we were very poor. And my mother and dad got divorced when I was about 14, 15-years-old, they got divorced. So, we just didn't have a lot of money to kick around (James).

Following the separation of his parents, James lived only with his mother. However, his background is one that highlights an era where a "very poor" child from a family with only one source of income was able to participate in multiple organized sports simultaneously, including hockey. He also connects his personal hardships to his desire to participate in various competitive sports. For it was playing multiple sports from his childhood to the professional level that he notes was necessary for his livelihood: "I just did what I had to do in regards to making a living for myself."

Furthermore, James states "I also had something that other athletes didn't have, I had an aggressive style. And that helped me because the team I played with, the Leafs, they were in need of that style of player." Highlighting the value of an aggressive nature through hockey participation, James shows his "masculine" methods of on-ice participation played a role in his professional hockey career (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Howell, 2001; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). Similarly, Perry Miller acknowledges that a typically masculine style of play contributed to his having a professional hockey player:

> So, we go out to Brandon, and I get in a fight in the first period, and I do pretty good. And we get to the second period and I get in a second fight…and we go into the dressing room then come back onto the bench

> for the start of the third. And Milt Black was sitting beside me on the bench…and he said to me "you know, if you get into a third fight you're kicked out of the game." And I said "well pick somebody, because I got to get noticed. This is my only shot" (Miller).

In his first and only professional pre-season game prior to signing with the Winnipeg Jets, Miller believed fighting was his "only shot" to secure a spot on the team's roster. Like James, it was this hegemonic masculine style of play that Miller attributes to being a crucial component to his ability to earn a living: "you know, you do what you do to survive. You watch the other team, and do what you do to give yourself the best opportunity to make yourself successful" (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Howell, 2001; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013).

Similarly, Miller also acknowledges that while his parents would support him with new hockey skates every Christmas as a minor, he lived in "not a big income family." He grew up in a small house and notes that his dad was the foreman of the laboring station where he worked during his days as a junior hockey player. In addition, he claims:

> When I was 11, my dad coached. My dad and another dad, as dads do, and luckily both of them had cars…and he coached until, I'm going to say, bantam…and when I played junior, it was cold in the rink and he was dying of cancer, but he'd still come. He always came, always. He never missed a game (Miller).

Miller notes it was typical for dads to serve as team coaches and be involved in the lives of their son's hockey careers. Furthermore, he adds: "mom was a hockey fan until probably around when I started playing junior, because then you have to fight." Miller's experiences demonstrate the ways in which both of his parents provided support during his days as a minor hockey player, although in stereotypically gendered ways. His background also shows he participated in a sport whose participants, coaches, and fans were predominantly male and was an ideal avenue for young men to learn and express typical masculine behaviors in an era of

hyper-competitive sport (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). Similarly, Ray Neufeld describes the roles of his parents and their involvement in his youth hockey career:

> Like my mom never drove a car or anything like that, you know? She was a mom, you know? She didn't have a license, she stayed at home… and my father worked all the time, he owned a drug store. And God bless him, he had to work hard to have success at it. And he basically spent 10 to 12 hours a day at it (Neufeld).

Highlighting the traditional and domestic roles of mothers following the Second World War, Neufeld indicates why his parents failed to watch or drive him to his minor hockey games as he grew up with a stay-at-home mother while his father worked to earn an income (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). However, Neufeld also describes a critical moment in his youth hockey career that again resulted from his mother supporting him as much as possible away from the rink:

> My mom went to my high school coach… my mom went up to him when I was 15 and asked him if I was going to be good enough to play hockey like for real, if I had a chance to play for real. And he said to her "well if you guys support him, you know with different equipment and stuff like that, and if he works hard at it, and gets into some other situations where he can challenge his abilities a little bit more, I think he has a legitimate chance." …So, she took a bus and went to Baldy Northcott's, it used to be a sporting good store in Winnipeg. And my mom bought me brand new hockey gloves, shin pads, pants, the whole nine yards, bought me everything. It was the first time I ever had my own equipment. I would have always used equipment that other players or people would give me…and she told my dad "look, Ray's got to get to hockey school, and we're going to get him there. And you're going to help with the financial part of it, and you're going to drive him there so you better know what day you can do that." So, my mom became sort of that driving force that pushed my dad to make sure I got to the hockey schools and hockey camps that I needed to get to, right? (Neufeld).

Neufeld's experiences as a 15-year-old hockey player further reveal the influence of his parents while highlighting the two identity categories under discussion. After a conversation with his high school hockey coach, Neufeld's stay-at-home mother travelled to purchase new hockey

equipment and influenced his working father to send him to summer hockey programs: both of which seemed crucial and necessary for his development as a player. Although growing up as a multi-sport athlete, Neufeld's background perhaps indicates a change in time when the acquisition of hockey-skills necessary to eventually play in the NHL required a greater financial cost and commitment from parents. However, his background is also evidence of an era where a future NHL participant, with seven siblings and only one working-parent, became a professional athlete without training or owning his own equipment until the age of 15. Finally, his experiences indicate a time when parents became involved in the lives of their athletic children when the idea of playing at the professional level became a possibility (Dyck, 2013; Van Rheenen, 2012; Wiggins, 1987). While Neufeld credits his stay-at-home mom as being "the driving force" of his minor hockey career, Dustin Boyd acknowledges his father as the main contributor to his athletic development:

> Well my dad never played hockey, but we would always play mini sticks, he would take me to games, come to watch me play, and we would always watch hockey on TV…So, yeah, I'd say my dad, you know, he helped me along the way as a kid with everything. And, like tell me on the ride home from games if I played well or maybe if I should have done some things differently, you know? That kind of stuff (Boyd).

Recounting the ways in which his father was a positive and supportive influence over his progression as a hockey player and passion for the game, Boyd's experience demonstrates the greater time commitment and financial expenses required of a young boy's parent. By stating he assisted "with everything" during his minor hockey career, Boyd suggests his father was able to take the time and pay for Boyd's participation in pre-season camps and facilitate the elite-levels of both spring and winter hockey that began at a young age. Boyd also has a younger brother who participated in Canada's junior hockey system as well. This perhaps indicates a change

where elite-level athletes came from families that have parents, or one parent, able to afford the necessary skill development programs for multiple sons. Although his father never played hockey, he would also provide Boyd with compliments or advice following youth hockey games. Despite not having first-hand experience in the games their children played, this again perhaps indicates a change in the role of parents to also include serving somewhat as their child's personal coach (Dyck, 2013). However, Boyd also describes his experiences with increased training expectations and changes within minor hockey that occurred following his years as a youth:

> The only reason I started to workout with a trainer was because I had signed with the Flames, otherwise I couldn't have afforded it. I just would have kept going to the gym with my buddies if I hadn't…and like, I think hockey is so expensive now. Like the equipment now, compared to other sports, plus the amount you have to pay to play…and I mean, I wouldn't be paying someone 40 or 50 bucks a session to workout at that age (Boyd).

As he was required by the NHL to exercise with a personal trainer at age 19, Boyd indicates that he was only able to afford the corresponding financial costs due to his first NHL contract. Therefore, the now expected and necessary off-season personal-training programs required to eventually participate in the NHL, which Boyd argues he would not purchase for a pre-teen boy, was only possible when he himself could afford to pay for them. He argues significant financial changes related to the landscape of hockey have occurred since his time as a minor player. It appears he suggests he would not have been financially able to play in the current era of minor hockey as today's personal-training expected at the youth-level would have been too expensive for his family. Boyd's minor career not only appears to have occurred slightly before the onset of year-round hockey participation and training for children, but also

prior to the various financial factors that Ryan Smith argues have drastically changed and increased in the early 21st century:

> To do everything now, you have to have some money, for sure. You have to be financially stable, you know? These camps and everything now aren't cheap, hockey's not cheap…because it does cost more to play at the higher levels…and now, nowadays, there's spring hockey, there's camps, and everybody wants the next best stick. Some of these kids are six and it doesn't matter what stick they use but they need a 200-dollar stick …so you've got better equipment, you've gone in three camps, you did the off-season training at a gym, you played on a spring team, it's just, it's full-time and expensive. It's just, it's changed. It's changed a lot so fast (Smith).

Referring to the same "10, 12, maybe 15 years" time period mentioned in the previous chapter, Smith argues that the current era of specialized development for youth hockey players has also witnessed a dramatic rise in the expenses to participate. He again points to the current full-time landscape of year-round hockey programs to highlight the corresponding financial burden. Like Dustin Boyd, Smith remarks on the rising costs of equipment, off-ice training, off-season programs, as well as participating in the top-levels during the minor seasons, making elite-level hockey appear to be strictly for those players that come from families who can afford these additional expenses (Dyck, 2013).

Turner (2013) echoes Smith as he discusses Winnipeg's current youth hockey system: "Look around. Kids in grade nine are wearing skates that cost upwards of $1,000. Hockey sticks for 12-year-olds are $300 a pop. Players as young as eight with personal trainers" (para. 14). One-on-one on-ice training sessions offered year-round to local minors "can cost up to $175 an hour" (Ibid, para. 74) while playing on one of today's Winnipeg spring hockey teams costs "upwards of five figures" (Ibid, para. 83).

Acknowledging the same trend, Billy Keane notes "the cost for playing at the elite-levels is exorbitant" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 122). Like Dyck (2013), local minor hockey coach Jim Parcels connects the cost of Winnipeg's elite-level hockey system to its demanding schedule by noting "if you're doing eight, nine, 10 years of AAA hockey from novice up, you're talking eight to 10 grand, minimum…you do that for 10 years, that's almost $100,000. That's because it's six, sometimes seven days a week commitment" (cited in Mirtle, 2013, para. 9). In an interview with Lunney (2013), Keane adds:

> If you're playing at that level, the families have made a significant financial investment in the development of the young player. That investment is going to carry over into the spring and summer - it's not just spring and take the summer off. The cost in the spring and summer now is exponentially higher than it used to be, with the spring hockey and the training that's expected (cited in para. 12-13).

As Keane highlights, the cost of playing at the elite-level now requires a year-round financial commitment from families' due to increased training expectations at younger ages. However, this year-round "financial investment" has resulted in an increase in the skill-level of local minors who can afford such costs: "the best minor hockey players today hit the ice more often during the season as well as in the off-season, making it even more expensive" (Lunney, 2013, para. 23).

Despite the growing costs, Lunney (2016) notes parents are willing to register their children for year-round hockey programs as they "view it as the only way their kids can keep pace with the more skilled players, thus improving their chances of making elite teams" (para. 15). However, for those parents unable to comfortably afford the required costs for their sons to participate at the elite-levels, Keane claims "they will go into debt, they will go into significant debt, just to try and make it work, significant debt." Similarly, Smith adds:

> I see a lot of people that are stretched thin, that sacrifice everything to give little Johnny the best opportunity…like you see the crazy hockey mom or the crazy hockey dad, you know? They go way overboard, like they sacrifice everything. Parents will, I mean the money that's going into hockey now, the amount they're pouring into it is astronomical, you know? They're taking out second mortgages, they're not going on summer or winter vacations, they sacrifice a lot, they're pouring their money into hockey (Smith).

Like Keane, Smith illustrates the tremendous financial sacrifices made by some of today's parents who view the expensive year-round, elite-level hockey programs as necessary for their child's future success. 13-year-old AAA Winnipeg hockey player Kyle Wiltshire is an example of this. Organizing her son's two elite-level spring hockey teams as well as paying for his off-ice training, Wiltshire's mother states "basically, we just save everything we can and everything goes toward hockey. Our whole life is hockey. It's at the point where if you want to stay in the more elite level teams, you have to do the extra stuff" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 91). Marnie Wiltshire, a single mom with four children playing hockey, claimed to contribute at least $15,000 to make Kyle's year-round hockey participation possible. Not only does the story of Kyle Wiltshire indicate a parent who feels year-round hockey is necessary for her son's success, it mirrors Smith's notion of recent drastic changes as today's era of youth hockey is exclusive to those players either with two parents earning an income or one who is willing to save and sacrifice "everything."

Keane also comments on recent changes in Winnipeg's local hockey scene by highlighting a recently developed prep-school hockey academy:

> It's becoming a rich kid's sport, it really is. And I say that in a sense of, you look at the sport academies, the prep-school hockey academies, that are a real trend right now, that, to me, are probably going to replace AAA hockey…These prep-schools are really starting to take hold in Winnipeg this year, you know? Because now the top 13-year-olds…are now leaving the AAA program to go to the Shaftsbury prep-school that

> The Rink is running, you know? And these are top guys, these are some of the best of Winnipeg's 13's, are leaving AAA to pay 28-grand a year. AAA will cost them around six. The cost to play in that prep school is 28-grand. So, there's not low-income kids playing in that academy…and the way these sports schools are going right now, in the last six to seven years, they've gone way up. And the numbers of AAA have either flattened or gone down (Keane).

As Gerry James could not afford the 20-dollar registration fee for minor hockey, a local hockey academy consisting of the city's "top" 13-year-olds is only available to players with parents able to contribute $28,000 per year. Keane adds that those able to afford such costs primarily choose to participate in Winnipeg's prep-school hockey academy over AAA "because of travel." Unlike AAA minor hockey, he states the city's hockey academy travels across Western Canada as well as the United States to play against other prep-school programs. Mirtle (2013) notes it is these players travelling and participating in today's expensive prep-school programs that often "get noticed by scouts and drafted into the Canadian Hockey League, the NHL's primary feeder system in this country" (para. 16). As Keane indicates, "there's not low-income kids" receiving this exposure required to progress their hockey careers.

As Winnipeg hockey instructor Curt Ketchen notes, "there's so much hidden talent that we'll never know because they never got the opportunity…That's not fair. There's many kids that love the game but have been pushed away for financial reasons" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 127). John Gardner, president of the Greater Toronto Hockey League adds "the game has changed in this respect: It used to be that you had a right to play…now it's can you afford to pay" (cited in Mirtle, 2013, para 6). Unlike the experiences of the players in my study, it now appears today's specialized minor hockey landscape contains an exclusive group of upper-class youth participants with families/parents able to afford the costs required to develop their skills

and receive the necessary exposure for future hockey success (Dyck, 2013; Lunney, 2013; Mirtle, 2013; Turner, 2013).

The Business of Professional Sport

According Real (1998), "the world of sports in the age of mass media has been transformed from nineteenth century amateur recreational participation to late twentieth and early twenty-first century spectator-centered technology and business" (p. 14). Saini (2015), adds today's sport landscape is largely a result of a connection between "economic and technological change… Each has developed extensively and rapidly as a major global industry. Each plays a significant part in structuring and informing people's lives" (p. 320). In the post-Second World War period, changes in the media as well as the economics of hockey influenced the athletic decisions of male players in Winnipeg in different eras. We will see how both the media and the economics of modern sport have impacted the athletic aspirations and backgrounds of my participants, but did not come to influence early and year-round hockey participation until the 21st century.

Media

> Well I grew up listening to Foster Hewitt, and also admiring two hockey players in the national scene, Bill Ezinicki, who was from Winnipeg…and the other one was the Rocket, Rocket Richard. During the War years, in the 40s, it was the Rocket this and the Rocket that. So, every kid on the playground would say "I want to be the Rocket." And that was my goal, I wanted to be like those two NHL guys, I wanted to be like the Rocket and I wanted to be like Bill Ezinicki, to be able to do what they did (James).

When asked to describe how he first got started in hockey as a child, Gerry James claims his initial interest in the sport was directly due to the influence of the media. While also noting he never saw professionals play on television, he reveals how listening to the NHL's broadcasted games over the radio was common for children "on the playground" and resulted in his personal

aspirations to become a professional NHL player like the two men he idolized. However, as a multi-sport athlete, James also connects his internal drive of one day playing professional hockey and football simultaneously to the media: “I don’t know how I was driven, but I remember Foster Hewitt, and I remember listening to the Bomber games too.”

Although he only played one professional sport, Perry Miller also notes his interests and progression in hockey were partly a result of the media:

> When I was a kid, maybe even starting before 11, it was Saturday Night Hockey. We always watched Saturday Night Hockey…And when you start playing junior, and you start to see your name in the paper, you know? You go “look at that, my name is in the paper!” And the other guys come over to you and say this and that and they come watch you play junior once in a while. It sort of makes you feel good when that stuff happens, you know? (Miller).

Playing his junior hockey in Winnipeg, Miller credits the local media coverage to him receiving personal recognition for his athletic skills. In addition, he highlights the growing popularity of televised NHL games during the 1960s and reveals his Saturday night routine beginning around the same time he started playing organized hockey included watching CBC’s televised “Hockey Night in Canada” (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). This weekly ritual is one that Ray Neufeld shared and credits as impacting his future athletic ambitions:

> I watched, I was probably like every kid in Canada at the time, watching Hockey Night in Canada on TV with Danny Gallivan and Dick Irvin. I watched it all the time, and I’d dream about playing…that’s probably what influenced me, watching and listening to the pros…like that always made you want to make it to the pros, watching them play (Neufeld).

Like “every kid in Canada at the time,” Neufeld notes his aspirations to play professional hockey were cultivated by the media. Through televised NHL games, he could view the league’s

male participants and develop the goal to eventually become an NHL player (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Like James, however, he notes the media played a role in his participation in multiple sports as a youth:

> I would be playing in my driveway, and I remember I used to turn on the radio inside the garage and I'd listen to the Montreal Canadians or the Toronto Maple Leafs and I used to dream of playing in the NHL. But I did that with football too because I used to listen to the Bombers play all of the time and I'd be outside throwing the football around dreaming of that too. So, I mean hockey was my favorite but I used to just love being around any type of sport as a kid (Neufeld).

Listening to both NHL and CFL games during his childhood years, Neufeld again notes his future ambitions as well as his methods of play were influenced through the media. Although he dreamed of playing professional hockey, watching and listening to NHL games did not result in him having a single focus and approach to sport. This approach is more obvious in Dustin Boyd's background:

> With TV, the NHL always being on TV all the time growing up. Like, the biggest influence for me for sure was watching the NHL on TV growing up and watching NHL players…It's all you really want to play because it's on TV everywhere, so that's really all you want to do (Boyd).

Like Neufeld, Boyd's "biggest influence" in hoping that he would eventually play professional hockey came from watching NHL players on televised NHL games (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Unlike the other three players in this study, however, he notes the televised NHL coverage during his childhood years resulted in him strictly wanting to play hockey. Although Boyd failed to play hockey year-round as a youth, Ryan Smith contends that young boys today are exclusively playing and training for hockey because of the media:

> The media is influential, and kids are all over it…all over the TV, sports highlights, you know? TSN, they've got five channels now… and like

> tomorrow afternoon there's two hockey games of Junior evaluation camp on, Canada vs Finland and USA vs Sweden, on August the third. When I grew up, there was no hockey shown on TV from the Stanley Cup finals until the first regular season games. So, I mean there's a chance for more exposure and that. So, again, now these 10 or 11 or 12 and 13-year-olds turn on the TV tomorrow…and think "whoa, this has got to be a great thing, how do I get there? I got to train for hockey, I should be skating right now, I have to be at the rink," you know? (Smith).

Smith notes the increased availability and opportunity for young players to view hockey programs today. Highlighting his own experience with televised hockey games growing up in Winnipeg, Smith argues that thanks to the greater hockey publicity and coverage through television, local youth today can now view hockey events year-round. In doing so, Smith argues that young male players are now encouraged and influenced to specifically dedicate their time to hockey specific-participation and training. With an increased number of hockey programs and greater exposure through the media, Smith notes young males today feel they "have to be at the rink" rather than participating in other sports or activities. Young males from Winnipeg further feel the influence to play hockey, he argues, due to the attention the city's local NHL team is shown in the media:

> I think with the Jets back, the Jets have become very influential…now there's a goal for these kids, there's an achievable goal. And these kids will talk to you, kids are very confident at their age, they're going to tell you they're going to make the NHL, they're going to be a Jet…So, I think with the Jets, they can see it, they're living it, they see it on TV now, the Jets are everywhere. So, in Winnipeg, you've got this now, and that without question influences young kids…it's out there so much, the product is there, they can see it, it means something to them, it's important to them (Smith).

Smith demonstrates having a major professional sports team in the city has an impact on the lives of local young male hockey players today. As all four players in this study previously

noted their athletic decisions and future aspirations were influenced by listening to and watching professional NHL players, Smith argues seeing these local players on a regular basis now influences young Winnipeg boys to strictly focus on hockey. He also notes greater influence to exclusively participate in hockey as a result of social media:

> And social media is big now…teenagers, they see the tweets and everything. They see what the NHL players do, you know? Patrick Kane saying "just in the gym" or "just finished shooting 500 shots." Well now that young kid is going to go "Patrick Kane just took 500 shots, Patrick Kane is working out in the off-season, I should be doing that." So, I think media has a lot to do with it, you know? Kids nowadays are aware of it. They're buying into what the media is saying and showing what the NHL players are doing (Smith).

According to Smith, the athletic decisions of young boys today are influenced by having direct access to view and connect with today's NHL players' off-season training programs. This access and opportunity to observe NHL players training and participating in hockey activities year-round today directly influences younger players to strictly play and train for hockey. He suggests the media fails to display NHL players participating in other sports or activities. Rather, the media now shows that to have success in hockey, youth hockey players must partake in the year-round training methods like the very NHL players they watch and idolize. Current NHLer Tyler Seguin, who previously noted the increased skill level of teenage hockey players due to intensified training methods, connects today's hockey landscape to recent changes in social media. As Sawatzky (2017) notes:

> Seguin, 25, believes players coming into the NHL are way ahead of when he and his contemporaries were at when he entered the league. "I think with social media these days, there's just so much knowledge out there that kids are starting at 14, 15, by working out, eating properly, having confidence that leads to the NHL…they come in with a ton of confidence. That's why you're seeing our league change" (p. C1).

Like Smith, Seguin specifically connects the very recent changes in social media to the very recent changes in hockey development and current landscape of professional hockey. He argues social media is now granting younger players greater access to view the development and training methods of professional NHLers. This exposure has resulted in younger players directly learning through observing these professionals and allows them to enter the league far more prepared than players in previous years.

Keane adds to by arguing early male hockey specialization is "being driven by the media." His reasoning behind this claim relates to Dustin Boyd's experiences. Boyd notes: "and I mean, obviously you want to make good money and you could see they made good salaries, so that was always something to strive for." Unlike James, Miller, and Neufeld, Boyd's childhood years were the same era that Keane argues witnessed the ideas of hockey specialization originate in part because of the publicized and growing NHL player salaries.

The Changing Economics of Hockey

> I think the biggest change to me was when the salaries really started getting escalated, you know? There was a real opportunity for the young players to see, seeing a lot of the NHLers, I'm going to say through the mid-90s, when the salaries really started getting escalated, and that's probably when the idea of training and really focusing on hockey full-time or year-round began, you know? And not only were the players seeing the salaries getting escalated, but obviously the parents. And to me, the parents thought, you know, here's my nest egg right here, you know? And they thought, if I can really invest in my son's hockey training, there might be something for me down the road. And that's just my two cents of it, but I see a lot of parents thinking they're going to get something in the end. And not the kid's learning of new skills, learning the life skills of playing sports in a team environment, but they thought there was going to be some financial reward for them in the end (Keane).

When asked to describe how hockey has changed, particularly in terms of the expectations of young players training, Billy Keane points to the changing economics of the

NHL. Like Dustin Boyd, he argues that young players beginning in the mid-1990s saw the increased salaries which played a central role in motivating young male hockey players to adopt a full-time and specialized method of athletic development. Furthermore, Keane also notes the influence the NHL's escalated salaries had on the decisions of parents. Rather than promoting multiple-sport participation or considering the potential benefits acquired through playing competitive hockey, Keane argues parents began to encourage their sons to participate in hockey-specific programs year-round in the hopes of future financial success. Therefore, Keane argues the changing economics of the NHL created a potential reward system that influenced young boys and their parents to forgo other athletic opportunities and strictly play and train for hockey (Gould, 2010; Kaleth & Mikesky, 2010; Landers et al., 2010; Malina, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Mostafavifar et al., 2013; Wiggins, 1987).

Like Keane, Gerry James highlights his own career and suggests the current NHL salaries are largely responsible for influencing and impacting the athletic opportunities and decisions of young hockey players today:

> Dick Duffy was a 20-goal scorer, and he came up to me and said "how can I get a better contract? Because I'm not getting very much money." And I said "well, learn how to play football Dick, and you'll have some advantage." Because, that's the way it was. You had to have leverage or else you couldn't negotiate…like there's too much money now. Money drives the issue. See I loved playing both sports, but I did what I had to do to make a living. Because I wouldn't have been, or be given the opportunity to play both sports today, because the money would be too great. Like hockey and football in 1956-57 in Canada was equal, now it's not even close. So, I wouldn't be given the opportunity to do what I did back then (James).

A multi-sport athlete throughout his entire career, James points to the substantial contracts that today's NHL players receive as a determining factor for the current year-round hockey landscape. Like Keane, he argues young hockey players today are strongly influenced to

participate only in hockey because of the recent escalation in NHL player salaries. The smaller contracts that players during his era received enabled and influenced him to play multiple sports (and would have motivated his contemporaries to seek non-hockey employment in the off-season). Also, James again notes that playing both sports at the professional level was not done simply for the sake of enjoyment, but was necessary for him make a living. Therefore, his experiences not only show some NHL players during his career were unable to survive solely from their professional salaries, but that today's NHL salaries require hockey-specific participation. Similarly, Perry Miller adds:

> In pro hockey, you get a couple summer jobs because your wage back then doesn't carry you through the year, so you have to work. I sold cars for two summers and did stuff like that…and I wasn't alone, lots of guys were doing stuff like that. They'd do stuff that would off-set their income, you know? You have to remember when I started, I started with the Jets in 74…in 74 I had meeting with Rudy Pilous, he was the general manager of the Jets…Rudy calls me in and says "we're going to offer you a contract, it's 15-grand a year. You either take it or you go back to the east coast league." In the east coast league, I was making 165 bucks a week…so I said "well Rudy, that's really good but I always promised my parents I would buy them something with my first NHL pay cheque so I was hoping to get some kind of signing bonus." So, he goes "okay, two-grand to sign, 15-grand for the year, you take it or you leave it." I said "Rudy, where do we shake hands?" you know? "I'll take it." (Miller).

Like James, Miller illustrates a moment in his career that indicates the size of NHL salaries in the 1970s failed to influence players to train and participate in hockey year-round. Rather than off-season training, Miller's experiences demonstrate that salaries forced some players to find off-season occupations where they could earn an additional wage – and for some athletes this meant playing another sport, which impacted training regimes. Noting the value of his first-year contract along with giving his supportive parents his signing bonus, Miller's background is also evidence that some professional players in his era were unable to afford off-

season training. This perhaps indicates players of this time failed to recognize training as a critical component to earning such a salary. On the contrary, Ray Neufeld adds to Miller's experiences by noting:

> In the NHL, in the summer time I was fortunate enough that I didn't have to work. Except in my first year, they didn't pay me a lot of money because I played in the minor league, but I got a 10,000-dollar signing bonus. So that was like "wow" with that, you know? I bought a car with that. But yeah in the NHL, I didn't have to work in the summer, so we basically just had fun. You went out and had fun, you know? And did some training (Neufeld).

Unlike James and Miller, Neufeld reveals the growing NHL salaries throughout the 1980s allowed the league's participants to financially survive solely from their hockey skills (Morrow & Wamsley, 2013). These salaries enabled players to dedicate more time to socializing as well as partaking in off-season training that existed during his career. Retiring in 1990 however, Neufeld's career ended prior to the moment where Keane suggests a financial incentive to specifically train and focus on hockey year-round emerged.

At the same time that NHL salaries were escalating in the "mid-90s," Winnipeg's elite minor hockey system left the public sector and entered the private sector with the creation of spring hockey. While the schedule of the initial unregulated spring hockey system did not result in exclusive and year-round hockey participation, people began to profit from this off-season minor hockey program. Hockey parent Jamie Kagan describes the evolution and current landscape of the local spring hockey scene:

> When I started in spring hockey it was something people whispered about because Hockey Winnipeg back in the day had power…It was like a secret society. That's changed dramatically in the last decade… It's the wild, wild west…There's no organizing body. There's no rules. And it's now considered by some parents the most important part of their hockey life. I can't think of a sport where most of the money, time

> and heartbreak is completely unregulated. This is capitalism at its best…and its worst (cited in Turner, 2013, para 40-55).

In a story reminiscent of Dustin Boyd's background, Kagan notes that only a minimal number of spring hockey teams quietly operated outside of the public sector in the mid-1990s. However, a drastic growth of spring hockey teams, viewed as essential for future development and success, with increasingly demanding schedules, have originated over the last 10 to 15 years in Winnipeg. Keane adds:

> What people are doing is making a lot of money on spring hockey. It's a million-dollar business from Victoria to Newfoundland. I'm not here to slag anyone who wants to make a dollar, but their priority is making money at the expense of some hockey development, in my mind (cited in Pauls, 2014, para. 23).

Like Kagan, Keane highlights the privatization and commercialization of Canada's growing unregulated spring hockey system (Coakley, 2010). Whether parents can comfortably afford it or not, more people are profiting from the year-round hockey system as the number of spring hockey teams nation-wide has increased. Lett (2016) adds "the cost of many spring programs is, quite frankly, so high that it borders on madness. That is partly because these programs are ambitious, and partly because many of the programs are run like a business, where coaches and organizers are paid for their time" (para. 5). Turner (2013) argues these 8-to 13-year-old participants play in "tournaments that can reap organizers tens of thousands of dollars in just one weekend" (para. 8). Mike Loustel, who "helped pioneer spring hockey in Winnipeg in the mid-1990s" (Ibid, para. 130) adds:

> I think it's just a cash grab and horses--t to be honest with you…they (parents) are caught up in a trap: If you don't play spring hockey, you'll fall behind…It's so unhealthy for these kids to play 11 months a year. I saw it… I was one of the first to do it. That's why I had to step back and say this is wrong. We didn't know any better…Everyone wants their kid

> to be the next Jonathan Toews, the next Sid the Kid…It just snowballed. It's the parents, it's the ego, it's the big dream (cited in Turner, 2013, para 129-133).

Like Keane, Loustel indicates people are profiting from the misconception felt by parents that year-round hockey participation is necessary. Noting this method of development is detrimental to youth players, he argues it is the parents of Winnipeg's male minors who view the lucrative spring hockey business as essential for a potential NHL career. However, local financial benefactors of spring hockey also note a supposed increase in talent as well as a growing number of local players who advanced to the NHL courtesy of spring hockey beginning in the mid-1990s. Although noting the financial burden to participate, Winnipeg spring hockey organizer, Garth Lancaster, points to Winnipeg's professional male players:

> Every best kid plays spring hockey…There's no exception. You've got to…Look at the kids and you'll shake your head. On and on…Just go down the list of kids playing pro from Manitoba. What happened? Spring hockey exploded. No question. I saw it (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 84-139).

While profiting from spring hockey, Lancaster uses the presumed belief and success stories of local professionals to demonstrate the necessity of year-round hockey participation. It is these local success stories and the idea of keeping up with competition that Ryan Smith argues further influence parents to push their children, despite the financial costs, to partake in off-season hockey programs:

> The stories that are coming out now are the ones we hear like why this 17-year-old made this junior team, and why he got drafted. It's "well I went to three hockey schools and I trained in the off-season," you know? "My dad bought me a gym membership with a trainer so I was training all the time." So now when people hear that, its "well it worked for him, it should work for my son." …So, now it's "I'll sign him up for this shooting clinic now too, everybody else is doing it", or something, you know? (Smith).

Aside from unregulated spring hockey, Smith indicates the success stories of local players who participated in various off-season hockey programs have become well-known and influential. Parents are now persuaded and willing to register and pay for their children to participate in additional hockey programs. As parents view these stories as an athletic blue-print for their child to follow, Lancaster notes the demand for local year-round and off-season youth hockey programs has grown:

> It's one-upmanship… Who can we bring in to teach our kids to power-skate? Who can we bring in to help our kids shoot? They (parents) want an advantage. They want a leg up on the next kid. So, it's opened the door for a lot of people to come in and put programs together. If somebody brings in a $500 shooting camp, it's whacked. But I understand. They're not letting their kids get left behind (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 83).

Illustrating the large incomes being generated from the belief in the value of year-round hockey participation, Lancaster demonstrates the demand for off-season hockey programs is a result of today's ambitious hockey parents. As local hockey entrepreneurs are cashing in on the current hockey system, the city has witnessed a number of spring hockey teams, various off-season programs, as well as year-round hockey specific training facilities sprout up recent years (Lunney, 2015; Lunney, 2016; Turner, 2013).

However, these privately run off-season hockey programs have also influenced Hockey Manitoba to incorporate spring hockey under its jurisdiction. Due to regulation issues associated with spring hockey teams as well as the growth of local hockey entrepreneurs, executive director Peter Woods notes that the provincial governing body recently created an "alternate season" from April to July. Now, local 8- to 14-year-olds have the opportunity to register for Hockey Manitoba's regulated and structured spring hockey league instead of the business-like operated

"outlaw" teams (Lunney, 2016). In addition, there is a certain skill-level required to compete in this new minor hockey league as Woods notes "it's probably exclusive to the higher-end players" (cited in Ibid, para. 17).

It appears the evolution and privatization of youth hockey programs has placed Hockey Manitoba in an awkward situation. As they are attempting to solve the problems associated with the expensive and unregulated off-season minor hockey landscape, they also appear to be contradicting their "Better Athlete, Better Hockey Player" initiative (see chapter 4). Woods claims Hockey Manitoba is committed to the long-term athlete development model, yet the four-month spring hockey program reflects the idea that year-round and exclusive hockey participation is required by youth players (Lett 2016; Lunney 2016; Turner, 2013). In addition, Keane argues Hockey Canada has also become involved in today's profit-generating youth hockey scene:

> Hockey Canada is double dipping because they're getting registration fees from AAA teams, but they've also endorsed these prep-schools. So yeah, they've got a generic nine-stage model, they don't give a f--k where it comes from, or who promotes this model to young players, now that they've got certified sports schools, which is basically in direct competition with AAA (Keane).

Similar to entrepreneurs profiting from youth off-season hockey programs, Keane notes Hockey Canada appears to be putting financial incentives ahead of hockey development. Discrediting their "generic" player development model, Keane shows the expensive prep-school or AAA programs, that both demand full-time commitment from young players, are now generating profits for our country's national governing body for hockey. It appears the registration fees to compete in today's elitist, full-time, year-round and expensive minor hockey system are now also benefiting Hockey Manitoba and Hockey Canada. However, participating in

these programs are apparently necessary to eventually play in the CHL and NHL: two hockey leagues that also appear to be profiting from a system that now influences year-round and exclusive participation at younger ages (Sawatzky, 2017; Westhead, 2014; Wiecek, 2017). Former CHL team owner, Mario Forgione, argues that junior hockey teams across Canada have profited from their players:

> At Michigan State, a kid plays for the school and gets an education at the same time. In the OHL, he's not playing for his high school or university, he's playing for a for-profit entity completely outside the school (cited in Westhead, 2014, para. 38).

Forgione argues Canada's major junior hockey system operates as a business that prioritizes and generates financial profit from its young male hockey players. Rather than the student-athletes in the United States who receive a college education while playing hockey, he notes our nations top-level 16-to 20-year-olds are providing, and sacrificing, their talents to increase the amount of money made by the CHL and its teams owners. As Sawatzky (2017) notes, the CHL has earned profits of "hundreds of millions of dollars off amateur players" (p. C1) who are paid modest sums that "haven't changed substantially in 40 years" (p. C1) for playing within a system that they believe will get them to the NHL. Wiecek (2017) adds:

> Consider: of the 211 players taken at last year's NHL draft, 96 – 45 percent – came from the CHL. All of which is to say the CHL has been very, very good to the NHL and the NHL has serious vested interests in maintaining the fiction that junior players are 'amateur student athletes,' rather than the revenue generators for privately held hockey teams they actually are. The NHL has gotten a free ride for a long time now when it comes to player development, letting others absorb the monumental costs of developing young players while benefiting enormously when those players go on to become the league's biggest stars (Wiecek, 2017, p. C3).

Along with highlighting the CHL as the league's principal feeder system, Wiecek argues the NHL continues to make money from young players who are now encouraged to specifically and solely participate and focus on hockey. He shows the NHL, whose players primarily come from a full-time junior hockey system that strictly encourages hockey development, now at younger ages, is eventually profiting from the parents of players who are paying the expensive fees for elite-level year-round youth hockey programs. For it is now a league that Siegel (2016) suggests profits from the "youth movement" spawned by its own salary cap created in 2005. Discussing the current NHL landscape of today, he notes "the tremendous influx of youth is surely salary cap-related. Young players who can contribute right away come with cheap entry-level contracts, an effective tool for teams trying to squeeze under the cap" (p. D2).

Therefore, while simultaneously failing to receive an education and generating money for their respective CHL teams, today's "cheap" entry-level contracts are now awarded to the country's "student-athletes" who graduate from the profit-driven hockey landscape. As these contracts appeared to have triggered ideas of year-round and exclusive hockey participation 20 years ago, they are now shaping the very landscape we see today. However, the NHL is not the only organization profiting from today's year-round hockey system. But it is individuals working in all levels of competitive hockey that are financially benefiting and compelling early sport specialization. Turner (2013) summarizes the contemporary sport industry with a specific focus to hockey by noting:

> And while this is a story about hockey, it's symbolic of a cultural shift where - perhaps because of sports Darwinism or the multi-billion-dollar global marketplace - children (and parents) are pressured to specialize in sports full-time at younger and younger ages (para 26).

Similar to the original quotation by Billy Keane, Turner highlights the profit-driven sport landscape to illustrate why youth hockey players are now exclusively participating and training for hockey. Although the changing economics of hockey are partially responsible for the increasingly popular trend of early hockey specialization, the personal experiences of all six participants in this study reveal various factors have played a role in establishing today's era of hockey development. As their personal experiences indicate a gradual progression towards the current era, it is important to examine how these factors that are now influencing and enabling early hockey specialization are interconnected to better understand the contemporary hockey landscape.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

The two previous chapters discussed the data generated from secondary sources as well as the six semi-structured interviews with NHL hockey players and key informants with knowledge of the Canadian hockey system and youth hockey development. Together, the information presented aids in understanding the contemporary hockey landscape and helps to situate when and why early sport specialization originated for male hockey players in Winnipeg. This chapter analyzes how the material presented in chapters 4 and 5 are interconnected to further demonstrate the structures of Canada's competitive hockey system and the pressures currently surrounding early male hockey specialization. Based on this study's results, recommendations for future action are also provided. To conclude this thesis, implications for future research are presented.

Conclusions

> Kids play far too much. I mean, kids are playing 12 months a year, little ones. They don't need it. Play other sports. Have other coaches. Hang around other kids, other parents. I think that's all healthy…It's expensive for the parents, I don't think it's necessary. The only people who are making out are the organizers of these summer tournaments. The parents think their kids have to play for people to see them (cited in MacQueen, 2013, para 26).

In an interview with MacQueen (2013), former NHL defenceman Bobby Orr summarizes the current youth hockey landscape and recent changes in athletic participation among young hockey players across the country. Today's minor-age hockey players with professional aspirations are participating in expensive, profit-generating hockey programs year-round as their parents feel this method of athletic development is necessary for greater exposure and future on-ice success (Lett, 2016; Lunney, 2015; Lunney, 2016; Turner, 2013). Like Ryan Smith and Billy Keane, Orr

argues against hockey specialization at early ages in favour of playing multiple sports and encourages youth players to be involved in other athletic activities. However, as local on-ice instructor Dave Cameron notes, participating in other sports and developing hockey skills through play are no longer part of Winnipeg's youth hockey scene:

> It's different now. I think people are starting to maybe put more money into the development of their kids. There's all kinds of options for guys to do that stuff, it's more than just going out on the ice and playing. They almost feel they have to keep up with the Johnsons. They have to keep playing to make the tryouts at the next level (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 77-78).

Echoing Orr, Cameron highlights changes in athletic participation specifically among Winnipeg's young male players by noting the full-time local hockey landscape where costly year-round skill-development programs are offered and perceived to be necessary. As practicing hockey-specific skills in expensive programs rather than playing, or participating in other sports, has become demanded and expected by youth players, a year-round financial commitment surrounds a game whose participants no longer advance to the elite-levels through talent and effort alone. As one recent report notes:

> It's widely known that Canada's national winter sport is expensive to play. But various factors have conspired over the last 10 to 15 years to make minor hockey dramatically more expensive, pricing out many middle-class families. These days, more and more of the players that go on to play major junior, college and, ultimately, pro hockey are from wealthy backgrounds. It's a development that threatens the sport's blue-collar roots, including the idea that the next Gordie Howe or Wayne Gretzky will come from backgrounds as modest as theirs were. Players of modest means in this generation must beat out peers who are often better trained and have spent many more hours on the ice, thanks to wealthy parents…While there are still many examples of players of limited means who beat the odds and make the NHL, a sport that was once a true meritocracy is increasingly one where money talks (Mirtle, 2013, para. 4-7).

Like Smith and Keane, Mirtle (2013) notes drastic financial changes in the structure of minor hockey occurred around the turn of the 21st century. At this moment, a financial burden to play and train with the ambition of eventually competing in the elite-levels altered and limited the game's participants. Now, young players from upper-class households with parents earning multiple incomes have greater opportunities to develop the necessary hockey skills by participating in today's elite, full-time, and expensive year-round hockey system.

Mirtle (2013) argues hockey's "blue collar roots," exemplified by Gerry James's background, have vanished as it seems it would be almost impossible for a child today with one working-parent, unable to afford the minor hockey registration fee, to eventually progress to the NHL. James's personal history reflects Mirtle's notion that hockey was once a "true meritocracy" where male participants developed the necessary and affordable skills solely through playing a variety of sports that were in-season. As James notes, players "never did any training" during his athletic career. On the contrary, Keane argues training among youth hockey players has "evolved" to "become like a team training mentality, where you get a group of buddies in similar ability to sign up for a program, then motivate each other to work out together" (cited in Lunney, 2015, para. 15). Keane's brief description of training reflects the experiences of Perry Miller, Ray Neufeld, and Dustin Boyd whose personal stories reveal a gradual progression of hockey players playing multiple sports and training independently to focusing and training for hockey with others more intensively year-round at younger ages.

Similarly, Hockey Manitoba's Peter Woods reflects the experiences of the four players in my study as well as the current minor hockey landscape when he notes that young boys are now encouraged to begin playing organized hockey at earlier ages: "Once a player gets to seven or eight years old, it's probably too late for him to be introduced to the sport" (cited in Martin,

2015, p. C6). However, Woods also argues against hockey's current year-round system at the youth level and suggests that the contemporary game is a reflection of today's youth sport landscape: "we're not the only sport presented with the challenge of kids participating full-time" (cited in Turner, 2013, para. 30). Turner (2013) adds to this by noting "volleyball, basketball, swimming, soccer – almost any popular youth sporting activity, at least at the elite-level – now demands a commitment of time and money that a generation ago would have been considered unfathomable" (para. 31). "But since this is Canada" he adds, "a place where the desire for success in hockey is buried somewhere in the DNA, the game will always serve as a picture window into an evolving society…indeed if hockey is a religion in Canada, then spring hockey – or the emphasis to play or train year-round – has become a belief system" (Ibid, para. 32-140).

The experiences of James, Miller, Neufeld, and Boyd indicate a progression towards such a "belief system." Their personal stories reflect an evolution towards early hockey specialization as well as the increasing costs, time commitment, and parental involvement for the purpose of their son's (or sons') hockey development. As Billy Keane notes, the changing economics of NHL salaries triggered the onset of year-round training and full-time commitment by hockey players approximately 20 years ago. His approximation of the mid-1990s correlates with Neufeld's experiences with training in that it was at this time when the "idea" of year-round hockey-specific participation and training originated. However, these ideas took approximately 5 to 10 years to filter through the hockey system as early hockey specialization originated by the onset of the 21st century.

It was this moment when the NHL's lucrative contracts and different media platforms created and showcased a system that influenced year-round and exclusive hockey participation at the youth level. Adults also demanded more time commitment from young players with

families/parents able or willing to afford the costs to specifically play and train for hockey. In doing so, it appears the skill-level of today's limited number of elite-level players has increased as the contemporary game has become younger and faster. Yet, the detriments associated with sport specialization are extensive in today's hockey scene while players are also failing to achieve a foundation of athleticism, potentially limiting their future on-ice success. "A complicated issue," as Keane notes, appears to accurately describe the era of athletic development for current youth hockey players that originated approximately 10 to 15 years ago. However, the factors that led to early hockey specialization in Winnipeg are all intertwined as they appear to be compelling younger players to pursue a system that has come to limit their life choices at earlier ages:

> Like I really believe, I think sometimes, hockey hurt me, you know? It took away some education, it took away some working years of my life…and people ask me about what I think about the money these days and all that stuff. I have no problem with telling them what I made, you know? I made 15-grand, bought myself a new car, but I took payments on it. But, it was that or take 165 and ride the bus, you know? The options were narrow (Miller).

While Gerry James played professional hockey in a time where he was able and felt required to also play professional football to "make a living," Perry Miller notes he had limited options when it came to pursuing a professional hockey career. He played a sport that "hurt" him in a time when the schedules became demanding, salaries were minimal, and opportunities to advance and survive from hockey skills were "narrow." Failing to achieve an education as well as work experience, Miller's personal history reveals an era where Canadian hockey players participated in numerous sports at the youth level, but unlike Gerry James, were forced to sacrifice other opportunities to seek a career solely as a hockey player. This pursuit was also shown through Ray Neufeld's personal experiences:

> You know it's funny, and no disrespect to these folks, but my English teacher and my guidance counsellor actually tried to discourage me from playing hockey. They'd say "are you sure you want to play?" I mean because I was at best an average student, so they were trying to get me more focused on my education. But I was already at that point focused on being a hockey player, personally. So, not that they were pressuring me, they were just trying to get me to focus on other things besides hockey. And I said "no, no. I really like hockey, so that's what I'm going to do" (Neufeld).

Like Miller, Neufeld was focused on "being a hockey player," in his final year of high school and sacrificed an education to pursue his dream of playing in the NHL. Reflecting the NAC (1967) and the Task Force Report (1969), his high school educators encouraged him to focus on education and "other things besides hockey." Neufeld's ambitions and background indicate a time when hockey players participated in other activities at the youth level, yet felt compelled to choose a path that required them to set other interests aside with the onset of junior hockey. As shown by Dustin Boyd, these actions by hockey players now appear to be occurring at younger ages:

> I knew I didn't want to go to college, and the MJ wasn't as good as the WHL, so I knew around then, around 14 after I was drafted, that to progress my hockey career with the goal of playing in the pros, I had to go to the WHL…but looking back I might have gone to college, maybe done the college route in the States. Because you go to school while you're playing hockey, so you're getting your education at the same time, it's a good system. Like for me, I guess I'm pretty lucky that hockey worked out. Because in the Western league, you just focus on hockey. There's not much time for anything else like school, you know? So, I would have started school later, at a later age, compared to the college guys in the States (Boyd).

Like Miller and Neufeld, Boyd had no time for other interests and activities while he was in junior hockey. However, he established specific ambitions following the junior hockey bantam draft as he knew at that point that he would be setting education aside until the future in order to

pursue a professional hockey career. As he had already given up other sports at the age of nine to solely play hockey, Boyd's experiences reveal an era where the changing structures of competitive hockey as well as the influence of adults began to direct younger players to exclusively focus on the sport in the hopes of future success. Although he was not required to play multiple professional sports to "make a living" like James, failed to claim hockey "hurt" him like Miller, nor was he persuaded to "focus on other things besides hockey" like Neufeld, Boyd admitted to being "pretty lucky that hockey worked out" due to his specific approach to sport beginning at a younger age. Reflecting the good fortunes noted by Boyd, Mario Forgione argues CHL owners:

> have abandoned some players who don't make it to the NHL and need help transitioning to a life after hockey… "Does the league wash their hands of them and say we are done with them? Yes. This is what they do," he said. "Players are a disposable commodity. The league has a social responsibility to look after these kids, but a lot of [former CHL players] haven't even finished Grade 12. Then what happens? Minimum wage jobs. They say: Here's your education package, God bless you, off you go…A lot of players fall through the cracks…What happens after they play four years, they're 21. How many guys are going back to school at that point?... I don't know how you consider them student athletes if you're not guaranteeing them an education." (cited in Westhead, 2014, para. 1-38).

Pointing to the business-like CHL, a league with the historic reputation as the primary feeder system for the NHL and in which participation is viewed as necessary to advance to the NHL, Forgione elaborates on the experiences of the four players in my study. As all four participants played in the NHL, they developed from a junior system that specifically encourages athletic success at the expense of academic development. Although they all compromised their education in favour of an athletic career, the experiences of James, Miller, Neufeld, and Boyd

show a gradual progression of increasingly forgoing both academic and athletic endeavours to pursue a system that hinders off-ice development at earlier ages.

Gruneau and Whitson (1993) argue that "from the time they formulate the ambition to be hockey stars, young players usually have to focus on hockey to such an extent that other interests and talents remain undeveloped and perhaps unknown" (p. 123). However, it appears these unknown interests and talents are being sacrificed at younger ages due to the factors associated with early hockey specialization that originated approximately 10 to 15 years ago. The current organized minor hockey system is one that now limits young hockey players' opportunities to have other options in life with the ambition to become a professional hockey player. The pursuit of such a career, Hockey Canada CEO Tom Renney argues, has consumed and mislead those in today's contemporary hockey landscape: "the mistake we make is in equating success in life by whether or not youngsters who play hockey now actually make it to the NHL" (cited in Seravalli, 2015, para. 3). Smith adds to this by offering advice to NHL-driven parents with sons playing hockey in the current year-round system:

> You have to know what your kid is and you have to know that not every kid is going to make it to the NHL. Not every kid is going to play junior or junior A, not every kid is even going to play AA, you know? But I think as along as your kid plays hockey until the furthest he can play and has fun, I mean it's a great sport, you can still have fun with your buddies, you can still get some exercise, there's so many great things about the game. But I think there's too much pressure on making this team or being the best or scoring this many goals, and that all has a lot to do with mom and dad (Smith).

Like Keane, Smith argues that the potential benefits acquired through playing competitive hockey are being overshadowed by the ambition of parents striving for their son's future NHL success. Highlighting the difficulty of eventually playing in the NHL, as well as the structure of organized hockey in Canada, the current hockey scene resembles nothing of Gerry

James's playing days. The game has changed to one where youth players are encouraged to forgo other opportunities and pursue a system that now demands full-time and year-round commitment at younger ages. An interconnected system exists that limits the choices of young players participating in a game that has become a professionalized industry at the youth level. Although this system has recently emerged, Gordon (2016) argues it has shaped the contemporary hockey landscape and resulted in the loss of a game that was once played by children primarily for the purpose of enjoyment: "maybe we've lost sight of the forest for the trees, letting hockey become an industry. We should remember it's a game, and let kids play and learn through play" (para. 20).

Recommendations

> It's getting totally out of control…It's a crazy world. It's professionalized. And I think this really has to come to people's attention that it has to be dialled back. Everything" (Derek Popke in Mirtle, 2013, para. 18).

President of the Vancouver Hockey School, Derek Popke, "who deals with overzealous parents dreaming of their children making the NHL" (Mirtle, 2013, para. 18), illustrates and appears to argue the necessity of implementing alternatives for today's youth hockey landscape. While Popke points to the dramatically rising costs and demanding schedules of the contemporary minor hockey system, he highlights the significance of policy change as well as educating people to prevent the noticeable problems now associated with "Canada's game."

Based on the findings from this study, four alternatives need to be implemented for Winnipeg's and Canada's youth hockey system. First, reflecting Popke, parents need to be educated on the detriments of sport specialization and the benefits of sport diversification at the youth level. As it appears they are the individuals playing a key role in today's era of specialized

youth hockey development, Hockey Manitoba must implement a program to inform local parents of this matter. To their credit, Hockey Manitoba and Hockey Winnipeg have recently incorporated a mandatory "Respect in Sport" online course for local hockey parents to complete prior to attending their child's hockey games for upcoming seasons (Schroeder, 2014; Turner, 2014). Created to educate parents on proper behavior at minor hockey games, this program could potentially incorporate information from this study as well. Echoing Billy Keane and Ryan Smith, Bobby Orr again argues today's ambitious parents overshadow the benefits of participating in organized minor hockey by noting "parents have to understand: 0.0057 percent of all kids playing hockey, that's the number of players who play one game in the NHL. So why is your kid playing? Why are you coaching? Why are you referring? To make better people" (cited in MacQueen, 2013, para, 22). Therefore, parents of young minor hockey players today need to be fully aware of the difficult odds of playing in the NHL, recent changes in the youth hockey landscape, and research on youth athletic development.

Second, a policy needs to be in place to prevent minor hockey coaches from encouraging minor-aged players to strictly participate in hockey. As Billy Keane notes, Winnipeg's minor hockey coaches are now pressuring their players, at the peewee level, to give up playing other sports and dedicate their time and athletic aspirations specifically to hockey. Upon granting these individuals the opportunity to coach minor-aged teams, local hockey governing bodies need to inform volunteer coaches that they are in no way allowed to demand their players to stop playing other forms of organized sport during their hockey seasons.

Thirdly, the WHL needs to alter its development strategies for young male players aspiring to play major junior hockey. As Friesen (2016) argues, "there's no denying that the WHL draft is a crapshoot" (para. 7) due to the unpredictability of a 14-year-old player's future

hockey skills and development. However, “of all of the major junior leagues” he adds, “they (WHL) easily have the toughest recruitment job because it’s often not as simple as convincing a player to move three or four hours away from mom and dad. In some instances, players are moving as far as 2,500 km away from home” (para. 5). Therefore, the bantam age draft appears to be necessary for recruitment and participating in the league is viewed as a crucial step for players with dreams of the NHL. However, the WHL draft is now also playing a large role in influencing young male players, and their parents, to solely focus on hockey year-round at younger ages while its participants need assistance preparing for life away from hockey. As Mario Forgione argues, “the league has a social responsibility to look after their kids” (cited in Westhead, 2014, para. 38). The WHL needs to be aware of the pressures surrounding players at the youth level while each team’s Education Advisor must develop adequate methods to support their players who fail to make it to the NHL.

Finally, Hockey Canada must develop a new long-term player development model that needs to be adopted and promoted by local hockey governing bodies. The current LTPD model boldly promotes research linked to early sport specialization, openly acknowledges “early hockey specialization is demanded” (Hockey Canada, 2015, p. 11), and fails to include detailed off-season guidelines for player development. In every age-specific chart of the LTPD model, information is missing throughout the months of May, June, July, and August for hockey players. Although the current model emphasizes a gradual progression from participating in a variety sports towards eventually and gradually focusing solely on hockey-specific skills and participation, a newer model must be constructed to inform players, parents, and coaches of adequate year-round development strategies in every age category to prevent the detriments associated with early sport specialization currently occurring with youth hockey players.

Future Research

The conclusions from this study add knowledge to the topic of early sport specialization, with a particular emphasis on male hockey players from Winnipeg, and suggest the need for more research on sport specialization and the landscape of youth sport. The importance of studying youth sport from a historical perspective is a crucial component to better understanding the reasons for early sport specialization. Future studies could expand the scope of this specific research topic by including the voices of individuals who now appear to play a significant role in the athletic decisions and development of young hockey players: parents. Also, as time and proximity limitations delimited this study to include interviewing male hockey players and key informants as well as collecting secondary material strictly from Winnipeg, expanding this study design to include all provinces and territories in the country would help in developing a better narrative of male hockey specialization throughout the rest of Canada.

Also, examining early sport specialization from a historical perspective in other sports and locations besides male hockey players from Winnipeg may provide other relevant information in the context of youth sport and early specialization. For instance, looking at other countries that appear to have a rich history and connection with a sport other than hockey and are known for producing elite-level athletes in their respective sports would add to literature to this topic. Perhaps other countries are experiencing high levels of youth burnout in their most well-known sports due to earlier specialization. In that case, similar methods from this study could be incorporated to examine the historical shifts in athletic development and analyze if and why other countries are also seeing youth athletes quitting sport at younger ages today.

Furthermore, this topic could be expanded to look at other athletes besides male hockey players in Winnipeg. Although the city, as well as the country, are well-known for producing

NHL players, male athletes from Canada have gone on to play at the professional level in other sports besides men's hockey. It would be interesting to examine the socio-historical changes and personal experiences of former and current professional male athletes in other professional sports outside of men's hockey and compare those results to the data in my study. As this study had a specific focus to men's hockey, it is not clear if the findings apply in the context of other sports and athletes in the city and country.

In addition, the findings from my study that analyzed socioeconomic status primarily focused on the rising costs to participate in organized hockey in post-Second World War Canada. Future studies examining the relation of socioeconomic status and hockey development could go beyond the financial component of hockey. On that note, it would be interesting to continue this study and analyze future changes as the cost to participate in Winnipeg's minor hockey system has drastically increased in recent years. As Billy Keane notes, the trend of local players participating in expensive hockey prep-schools is rising and could potentially replace AAA hockey. Based on his comment, and the amount of recent changes in the local hockey scene, analyzing future financial developments in Winnipeg's elite-levels of minor hockey would continue to add information to hockey specialization.

Also, as this study found early hockey specialization originated by the turn of the 21st century, it failed to include the experiences of a hockey player who participated in minor hockey at this time. Although the four hockey players included in this study provided insight into the gradual progression towards sport specialization, the experiences of a player who played and trained for hockey year-round at the youth level is missing. Including the voice of a player with first-hand experience in today's youth hockey landscape would add relevant literature to this topic.

This study also focused on hockey as opposed to athletes participating in an individual sport. It can be argued that team sports provide athletes with additional opportunities to experience socializing in group settings as opposed to athletes who primarily train and compete by themselves. In this sense, examining the impacts, influences and pressures associated with early sport specialization while comparing team and individual sport athletes could also add significant information to this topic.

Another area that requires attention is that this thesis specifically focused on male hockey players. Although several reasons were provided to justify this decision, this study could potentially be applied to female youth as there has been a recent growth of female minor hockey participants in Winnipeg along with a newly established Canadian Women's Hockey League. As they fail to share the same history in competitive hockey as males, it could potentially be more difficult to historicize shifts in female hockey specialization. However, as it appears year-round and exclusive hockey participation at the youth level for males originated over the last 10 to 15 years, it would be interesting to apply this method of study for female hockey players and to then use this data as comparison. Also, reflecting the idea of studying other male professional athletes, a similar study could also be applied to other female athletes besides female hockey players in the country to add literature to early sport specialization.

This specific study looked at former and current professional hockey players with experience participating in Canada's junior hockey system and eventually the NHL. Perhaps examining sport specialization for those athletes who developed in such a way but were unsuccessful in terms of eventually competing at the professional level would also shine light to this topic. Although recruitment would be difficult, it would be interesting to examine former male players in Winnipeg who specialized in hockey but failed to make a living as a hockey

participant. This could perhaps add relevant information to potential and various detriments associated with early sport specialization. On this note, perhaps this study could also be applied to include the experiences of hockey players from Winnipeg who participated in the U.S. NCAA system prior to advancing to the NHL. The experiences of these players could be then compared to those players from my study to further analyze the differences and influences of the Canadian hockey system and the NCAA in terms of on and off-ice development.

Overall, information from the review of literature, secondary research, perspectives of former and current professional hockey players with NHL experience, along with key informants with specific knowledge in youth hockey development reveals that early sport specialization has a very recent history within the context of male hockey players in Winnipeg and Canada. Despite the various negative consequences associated with this method of development from physiological, psychological, and sociological perspectives, using an historical approach to study early male hockey specialization in Winnipeg allowed me to understand the reasons why this athletic trend has become increasingly popular.

This brings us back to our original elite-level minor hockey player from Winnipeg mentioned at the outset of this thesis: Riley Stotts. The now 17-year-old listed prospect for the 2018 NHL draft, Stotts appears to be currently fulfilling his destiny that began around the age of nine as he is now a "WHL guy" playing for the league's Swift Current Broncos. Once again, congratulations are in order for Riley as participating in this league at such an age as well as being labelled a future NHL draft pick are tremendous accomplishments on their own. As an athletic enthusiast with specific knowledge of Canada's hockey systems, I commend Riley and sincerely hope he goes on to have a successful career both on and off of the ice. And perhaps selecting his story as an example of youth sport specialization was unfair as his athletic

background and other potential interests are unknown. Similar to this historical research study, Riley's limited available background leaves unanswered questions and fails to illustrate the complete story of early hockey specialization. Nevertheless, his story shows a young, talented hockey player, who was viewed by his parent as a future "WHL guy" before he even had the opportunity to celebrate his 10th birthday. His story appears to reflect the current trend of athletic development among youth male hockey players in Winnipeg and across Canada, as well as highlights the forces that shape contemporary youth sport. Like the current era and landscape of youth hockey, his story reveals children today are now influenced to pursue a single sport, forgoing other opportunities, to achieve athletic success.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for former and current NHL players

1. Can you tell me about how you got started in hockey? (Probe: How old were you when you first started playing?)

2. Can you tell me about any other sports you played growing up and how old you were when you played them?

3. How old were you when you stopped playing other sports to strictly play hockey? (Probe: What influenced you to make that decision? Did your hockey schedule ever become so demanding that you no longer had time to participate in other sports?)

4. Did you ever feel pressure to strictly play hockey? (Probe: If so, how old were you? From who?)

5. Did you ever feel pressure to play in the NHL? (Probe: If so, how old were you? From who?)

6. Can you walk me through what your hockey seasons were like as a minor hockey player, junior hockey player, and while in the NHL? (Probe: Did you do other activities?)

7. Can you walk me through what your summers or off-seasons were like as a minor hockey player, junior hockey player, and while in the NHL? (Probe: Did you ever play summer hockey or participate in spring/summer hockey camps. Did you ever take part in any sort of off-season training specifically for hockey? If so, when? Why?)

8. Were you ever counselled to believe that playing and training for hockey year-round would help you make a better player or make it to the NHL? (Probe: If so, when? From who?)

9. Can you tell me anything about your family or home environment which might have influenced your becoming a hockey player? (Probe: Did this ever influence you to strictly focus on hockey?)

10. Can you tell me anything about how growing up in Winnipeg may have influenced your progression and desire to be a hockey player?

11. When you played hockey, was there anything about living in Canada that influenced or motivated you to become a hockey player?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for key informants

1. Can you describe your background in hockey and current role within Winnipeg's and Canada's hockey system? (Probe: Why did you get involved in this line of work?)

2. In your history with the sport, can you describe how you think hockey has changed, especially in terms of the expectations around player training? (Probe: When did these changes happen?)

3. Based on what you just said, in your opinion do you think off-season training such as spring/ summer hockey and off-ice training is necessary for young players in terms of eventually competing at the elite level? (Probe: Why or why not?)

4. Can you talk about what you think the ideal progression as a hockey player in terms of player development should be? (Probe: For instance, Hockey Canada promotes a 9-stage player development model and each stage represents a different age and different point in developing the player. How do you think the progression should be in terms of playing various sports to eventually specializing in hockey if the goal is to play in the NHL?)

5. Based on what you just said, do you think it is better athletes that will eventually play in the NHL or better hockey players? (Probe: Why/ why not? Has this changed over the years?)

6. Can you describe what you think is influencing young players to play and train exclusively for hockey? (Probe: When did this start happening? How is this/are they influencing them?)

7. Can you describe any pressure you see on young players in terms of the Canadian hockey system? (Probe: Do you think this pressure influences young players to strictly play and train for hockey? If so, how?)

8. Can you describe the role of parents in terms of hockey player development? (Probe: How are they involved/influential in terms of their kids playing hockey?)

9. Can you describe the type of young players you see today playing and training for hockey in terms of socio-economic status? (Probe: Has this changed over time?)

10. Can you tell me anything about how living in Winnipeg or Canada may influence or effect hockey development for young players?

11. Can you tell me anything about how living in Winnipeg or Canada may influence young players to specialize and train exclusively for hockey?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share on this topic?

Appendix C: Participant Information

Participant #1
Name: Gerry James
Role: Former NHL player
Years active in the NHL: 1954-1960
Years (in decades) active in hockey: 1940s-1960s

Participant #2
Name: Perry Miller
Role: Former NHL player
Years active in the NHL: 1977-1981
Years (in decades) active in hockey: 1960s-1980s

Participant #3
Name: Ray Neufeld
Role: Former NHL player
Years active in the NHL: 1979-1989
Years (in decades) active in hockey: 1970s-1990s

Participant #4
Name: Dustin Boyd
Role: Former NHL player
Years active in the NHL: 2006-2011
Years (in decades) active in hockey: 1990s-current

Participant #5
Name: Ryan Smith
Role: Key informant
Current Occupation: Western Hockey League Assistant Coach/ Part-time hockey instructor

Participant #6
Name: Billy Keane
Role: Key informant
Current Occupation: Manitoba Junior Hockey League Head Coach/ Full-time hockey instructor

Appendix D: Participant Recruitment Letter

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2

Research Project Title: The Early Specialization in Hockey of Professional NHL Players from Winnipeg

Principal Investigator: Brent Poplawski, Home # (204) [redacted], Cell # (204) [redacted], umpoplab@myumanitoba.ca

Research Supervisor: Dr. Russell Field, Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management, (204) 474-8312, russell.field@umanitoba.ca

My name is Brent Poplawski and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at the University of Manitoba and my advisor is a faculty member. I am conducting research on the topic of early sport specialization, with a specific focus on male National Hockey League (NHL) players from Winnipeg, as a part of my Master's degree. This research project will consist of interviewing two groups:

1. Former and current NHL hockey players from Winnipeg

2. Key informants with knowledge on Winnipeg's hockey system and athlete development

This participant recruitment letter has been sent to you electronically as you are an individual with experience playing in the NHL or have knowledge in Winnipeg's hockey system and athlete development. I would like to interview you about your experience. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete one face to face interview that will take about 60 minutes and to review the typed transcript of that interview, which will take approximately 30 minutes. These interviews will be used to gain knowledge about both the personal experiences and expectations for young hockey players from Winnipeg in different time periods. This will help in understanding when, how, and why youth sport specialization has become so prominent for young hockey players. The interview will focus on your memories of athletic involvement in Winnipeg and will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview questions asked will focus on your background and your experience with hockey, where and when this took place, and your overall memories of sport/physical activity.

Each interview will be audio recorded using a small digital audio recorder to allow for the subsequent transcription of each interviewee's observations while I may also take notes during the interview. This material will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored during the duration of this study. The digital recorder and interview notes will be stored in a

locked filing cabinet, to which I have the only key, at my personal residence. All digital files generated by the interviews (e.g., transcripts) will be saved on a USB drive stored in the same filing cabinet as well as on the hard drive of a computer that is password protected (a password that only I know). You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your interview within six to eight (6-8) weeks of the interview. Your feedback is requested within three (3) weeks' time, after which it will be assumed that revisions are not needed.

You will have the option to review, verify, and if necessary modify your comments by adding or deleting any material. Only I will have access to the primary data. All audio recordings, observation notes, and transcription notes will be destroyed in December, 2018. The recorded interviews will be deleted from the audio recording device while all digital files will be deleted from hard drives and any other electronic storage devices. Paper records will be shredded.

Please be assured that you are under no obligation to participate in an interview. If you do choose to participate, you may at any time during the interview refuse to answer any question(s), stop the interview at any time, or withdraw without penalty from the study. I will also provide you with a brief list of available support services and their contact information should you feel the need to contact them. You will be free to raise questions or concerns with myself throughout the interview and will have the opportunity to view the transcript of your interview before the completion of this study. You will be given the option to choose whether you want to be identified within the study and its published results either by your name or by pseudonym. If you choose the latter, any details that might be used to identify you directly will be removed from the transcript and your name will not be used in the published study.

Although the findings of this study will not benefit you directly, by participating you will be contributing to the production of new knowledge about Canada's sporting landscape and highlight potential reasons for early sport specialization.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122, or e-mail at humanethics@umanitoba.ca.

I am hopeful that you will be interested in participating in this study. If you are, could you please get back to me by phone (Home: 204-[redacted], Cell: 204-[redacted]) or email (umpoplab@myumanitoba.ca) and we will arrange a time and location to meet at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Brent Poplawski

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management

Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Canada R3T 2N2

Research Project Title: The Early Specialization in Hockey of Professional NHL Players from Winnipeg

Principal Investigator: Brent Poplawski, Home # (204) [redacted], Cell # (204) [redacted], umpoplab@myumanitoba.ca

My name is Brent Poplawski and I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology and Recreation Management at the University of Manitoba and my advisor is a faculty member. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This is a graduate student level research project which seeks to determine the post-Second World War socio-historical factors in Canada that resulted in youth being encouraged or feeling pressured to pursue a certain sport, forgoing other athletic opportunities, as a means to achieve elite level success. This study historicizes the shift in youth sport in the post-Second World War period in Canada, with a specific focus on male National Hockey League (NHL) players from Winnipeg, to better understand the reasons for early sport specialization and the forces that shape contemporary children's and youth sport.

It has become increasingly popular among today's youth athletes to specialize in one particular sport at earlier ages in order to compete at the highest levels. Although early sport specialization has not been proven to lead to elite level success, a growing trend in Canada is year-round participation in hockey amongst young players while neglecting to participate in other sports/forms of physical activity. Simultaneously, the number of youth male hockey participants has decreased in recent years across the country, including Winnipeg. This project will help in understanding the socio-historical factors that have resulted in increasing rates of early specialization and contextualize the growing rates of youth male hockey players quitting the game. It is important that we understand when, why, and how hockey specialization became a popular method of player development in Canada in order to potentially prevent the growing numbers of youth player burnout.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete one face to face interview that will take about 60 minutes and to review the typed transcript of that interview, which will

take approximately 30 minutes. Each interview will focus on your memories of athletic involvement in Winnipeg and will be scheduled at a time and place that is convenient to you. The questions asked will focus on your background and your experience with hockey, where and when this took place, and your overall memories of sport/physical activity.

Each interview will be audio recorded using a small digital audio recorder to allow for the subsequent transcription (by myself) of each interviewee's observations while I may also take notes during the interview. This material will only be used for research purposes and will be securely stored during the duration of this study. The digital recorder and interview notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, to which I have the only key, at my personal residence. All digital files generated by the interviews (e.g., transcripts) will be saved on a USB drive stored in the same filing cabinet as well as on the hard drive of a computer that is password protected (a password that only I know). You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of your interview within six to eight (6-8) weeks of the interview taking place. You will have the option to review, verify, and if necessary modify your comments by adding or deleting any material. Your feedback is requested within three (3) weeks' time, after which it will be assumed that revisions are not needed.

You will be given the option to choose whether you want to be identified within the study and its results either (i) by your name or (ii) by pseudonym (see below). If you choose this second option, any details discussed during the interview that might be used to identify you directly will be removed from the transcript and your name will not be used in the study. If you choose to waive this right, you will be asked for a second time, after you have read your transcribed interview, if you would like to continue to be identified by your name or if you would prefer to revise your decision and be identified by pseudonym. You have this option of waiving confidentiality because you are over the age of 18 and have the right to be identified by your name if you so choose. Also, you are well known professional that has achieved elite status as a hockey instructor/coach or professional athlete and this gives you the opportunity to share your name and the path you pursued to career success with the public. However, the potential risk of waiving confidentiality is the fact that you are a public figure and may not want your actual name associated with what you discuss as your past experiences or opinions could potentially become public knowledge.

Only you, myself, and the research supervisor will have access to the research data. You will have access to the transcription of your interview, the research supervisor will have access to the anonymized data, while only I will have access to the original recorded material. All audio recordings, observation notes, and transcription notes will be destroyed in December, 2018. The recorded interviews will be deleted from the audio recording device while all digital files will be deleted from hard drives and any other electronic storage devices. Paper records will be shredded.

You are under no obligation to participate in an interview. If you do choose to participate, you will be free to raise questions or concerns with myself throughout the interview and will have the opportunity to view the transcript of your interview, if you wish, before the completion of this

study. You may withdraw from this study at any time, by notifying the me, and all paper and digital records of your participation will be destroyed.

You will not be subjected directly to any physical or emotional risks beyond the most minimal risks. While there is a potential that discussing your personal history and experiences of athletics in this setting may be connected with uncomfortable memories, you should be assured that you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer nor would you be expected to divulge any information that you are not comfortable sharing. If you do feel discomfort at any time, we can pause or stop the interview. Please remember you do not have to answer any question you do not want to and have the option to withdraw from the study at any time. Also, if you do become upset or feel discomfort, below is a list of available support services with telephone numbers and addresses if you feel the need to contact them:

- Klinic Community Health (204) 784-4090, 870 Portage Ave, Winnipeg, MB R3G 0P1

- University of Manitoba Psychological Service Centre (204) 474-9222, 161 Dafoe Building, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5V5

- Youville Community Health Resource Centre (204) 255-4840, 6-845 Dakota St, Winnipeg, MB R2M 5M3

Although the findings of this study will not benefit you directly, by participating you will be contributing to the production of new knowledge about Canada's sporting landscape and highlight potential reasons for early sport specialization. The findings of the study will contribute to my master's thesis. As such, the analysis of transcript data as well as any direct quotations included within the thesis will be shared with my supervisor and members of the advisory committee and then be publicly available after the successful defense of the thesis. If you would like to receive a brief (1-3 pages) summary of the findings, they will be provided to you no later than December, 2016.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact the Human Ethics Coordinator at 204-474-7122, or by e-mail at humanethics@umanitoba.ca. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

_____

Participant's Signature Date

_____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature Date

1. Please indicate how you would like to be identified within this study:

□ By name: _____ □ By pseudonym: _____

Note: You have the option to revise your preference when you review the transcript of this interview.

2. Please indicate how you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcript for review:

□ Email: _____

□ Post: _____City:_____ Postal Code:_____

3. If you would like to receive a summary of the findings of this research, please indicate the method by which you would like this delivered to you:

□ Email: _____

□ Post: _____City:_____ Postal Code:_____