
The International Hockey League and the Professionalization of Ice Hockey, 1904-1907

By Daniel S. Mason

FACULTY OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RECREATION
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Today, the sport of ice hockey in North America is dominated by its premier circuit, the National Hockey League (N.H.L.). However, at the beginning of this century, the sport had only begun its transformation into a commercially driven spectacle, which, according to Gruneau and Whitson, now sells everything from beer to national identity.¹ Emerging during a period of rapid urbanization and industrialization in Eastern Canada, hockey underwent significant developments through the final decades of the nineteenth century, as more leisure opportunities for Canadians helped make hockey Canada's favorite winter sport.³ It was within this context that the amateur hockey associations encountered a phenomenon present in most popular team sports of this period—professionalism.⁴ While Canadian amateur associations sought to forbid professionals in their clubs and leagues,⁵ a semi-professional league was formed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, primarily furnished with players banned from the amateur ranks in Canada. In the meantime, the first openly professional team, the Portage Lakes Hockey Club, was formed in northern Michigan. Five communities in the United States and Ontario formed the International Hockey League (I.H.L.) in 1904, which would usher in a new era for the sport of ice hockey. The loss of high-caliber players to the new, U.S.-based league resulted in a battle for control of the rights of the top players of the day, concerns about the decline of amateurism in the sport, and outrage over U.S. influences on one of Canada's national institutions.

This league operated for only three seasons, disbanding in the fall of 1907. This paper will identify a number of reasons for the collapse of the league. Traditionally, the league's demise has been attributed to a lack of spectators;⁶ however, as this paper will show, the primary reason the league disbanded was a loss of players. The elite Canadian leagues professionalized because the only way

to keep players from migrating to the I.H.L. was to pay them comparable wages. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to review the development of the I.H.L. in its five league communities, examine how its operations influenced the operators of elite-level Canadian hockey and its importance in the transformation of the sport to a more commercialized form. Civic boosterism and the need for skilled players led I.H.L. club managers to pay athletes, but the battle for control of elite hockey players would ultimately be won by the established Canadian leagues. Despite its brief existence, the I.H.L. signaled a new era for hockey; soon many of the top leagues used professional players, and elite-level hockey, like many other team spectator sports of this period, became the preserve of professionals. Only after examining the operations of the I.H.L. and its members in greater detail can the significant influence of this league on the sport of ice hockey be revealed.

Early Developments in Ice Hockey

The first ice rinks in eastern Canada were built for semi-commercial purposes by upper-middle-class Canadians, who used them for skating, masquerades, and other social activities. By the 1870s, there were a dozen such rinks in Canada.⁷ At the same time, early forms of hockey were being played by army regiments in both Kingston, Ontario, and Halifax, Nova Scotia.⁸ However, it was not until March 3, 1875, that the first recorded hockey game was played, at Montreal's Victoria Skating Rink.⁹ It would be in Montreal that the sport's early developments would occur.¹⁰ Hockey was soon taken up by other larger Canadian cities,¹¹ and by the mid 1890s rinks were constructed specifically for the purpose of playing the sport.¹²

In the meantime, increased interest in the sport facilitated the formation of various amateur associations, which were organized by the upper middle class of larger urban centers such as Montreal or Toronto. As late as 1895, hockey was still restricted to the more privileged members of Canadian communities.¹³ Thus, the involvement of the working class was peripheral to the early development of the game, as the middle class leaders of the amateur associations tried to govern the sport under the auspices of amateur ideals adopted from Victorian England.¹⁴ It was these leaders who would be threatened most by the intrusion of professionals.

But with the growth in the popularity of the sport, games were soon also played by groups outside of the middle class in eastern Canada's larger urban centers. The increased interest in games made hockey a potentially commercial spectator sport.¹⁵ As the game became more widespread, the amateur associations encountered problems dealing with professionalism. While earlier in the nineteenth century, social class had determined amateur status in Canada,¹⁶ by the time hockey became more widely played, money was the primary indicator of one's amateur or professional status.¹⁷ With the pressures of civic boosterism emphasizing the outcomes of matches between clubs, teams began using various methods to acquire players, such as altering birth certificates, offering secret payments, and relocating players,¹⁸ that directly conflicted with the tenets of

amateurism. In these ways, professionalism crept into the sport in Canada, well before the first professional league had been formed.¹⁹ The detection and punishment of alleged professional players then became the primary objective of the Canadian amateur leagues, particularly the powerful Ontario Hockey Association (O.H.A.),²⁰ and the I.H.L. would later provide a convenient scapegoat for many of the problems already present in the sport.

Hockey and the I.H.L. Communities

With considerable growth and development of the sport,²¹ hockey was introduced in new areas, many of which had little or no ties to Victorian ideals of amateurism. By the early 1900s it was Canada's most popular winter sport,²² played in most regions.²³ In the United States, the game was not as widely played, although many other team sports, such as baseball, had assumed an "unprecedented prominence in the daily lives of millions of Americans."²⁴ Advances in transportation and increased urbanization and industrialization catalyzed the proliferation of sporting clubs and competition between many regions. For example, in 1865 the United States had 35,000 miles of railway track, by 1900 this had grown to more than 242,000 miles,²⁵ opening up many new territories and opportunities for sporting endeavors. A national affinity for sporting experiences, a cold winter climate, and new opportunities for communities to organize and compete in sport made the northern United States a potential hotbed for the Canadian winter sport of hockey.

However, unlike in Canada, hockey would not develop under the influence of amateurism; this British approach to sports competition did not resonate with working-class cities such as Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and the mining communities of northern Michigan. As explained by Couvares, many of the working-class inhabitants of Pittsburgh did not discern between the professional and amateur in their sporting pastimes.²⁶ Some residents of Pittsburgh, who had played ice polo during the latter half of the nineteenth century, took up ice hockey after a series of exhibition games against a visiting Queen's University team, from Kingston, familiarized the locals with the Canadian game.²⁷ The sport quickly became popular, but the city lacked skilled players. As a result, players were lured from Canada to the newly formed, semi-professional Western Pennsylvania Hockey League (W.P.H.L.) with promises of high-paid employment and small monetary inducements.²⁸ At this time all Canadian associations were still amateur, and since many of the players had been already expelled from hockey in Canada for being professionals,²⁹ the W.P.H.L. provided an opportunity for these players to continue their careers.³⁰ The W.P.H.L. featured four teams, all of which played in Pittsburgh's Duquesne Gardens, at that time one of only two artificial ice surfaces in North America.³¹

Until the 1904-05 season, the winner of the Western Pennsylvania League championship played the Portage Lakes Hockey Club from Houghton, Michigan, for what was referred to as "The Championship of the United States," presumably because they were the only elite-level senior teams playing in the United States

at that time.³² Houghton was known as “the birthplace of organized hockey in the United States”³³ because its team, the Portage Lakes Hockey Club, had been formed at the turn of the century.³⁴ It relied on the playing abilities of several transplanted Canadians, including Dr. John L. “Doc” Gibson, a local dentist, and used the same recruitment practices as the operators of the Western Pennsylvania League, paying Canadian players and even inducing some players from the Western Pennsylvania League to join its team. In fact, Portage Lakes became so strong that, in the 1903-04 season, exhibition games against teams from both Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, and against the Western Pennsylvania League clubs, provided inadequate competition.³⁵ Because amateur regulations in Canada forbade the top Canadian teams from playing against either Houghton or Pittsburgh,³⁶ and because American teams and their supporters wanted more competitive, evenly balanced, exciting hockey games, the need for a professional league in the United States became evident.³⁷

The Upper Peninsula of Michigan would not be represented by just one I.H.L. team; Calumet, nearby rival to Houghton, also sought to enter a team into the new league. Approximately thirty miles from the Houghton-Hancock township, Calumet was of similar size and industry, relying on the copper mining operations of the Calumet and Hecla Company. Hockey was not an established sport in Calumet, although an ice rink had opened in nearby Laurium in 1890.³⁸ Another rink had later been constructed, but neither would be suitable for hockey because poles in the centers of the rinks “interfered considerably with combination plays.”³⁹ Given Calumet’s relative inexperience in operating hockey teams and facilities, it is likely that civic rivalry with Houghton provided the impetus for Calumet’s involvement in the first professional league.

In addition to the civic rivalry between the towns of Houghton and Calumet, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, had a geographic rivalry, and involvement by one community would draw in the other. Hockey had already become a firmly entrenched sports activity in both towns by the turn of the century, and teams from the Michigan Soo had played amateur games against Canadian teams, such as the Toronto Varsity.⁴⁰ By 1903 the Michigan Soo had organized what was considered to be a professional club, comprising former Pittsburgh and Houghton players,⁴¹ playing home games at the curling rink located on Ridge Street.⁴² Meanwhile, across the border, the Canadian Soo had already entered a team into the Ontario Hockey Association and, like their American counterparts, played games at their own local curling rink.⁴³ In addition, the Canadian town had established a three-team intermediate league and a junior league comprising Y.M.C.A. and high school teams.⁴⁴ Early competitions between the Michigan and Canadian Soo senior teams were often one-sided; one such game in January of 1903 resulted in a 18-1 score favoring the Canadians.⁴⁵ However, as the Michigan Soo began acquiring the services of experienced players from Pittsburgh and Houghton, the American team became more competitive. With the remaining O.H.A. teams such a long distance from the Soo, the Canadian team opted to play against its U.S. rival and risk being professionalized by the O.H.A.⁴⁶

While the leagues in Canada had been accused of professional practices for several years, it was not until the formation of the Portage Lakes Hockey Club and the International Hockey League in 1904 that open professionalism arrived in hockey.⁴⁷ The Portage Lakes Hockey Club would be the flagship team and would be joined by a club from Pittsburgh, which would disband the Western Pennsylvania League in order to enter a team in the new professional circuit. During the previous season, in 1903-04, exhibition games against the Portage Lakes team had led the O.H.A. to ban both the Sault Ste. Marie towns.⁴⁸ As a result, it was likely that the two Soo teams would join the new league, as they would be unable to compete against the Canadian amateur teams. The Ontario Soo club had already faced the wrath of the O.H.A. by ignoring amateur regulations to compete against their nearby American counterparts.

In the fall of 1903, James R. Dee of Houghton wrote to Pittsburgh to initiate discussion on the formation of a national hockey association.⁴⁹ By the fall of 1904 with the possible inclusion of a team from the Canadian Soo, the Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News* reported that the proposed league would “adopt the name ‘International’ or something of similar significance.”⁵⁰ At a meeting held on November 5, 1904, prominent business leaders from Pittsburgh, the Canadian Soo, and northern Michigan⁵¹ considered franchises for a number of cities including Montreal,⁵² Detroit, Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, Milwaukee, Grand Rapids, and Duluth.⁵³ Eventually, the league accepted teams from Houghton, Pittsburgh, the two Soos; and Calumet, the nearby civic rival of Houghton. In addition, a revenue-sharing plan suggested by the Canadian Soo—that gate receipts be divided in a 60-40, home-visitor split—was adopted by the league.⁵⁴ Revenue sharing would make the long journey to Pittsburgh more palatable, given the potential gate moneys that could be generated in that city’s commodious Duquesne Gardens.

The residents of the I.H.L. communities would anxiously await the onset of the league’s inaugural season. The town of Houghton was a rapidly developing community that drew mining and other business interests.⁵⁵ This community, like most found in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, was created because of copper mines⁵⁶ and depended upon the operations of the nearby Calumet and Hecla Mine. Future Portage Lakes Hockey Club player and Hockey Hall of Fame inductee, Frederick “Cyclone” Taylor, remembered Houghton as “a great Saturday night fun place for miners who prefer to patronize something other than art museums or the opera house.”⁵⁷ The Calumet and Hecla Mine disapproved of company-owned or operated businesses, allowing for other business interests, such as potential sports entrepreneurs, to develop and prosper.⁵⁸ The mine was prosperous, paying out its biggest dividends in 1899, and the area’s population and mining employment would peak in 1910.⁵⁹ The small towns of Houghton and Calumet, with populations of 3,359⁶⁰ and 4,668,⁶¹ respectively, were flourishing mining communities whose citizens would welcome the I.H.L. as a contrast to the harsh realities of work life in an industrializing community

In Pittsburgh, coal, iron, and glass were the underpinnings of the city’s industrial economy.⁶² Although much larger in size, Pittsburgh was similar to

the other I.H.L. towns in that its population featured a large percentage of working-class citizens. Meanwhile, the two Soo communities, divided only by an international border and the Soo Locks, had developed a keen rivalry; the presence of one team in the I.H.L. made the other's involvement a certainty. As explained by J.C. Boyd, president of the Canadian Soo rink company, the Ontario "town wanted a team that could lick the American Soo."⁶³ The five I.H.L. communities seemed an ideal fit for the new league; interest in games in northern Michigan and the two Soos would be driven by civic boosterism, while Pittsburgh provided a large population base and established hockey tradition to fill its arena. However, the other league communities lacked similar rinks, and the preparation of facilities was necessary for the success of the new league. Houghton, which had built its \$16,000, 2500-seat Amphidrome in the fall of 1902,⁶⁴ was followed by Calumet's 4000-seat Palestra, erected with similar fanfare and cost for the start of the 1904-05 season.⁶⁵ Pittsburgh featured the Duquesne Gardens, with its artificial ice surface and 5000-seat capacity, which had been used previously to host Western Pennsylvania Hockey League games. Not to be outdone, the American Soo team renamed their arena.⁶⁶

With the league communities eagerly anticipating the inaugural 1904-05 season, team operators scrambled to acquire players. Managers were compelled to "send missionaries through[out Canada] looking for hockey [talent]."⁶⁷ The teams immediately set their sights on the top players of the day, including "Hod" Stuart, who was considered by some to be the "greatest hockey player in the world."⁶⁸ Stuart's services were acquired by the Calumet team; the native of Ottawa, Ontario, would be paid the princely sum of \$1800 to play for the team and manage the club's rink for the 1904-05 season.⁶⁹ As the other teams finished assembling club rosters, the Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News* reported that the I.H.L. clubs would feature an unparalleled level of competitive talent."

The local supporters soon adopted nicknames for their teams. Players from the two Soos were called "Lock City Men," while those from copper country were labeled "Miners."⁷¹ Pittsburgh players were "Coal Heavers,"⁷² and supporters of the American Soo team preferred to call their players "Wolverines."⁷³ Local businesses took advantage of the league's popularity, by installing private telephones in hotels and saloons that allowed reports to be relayed directly from the arenas.⁷⁴ Similarly, railway companies scheduled extra excursions to and from nearby I.H.L. communities,⁷⁵ both before and after games,⁷⁶ and arranged for spectators to travel the longer distances for games against league rivals." As evidenced by the league's effects on other local businesses, the economic impact of the I.H.L., particularly on the smaller mining towns of northern Michigan, could not be measured solely in team profits.

For three seasons I.H.L. games entertained the communities. Calumet, led by "Hod" Stuart, won the first league championship,⁷⁸ before Houghton's Portage Lakes Hockey Club returned to win both the 1905-06 and 1906-07 titles.⁷⁹ The league did encounter some problems, such as when the Canadian Soo team disbanded during the 1905-06 season, only to return the following year.⁸⁰ The Canadian Soo team remained the weak club throughout the league's operations,

suffering from low attendance and poor performances, but had little option other than entering a team in the I.H.L. as a result of the team's banishment from the O.H.A. This team lost money in all three years of operations,⁸¹ but the remaining clubs were usually able to turn a profit.⁸² However, small populations and gates limited teams to small profits. This problem of low profits was further compounded by the fact that the league allowed teams to bid with one another for a player's services, which resulted in the eventual suggestion of a salary cap.⁸³ As explained by James R. Dee of Houghton, the Amphidrome would need to be sold out for every game if the team was to turn a significant profit.⁸⁴ Given the slim chance of a team producing a solid profit, it is likely that the primary motivation driving many of the league operators was boosterism, or the promotion of one's local community, rather than any expectations of monetary gain. However, given the prominence of local ownership, there were other obvious benefits to hosting games, including the patronage of other business interests.⁸⁵ Thus, despite the fact that players were paid on the I.H.L. teams, the early entrepreneurs in the smaller I.H.L. towns could be described as operating "community" teams, rather than what Kidd calls "full market" or "capitalist" clubs;⁸⁶ the value of the team operating locally could not be measured solely in terms of the revenues it generated at the gate. The use of professional players was more a reflection of the lack of skilled hockey players in most of the I.H.L. communities, which meant that the athletes had to be paid outright to relocate from Canada to play, than it was an effort of club owners to operate profitable commercial enterprises. As long as the owners could achieve limited financial rewards, or even bear a small loss, the teams continued to operate.

The Professionalization of Canadian Ice Hockey and the Demise of the I.H.L.

The financial viability of the I.H.L. would ultimately be determined by external forces beyond the control of the league teams and communities. As the managers of the I.H.L. clubs continued to operate, a number of changes were occurring in elite-level hockey in Canada that would eventually determine the fate of the professional league in the United States. While the International Hockey League would have a significant impact on the communities that hosted league games from 1904 to 1907, it would also affect the elite Canadian amateur leagues. As discussed earlier, the I.H.L. towns did not have enough local talent to fill club rosters, so many of the top players from associations such as the Ontario Hockey Association were lured to play professionally.⁸⁷ Every I.H.L. player received a salary to play hockey, and some were also given lucrative employment positions within the community. Because the hockey season lasted only three months, most players returned to Canada after the end of the playing season, which made the process of acquiring players begin anew for I.H.L. managers each fall.

Even as I.H.L. teams sought out professional players each year, the Canadian leagues steadfastly claimed amateur status and publicly scorned professionalism.

This anti-professional stance was challenged by one Toronto *Star* reporter, who determined that the amateur leagues were guilty of professionalism; when the leagues paid players eager to join the I.H.L. to stay in Canada, “the great amateur principles [were] soon swept aside when it [came] down to a straight proposition of dollars and cents.”⁸⁸ The task of luring players to the I.H.L. communities had not been a problem for I.H.L. teams, as long as the players were willing to forgo amateur principles. When there was no other professional leagues, there was no market competition for the services of professional hockey players. However, in the fall of 1904, as I.H.L. teams began assembling team rosters, the I.H.L. managers encountered competition, with the Ontario Hockey Association bidding for players. One I.H.L. newspaper recognized the hypocritical stance of the alleged amateur teams, stating that “the question arises as to whether honest professionalism or dishonest amateurism is preferable.”⁸⁹

The salaries of hockey players, in both the I.H.L. and the so-called amateur Canadian leagues, would be increased by such market competition, which potentially jeopardized the operations of the elite leagues in both countries. This competition reached such a high level that the Pittsburgh *Sun* finally suggested having both the U.S. and Canadian leagues agree to restrict player movement, particularly players who chose to switch clubs in mid-season.⁹⁰ With such controls in mind, the Pittsburgh club and the Montreal Wanderers were rumored to have agreed to exchange players to ensure that the Canadian team won the Stanley Cup, and the American team the I.H.L. championship.⁹¹

Although many of the Canadian amateur teams were secretly paying players to keep them from switching associations and to stop the departure of talent to the I.H.L., most associations continued to claim adherence to the principles of amateurism. The most outspoken supporter of amateurism was John Ross Robertson of the O.H.A.⁹² As the I.H.L. prepared for its inaugural season in 1904, Robertson announced that “for self preservation, the stand of the Ontario Hockey Association against the professionalism of Pittsburgh, Houghton, Calumet and the Soo must be uncompromisingly antagonistic Any player who figures on any of these teams must be banished from Ontario Hockey.”⁹³ While players moving between amateur associations posed one kind of problem for the O.H.A., it was the professionalism⁹⁴ of the I.H.L. that would become the greatest threat to amateurism. To fight this, the O.H.A. implemented a stringent anti-professional scheme, which included residence rules, certifications, and a carding system.⁹⁵ The O.H.A. boasted that it had never reinstated a player who had played for an American team,⁹⁶ but this stance would actually aid the I.H.L. in its search for players, because banned players would have no choice but to move to the U.S.-based league for the rest of their careers. Unlike other sports, such as lacrosse, where professionals could play alongside amateurs,⁹⁷ in hockey banished players had no playing alternative other than an I.H.L. team.⁹⁸

With the migration of players to the I.H.L. and secret payments to players to remain in Canada, it became apparent that strictly amateur teams could not “compete with pseudo-amateur (or semi-professional) leagues.”⁹⁹ By 1906, after two years of I.H.L. operations, many Canadian associations featured hidden

professionals, and to stop this hypocritical practice, the Eastern Canada Amateur Hockey Association (E.C.A.H.A.) instituted a provision that allowed professionals to play alongside amateurs, as long as a player's status was declared in advance to the public.¹⁰⁰ This was done to stop the flow of talent to the U.S. league, acknowledge the prevalence of professionals within the sport, and perhaps still allow amateurs to remain in high-level competition. However, the decision had an adverse effect on the I.H.L.; not only were the managers of the I.H.L. teams forced to bid against Canadian teams for players, now former I.H.L. and W.P.H.L. players could return to Canada to play.¹⁰¹ Many hockey enthusiasts in Canada saw this decision as a way of stopping amateur teams from engaging in hidden professionalism.¹⁰² The Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette* predicted that, by 1907, professionals would no longer be playing under the guise of amateurism.¹⁰³ With Canadian players waiting to see what offers could be obtained from teams in Montreal and Ottawa, it was feared that the I.H.L.'s caliber of play would be diminished.¹⁰⁴

With this new regulation, the Canadian leagues finally openly accepted professionalism and no longer had to secretly keep professionals on team rosters. This sentiment was expressed by president Gorman of the Canadian Amateur Athletic Union, who said:

there are just as many professionals as there are . . . amateurs, and there is no one that I have any more respect for than the man who comes out and plays the game fair. The men I am down on are those who pretend they are amateurs.¹⁰⁵

In the spring of 1906 the Stratford *Daily Herald* aggressively attacked the amateur associations, reporting that

hockey has been played for ten years or more in Canada by men paid good salaries to play the game. Yet, they are called amateurs Better to come out boldly as professionals, because this is what most of the big teams in Canada [are] today.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, a letter from a Canadian hockey enthusiast, W.A. Patterson, of Toronto, echoed this sentiment, explaining that fans were tired of alleged amateurism and that the city of Toronto seemed ready to accept professional hockey.¹⁰⁷ However, with the acceptance of professionals in the elite Canadian leagues, the future of the I.H.L. was now bleak

Following the third I.H.L. season in the spring of 1907, the Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News* praised the success of the I.H.L., claiming that "it looks as though the league has not only thoroughly established itself but is just about to enter upon a period of remarkable growth."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, by the fall of 1907, I.H.L. managers were encountering more problems in acquiring the services of players for the 1907-08 season, "as the Canadian puck-chasers, whether of high or low degree, are not showing any particular desire to rush over the border."¹⁰⁹ The

management of the American Soo informed I.H.L. president Kemp that they could not secure players unless the players were offered “exorbitant salaries.”¹¹⁰ With the other I.H.L. teams unable to obtain players at reasonable rates, the I.H.L. executive agreed to disband for the 1907-08 season. The Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette* reported that this was because “the Canadian players can sign with the former amateur teams of the Dominion for more money than the American managers can afford.”¹¹¹ Unlike in Canada, the communities of the I.H.L. had not had sufficient time to develop their own local players,¹¹² so the high level of play in this league could not be maintained without an inflow of Canadian talent. The onus was then on the owners of the clubs, who had to decide whether the value of the team to the community outweighed the financial losses that had increased as a result of spiraling salary costs and decreases in attendance. Unfortunately for I.H.L. supporters, the league operators decided to disband.

Leaving a Legacy for Hockey

This paper has examined the importance of the International Hockey League in the transformation of ice hockey into a commercially and professionally driven sport. In *The Death of Hockey*, Kidd and Macfarlane explain that “as with so many of our resources, the sellout of hockey was the inevitable consequence of our proximity to the United States and our cheap faith in free enterprise.”¹¹³ However, the seeds of hockey’s transformation to a more commercialized form were sown prior to the migration of hockey to the United States. Problems associated with the intrusion of professionals into amateur leagues had occurred long before hockey was organized in communities such as Houghton or Pittsburgh. It was spectator demand for high-caliber competition in areas lacking skilled players that resulted in outright payments to players; the fact that Houghton and Pittsburgh were American cities is moot. The “sellout” of hockey would later occur in the mining communities of northern Ontario, and then on Canada’s west coast, with the formation of the Pacific Coast Hockey Association. However, the I.H.L. did encourage the commercialization of the game by signing many of the top players of that period. By providing a model of how a professional hockey league could be operated, the league forced elite amateur hockey associations in Canada to weigh the merits of upholding amateurism or paying players to maintain a competitive team. However, the popularity of the game in Canada would mean that, inevitably, control of the game would not be exclusive to those who had established the early elite hockey associations.¹¹⁴

One year after the I.H.L. folded, Stanley Cup trustees agreed to allow the best hockey teams, amateur or professional, to vie for the coveted trophy, according to Jones, “it was obvious that the amateur teams could not compete with the professionals.”¹¹⁵ It was in this manner that being a hockey professional became equated with skill level, rather than simply social class or remunerative practices. Hall of Fame referee Chaucer Elliott stated that he believed that the professional player, as found in the I.H.L., was a better athlete, as the professional gave more

effort in trying to maintain a sporting livelihood.¹¹⁶ As Cosentino explained, it was also at this time that the notion developed that “the amateur, since he played his sport for no remuneration . . . was not worthy of being remunerated.”¹¹⁷ In effect, the professional player was now considered an expert, rather than someone who cheated amateur principles.¹¹⁸ The I.H.L. was an important catalyst in the rapid transformation of the elite level of the game in Canada during its critical growth period from 1900 to 1910.¹¹⁹

As hockey slowly developed into an integral part of Canadian culture,¹²⁰ the popularity of the sport would ultimately determine its commercial form, independent of the men of cities such as Montreal who had been instrumental in the sport’s formative years. The I.H.L. commenced operations during a period when the conflict between amateurism and professionalism, the most significant conflict in Canada’s early sporting history, was reaching its zenith.¹²¹ By 1907, the sport of ice hockey was in a state of transition, as most of the elite-level leagues in Canada were openly embracing professionalism.¹²² As explained by Young, supporters of amateurism would lose the battle for control of elite hockey in Canada, since staying amateur and remaining competitive was not possible for associations such as the O.H.A.; although “professionalism continued to be punished for decades thereafter . . . every year many of the best players moved to the pros.”¹²³ In 1908, professional hockey had arrived in Canada,¹²⁴ with the formation of the Ontario Professional Hockey League (O.P.H.L.) and the Temiskaming Hockey League’s adoption of the professional game.¹²⁵ Many of the former I.H.L. players joined the O.P.H.L. or the professional Manitoba Hockey League.¹²⁶

The impact of I.H.L. players would be seen in Canadian hockey for many years to come; at least one former I.H.L. player would play on a Stanley Cup championship team from 1907 until 1916. Of the approximately forty players of this period to be enshrined in Hockey’s Hall of Fame, fourteen played for I.H.L. teams. I.H.L. referee Chaucer Elliott would also be inducted, along with Dr. John L. Gibson, whose role in the formation of the Portage Lakes Hockey Club and eventually the I.H.L. would result in his induction in the Builders category.¹²⁷ The I.H.L. also had a number of other effects on the game of hockey. By 1904, hockey had already adopted universal rules, strategies, and equipment.¹²⁸ It is difficult to determine if some of the rule changes enacted during the I.H.L.’s three seasons were in fact innovations or examples of the league adopting changes that originated in other leagues.¹²⁹ However, I.H.L. referees were granted the authority to fine players for overly aggressive behavior, in an effort to reduce violence in I.H.L. contests,¹³⁰ and the league quickly developed a reputation for fast, exciting play. Frederick “Cyclone” Taylor claimed that there was more emphasis on skating and stickhandling than in the Canadian leagues.¹³¹ Other practices made the I.H.L. game faster; several observers reported that the custom of “lifting” the puck into the opponent’s territory to relieve pressure, which slowed play during games, was not as prevalent in the I.H.L.¹³² I.H.L. teams also began using smaller, faster players at the point position, who could quickly move the puck up the ice from the defense position.¹³³ As evidenced by the changes discussed

above, the I.H.L.'s contribution to hockey was not only in hastening the emergence of a more commercialized, professionalized form of the sport, but in featuring fast-paced, exciting games played by many of the top players of this period.¹³⁴ For these reasons, the contribution of the I.H.L. to the development of the sport of ice hockey is unquestioned.

* A version of this paper was presented at the 1997 North American Society for Sport History conference held at Springfield College. I wish to thank Dr. Barbara Schrodt for all her help, guidance, and encouragement with my research on this and other projects. I would also like to thank Dr. Nancy Struna for her comments on earlier versions of this paper, along with the informal feedback I received from others at the conference.

1. Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), p. 32.
2. See Ian Jobling, 'Urbanization and Sport in Canada, 1867-1900,' in R. Gruneau and J. Albinson, eds. *Canadian Sport: Sociological Perspectives* (Don Mills: Addison-Wesley, Ltd., 1976), pp. 64-77, for a discussion of the urbanization of Canada during this period.
3. See Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*; Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1907-1914*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987).
4. See Frank Cosentino, "A History of the Concept of Professionalism in Canadian Sport," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1973).
5. See Alan Metcalfe, "Power: A Case Study of the Ontario Hockey Association, 1890-1936," *Journal of Sport History* (19)1, Spring 1992.
6. Bill Roche, "Pro Hockey, Product of the U.S.A.," in B. Roche, ed., *The Hockey Book* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1953), p. 17; Kevin Jones, "Sport in Canada, 1900-1920" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1970), p. 267.
7. Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 145.
8. Allan Cox, "A History of Sport in Canada, 1868-1900," (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1969), p. 226; Bruce Kidd and John Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey* (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 101.
9. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 61; Cox, *History of Sports in Canada*, p. 228.
10. Henry Roxborough, *One Hundred-Not Out*, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1966), p. 139; Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 61; Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, p. 37; Syd F. Wise, "Sport and Class Values in Old Ontario and Quebec," in W.H. Heick and R. Graham, eds. *His Own Man*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), p. 108.
11. See chapter 2 of Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, pp. 61-71; Kidd and Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey*, pp. 100-103.
12. Cox, *History of Sports in Canada*, p. 238.
13. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 64.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 65. One such organization, the Ontario Hockey Association, was described by Metcalfe, as being "a case of the elite running its own exclusive club." Alan Metcalfe, "Power," p. 6.
15. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 169.
16. Frank Cosentino, "Professionalism in Canadian Sport," p. 9; Cox, "History of Sports in Canada," p. 409.
17. Cosentino, "Professionalism in Canadian Sport," p. 76; Jones, "Sport in Canada," p. 434.
18. Scott Young, *100 Years of Dropping the Puck: A History of the O.H.A.*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Inc., 1989), p. 36.

19. Kidd and Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey*, p. 103. According to Cox, amateur associations such as the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada had the most trouble with sports that drew large, paying crowds; Cox, "History of Sport in Canada," p. 420.
20. Alan Metcalfe, "Power," p. 7.
21. Howell and Howell, *Sport and Games in Canadian Life*, (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1969), p. 74.
22. Jones, "Sport in Canada," p. 255.
23. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 64.
24. John Rickards Betts, "The Technological Revolution and Rise of Sport, 1850-1900," in S.A. Riess, ed., *The American Sporting Experience: Historical Anthology of Sport in America* (New York: Leisure Press, 1984), p. 142.
25. James F. Willis and Martin L. Primack, *An Economic History of the United States, 2nd ed.* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989), p. 241.
26. Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 43.
27. J.W. "Bill" Fittell, *Hockey's Captains, Colonels, & Kings* (Erin: Boston Mills Press, 1987), p. 108.
28. This league was considered "semi-professional," as the players were only paid small sums; it would be offers of high-paying positions within the Pittsburgh community that would persuade players to come to Pennsylvania to play hockey.
29. Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, p. 74
30. One such player was future Hockey Hall of Fame inductee, Riley Hern, who had been banned by the O.H.A. in 1901; Fittell, pp. 117-118.
31. Eric Whitehead, *Cyclone Taylor: A Hockey Legend* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, Limited, 1977), p. 46.
32. This term could only be used loosely; hockey was not formally organized as it was in Canada. However, it is highly unlikely that any other U.S.-based team could compete with either the Portage Lakes team, or any of the four W.P.H.L. teams.
33. Rene Adams, "Historic Houghton," *Hockey Pictorial*, (March 1961), p. 32.
34. For a detailed account of the development of this team, see Daniel Mason and Barbara Schrodt, "Hockey's First Professional Team: The Portage Lakes Hockey Club of Houghton, Michigan," *Sport History Review* 27 (May 1996): 49-71.
35. The team would win 23 of 25 games in 1903-04, outscoring opponents by a margin of 257 to 49; Mason and Schrodt, "Portage Lakes Hockey Club," p. 66.
36. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1903.
37. According to the Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, the 1903-04 season "was not the greatest season in the history of the game in Houghton, in the opinion of many enthusiasts. The majority of the games were tame, the attendance and the enthusiasm were not so great"; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 24 March 1904.
38. *Ibid.*, 9 December 1906.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Sault Ste. Marie Star*, 20 February 1902.
41. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 2 December 1903.
42. This rink would be later referred to as the Ridge Street Ice-A-Torium.
43. *Houghton Daily Mining Gazette*, 22 November 1902.
44. *Sault Ste. Marie Star*, 4 December 1902.
45. *Ibid.*, 29 January 1903.
46. *Toronto Globe and Mail*, 25 December 1903; *Calumet Copper Country Evening News*, 30 September 1904.

47. Kidd and Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey*, p. 103.
48. The two cities were commonly called the “Canadian Soo,” and the “Michigan” or “American Soo.”
49. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 20 December 1903.
50. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 11 October 1904.
51. This included: A.L. McSwiggan, Manager of the Duquesne Gardens (Pittsburgh); A.D. Ferguson, Manager of the Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, Curling Club; J.C. Boyd, Superintendent of the Canadian Ship Canal, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; Charles Thompson, Agent, Copper Railroad, Laurium, Michigan; and James R. Dee, President, Amphidrome Company, Houghton; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 30 October 1904.
52. *Ibid.*, 15 November 1904.
53. Calumet Copper *Country Evening News*, 2 December 1904.
54. Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 3 November 1904.
55. Marquette *Daily Mining Gazette*, cited in Arthur W. Thurner, *Calumet Copper Country and People: A History of a Michigan Mining Community 1864-1970* (Chicago: N.p., 1974), p. 66.
56. Wilbert B. Maki, *Visions of Houghton, Yesterday and Today* (A copy of this book is available at the Michigan State Library and Archives, Lansing, Michigan.), p. 5.
57. Whitehead, *Cyclone Taylor*, p. 46.
58. Thurner, *Calumet*, p. 66.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 6 November 1902.
61. Thurner, *Calumet*, p. 106.
62. Couvares, *Pittsburgh*, p. 9.
63. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 13 October 1904.
64. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 27 December 1902, 10 January 1905.
65. Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 8 November 1904, 14 December 1904, 16 December, 1904.
66. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 25 January 1905.
67. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 14 October 1904.
68. This was the opinion of referee Chaucer Elliott, who would officiate many of the top players of the period enroute to enshrinement in the Hockey Hall of Fame; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 29 March 1906.
69. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 10 January 1905.
70. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 2 December 1904.
71. *Ibid.*, 24 December 1904.
72. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 8 December 1905.
73. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 27 December 1905.
74. One such establishment to do so was Dunn Bros. of Fifth Street in Houghton; Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 5 January 1906.
75. One game between Houghton and Calumet thirty miles apart, featured eighteen cars full of passengers; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 10 January 1905.
76. The Copper Range Railroad usually charged fifty cents for return fare between Houghton and Calumet; Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 12 December 1904 and 30 January 1906.
77. The Duluth, South Shore and Atlantic charged six dollars for fare between Houghton and the American Soo; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 12 February 1904, while the

- managers of the Calumet team arranged to have fans transported from Calumet to the American Soo and back for \$6.50; Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 27 December 1904.
78. Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 21 March 1905. In an effort to overtake Calumet in the pennant race, the Portage Lakes had acquired the services of Pittsburgh's top player, Lorne Campbell, to play against Calumet in the final games of the season.
 79. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 12 March 1907.
 80. Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 1 March 1906. Following the 1905-06 season, it appeared doubtful that the Canadian team would return.
 81. The team lost \$1500 in its first year; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 9 March 1905. The following season, financial difficulties led to the team folding during the season; Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 15 March 1906. The team had much more success competitively in 1906-07, but still lost \$600; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 21 March 1907.
 82. The Calumet team was able to clear \$2000, after expenses, in its first season of operations; *Ibid.*, 9 March 1905. One cause for concern over the profitability of the league was the long train ride required to play in Pittsburgh. Some considered these games "big money makers," others suggested that the trip was too expensive to justify Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 14 November, 1906 and Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 6 February 1906. One player, Fred Whitcroft, was banned from playing in the I.H.L. for intentionally having two or more I.H.L. teams bid for his services; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 11 December 1904.
 83. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 26 October 1905; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 14 February 1907. The competition for players became so fierce that teams would refuse to report which players they were in contact with regarding joining their rosters, lest another I.H.L. team find out and offer additional inducements; Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 1 November 1905.
 84. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 10 January 1904.
 85. For a closer look at the operations of the I.H.L., see Daniel S. Mason, "The Origins and Development of the International Hockey League and its Effects on the Sport of Professional Ice Hockey in North America," (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1994).
 86. For a more detailed discussion of this concept, see Bruce Kidd, *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, Inc., 1996), pp. 190-194.
 87. Following a trip to Montreal to acquire more players for the Calumet goaltender Billy Nicholson found that the city had lost many of its talented players to the new professional league. The Montreal *Star* then reported that "there will be no more good players left [in Montreal] at all next winter"; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 23 March 1905.
 88. *Ibid.*, 2 November 1905.
 89. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 29 October 1904.
 90. *Ibid.*, 4 February 1907.
 91. *Ibid.*, 31 December 1906. This is an interesting agreement, considering that the Stanley Cup was supposedly a trophy open only to amateur competition at this time.
 92. See Young, *100 Years*.
 93. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 3 December 1904; Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 12 December 1904.
 94. Metcalfe, "Power," p. 12.
 95. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
 96. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 24 November 1904.
 97. Cosentino, "History of the Concept of Professionalism," p. 224.
 98. Following a report of the C.A.A.U., the Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette* reported that stricter rules in Canada would "prove to be a boon to the International Hockey League

- which [was] looking for good players”; Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 1 November 1906.
99. Lansley, p. 67. Soon the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association would propose a rule change that would allow professionals to play with amateurs; *Ibid.*
 100. Young, *100 Years*, p. 78; Kidd and Macfarlane, *Death of Hockey*, p. 103.
 101. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 28 October 1906.
 102. One such club was the powerful Ottawa team; *Ibid.*, 3 November 1906.
 103. *Ibid.*, 15 December 1906.
 104. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 8 December 1906.
 105. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 15 February 1906.
 106. *Ibid.*, 4 March 1906.
 107. Sault Ste. Marie *Evening News*, 7 February 1906.
 108. *Ibid.*, 18 March 1907.
 109. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1906, citing a Manitoba *Free Press* article.
 110. Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 5 November 1907; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 14 November, 1907.
 111. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 6 November 1907. A month earlier, the same newspaper reported that there would be a huge demand for players in Canada; *Ibid.*, 6 October, 1907.
 112. Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 14 November 1907.
 113. Kidd and Macfarlane, *The Death of Hockey*, pp. 18-19.
 114. For an example of civic boosterism resulting in the advent of professional hockey teams in Canada, see Frank Cosentino, *The Renfrew Millionaires: The Valley Boys of Winter 1910* (Burnstown, Ontario: General Store Publishing House, 1990).
 115. Jones, “Sport in Canada,” p. 269.
 116. Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 11 January 1906.
 117. Cosentino, “Professionalism in Canadian Sport,” pp. 205-206.
 118. Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, p. 72.
 119. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 121.
 120. Hockey has been described as “one of [Canada’s] most significant collective representations—a story that Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be Canadian”; Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, p. 13.
 121. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 130.
 122. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 12 March 1907. As explained by Kidd and Macfarlane, “although the belief in amateurism was strong among the military and members of the middle and upper classes who played hockey in the universities and private clubs, it meant little in the frontier mining towns, where working conditions were brutal and there was no middle class to sustain it”; Kidd and Macfarlane, *Death of Hockey*, p. 102.
 123. Young, *100 Years*, p. 98.
 124. Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, p. 75.
 125. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, p. 170.
 126. See Charles L. Coleman, *The Trail of the Stanley Cup* (New York: Kendall-Hunt Publishing, 1966).
 127. See Dan Diamond, ed., *Hockey Hall of Fame: The Official Registry of the Game’s Honour Roll* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1996).
 128. Morris Mott, “Inferior Exhibitions, Superior Ceremonies: The Nature and Meaning of the Hockey Games of the Winnipeg Vics, 1890-1903,” *Fifth Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Toronto: University Press, 1982), p. 2.

129. For example in December of 1906, I.H.L. referee, Cooney Shields, dropped the puck between the opposing players to commence play, rather than placing the puck and shouting "play." This was done to reduce the likelihood of over-eager players from hurting the referee by trying to play the puck before the official could get out of the way of the two skaters.
130. Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 11 January 1906; Pittsburgh Gazette, 23 January 1906. Referees could fine players anywhere from two to ten dollars, depending on the severity of the infraction; Sault Ste. Marie *Star*, 8 February 1906.
131. Whitehead, *Cyclone Taylor*, p. 42.
132. Manager McSwiggan of the Pittsburgh team reported that, although he watched hockey games at all levels in Canada, it was in his rink that "lifting" was abandoned. He attributed this to the large ice surface of the Duquesne Gardens; Calumet *Copper Country Evening News*, 26 February 1907. McSwiggan's comment was supported by Pittsburgh's assistant manager, Frank Danahey.
133. Houghton *Daily Mining Gazette*, 20 February 1907.
134. Roche, "Pro Hockey," pp. 16-17.