

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC  
ANALYSIS OF 'LUCK' IN HOCKEY

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis hypothesizes that the public discourse of professional hockey can be analyzed by treating it as rhetoric. Robert Paine has demonstrated the anthropological usefulness of treating the public discourse of politics as rhetoric; here his insights are tested and applied to a new realm of cultural performance, hockey discourse. Approaching the public discourse of hockey in this way demonstrates the rhetorical processes by which the information and communication in this form of public discourse are culturally ordered for presentation.

To test this hypothesis, five cultural texts in which luck is used to interpret or explain hockey events are selected and examined to determine whether or not the hypothesized relationship can be substantiated. The hypothesis is confirmed through the analysis of these selected cultural texts and it is concluded that a rhetorical approach is applicable to the analysis of the public discourse of professional hockey. This analysis indicates that this mode of interpretation in anthropology can be extended to cultural realms far beyond that for which it was originally developed.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the use of luck as it appears in interpretations and explanations of a central feature of all professional hockey performances, winning and losing. Specifically, this thesis comprises an ethnographic analysis of these interpretations and explanations as they are presented through various media channels to projected audiences. The communication of such information constitutes the public discourse of hockey, while the meanings and values presented through this public discourse are identified here as the public culture of hockey (see Chapter II). As an ethnographic analysis, this thesis seeks to locate and interpret the use of luck within the public culture of hockey.

The focus on luck serves well in this endeavor because on first sight it would appear to deny all that is important in hockey. Hockey is generally seen as a game requiring considerable skill, talent and hard work in order for one to be successful. Suggesting that winning and losing can be the result of luck would seem to indicate that these variables do not adequately account for what the game is about. Yet luck is used with surprising regularity in the interpretation and explanation of hockey events. By examining several cases in which luck is used in the light of some of the meaning and values associated with hockey, it is possible to understand certain aspects of the rhetorical processes involved in giving order to this public culture. Furthermore, this focus on the use of luck in hockey makes it possible to examine luck as it is used in specific ethnographic situations rather than in the abstract world of logical relationships.

In adopting such an approach, this thesis is theoretically grounded in the anthropological study of rhetoric. Thus far, the two major anthro-



pological contributions to this field of research are a volume edited by Maurice Bloch (1975) and a volume edited by Robert Paine (1981). While there are significant differences in the approaches espoused by these two social anthropologists (to be discussed in Chapter II), both volumes share a common emphasis on political rhetoric. In this thesis the anthropological study of rhetoric is broadened to include non-political forms of rhetoric. Here a rhetorical approach is used in the analysis of a realm of culture (hockey) which is not formally political. The rhetorical approach to the public culture of hockey focuses analytical attention on the processes by which individuals -- referred to here as hockey rhetoricians -- order the meanings and values presented in their interpretations and explanations.

The analysis of luck and the related concepts of chance and probability are fairly common themes in the sociology, psychology and anthropology of sports (see Bailey, 1980; Goldstein, 1979; Hayano, 1978; Lau and Russell, 1980; Neil, 1975). These studies exhibit a common concern with whether or not such attributes as skill, talent and hard work can adequately explain what happens in sporting contests. The difficulty with this material is that luck is not presented as an ethnographic phenomenon. That is, instead of being investigated as an ethnographically occurring cultural category, luck is treated as an analytical one, to be understood in the way that any particular investigator chooses to define it. This allows debate about the objective causes of outcomes in sports without ever dealing with the meanings and values associated with them. Such an approach is very different from the one offered in this thesis.

Luck, when it is used in an ethnographic context, is never demonstrated by these analysts as matching up with their a priori definitions of what it

means. Their concern is with science, and not with the processes by which meanings and values are organized in specific ethnographic situations. One analyst of luck, and a psychologist at that, has hinted at these difficulties:

The idea of luck is ubiquitous but by no means simple, in the sense that it means precisely the same to everyone, everywhere. Expressions of 'luck' in different languages introduce nuances that are difficult, it not impossible, to capture in any particular tongue. And even those who speak the same language do not necessarily use the word 'luck' in the same sense (Cohen, 1960: 114).

Any approach which pre-defines luck and then sets out to analyze it ends up analyzing little more than its own construct. While such an approach may produce results which are useful in answering some questions, it does not answer questions concerning specific ethnographic contexts and the meanings created through the use of luck in these contexts.

In order to examine the use of luck in the public culture of hockey, close attention has been paid in this thesis to the categories of classification that are used in this specific culture. This closely parallels the methodology of Evans-Pritchard who, in his analysis of Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande (1937), states:

Here I am mainly concerned with following Zande thought. I have classed under a single heading what Zande call by a single word, and I have distinguished between types of behaviour that they consider different (1937:8).

In the analysis of the use of luck in the public culture of hockey the concern is with the way luck is used on specific rhetorical occasions in this culture. Luck is not an abstract relationship in this analysis; it refers to a cultural category in the public culture of hockey.

The ethnographic data on which this thesis is based was collected primarily during the 1980-81 hockey season. The material was collected

in one NHL city, Vancouver, but often originated elsewhere as reports from around the league are readily available through newspapers, magazines, books, and through radio and television broadcasts. Newspapers and other written material were collected daily and were sorted and examined regularly. Indices were created and maintained in order to aid the future location of any material considered useful. Radio and television broadcasts were first monitored for considerable time, with notes taken by hand, and were occasionally tape recorded. In the Stanley Cup playoffs, the pinnacle of the hockey year when all values become emphasized, the tape recording of both games and other sportscasts became most extensive. These tapes were also indexed to aid in the future location of relevant information.

Both the written and broadcast materials were collected in as systematic fashion as was possible. It is inevitable that in any ethnographic situation, some information will be missed by the ethnographer. In this case, for example, all the available radio and television broadcasts were not recorded, even when recording was at its most extensive stage, because many stations in Vancouver schedule their sports broadcasts at approximately the same time. While such competition may be good for their business, it is something less than ideal for an ethnographer engaged in collecting data. Still, even though not completely rigorous, an attempt has been made to sample all available sportscasts in Vancouver.

In collecting the written ethnographic materials used in this thesis, data gathering has not been confined solely to current sources, although it is the present which receives most emphasis. In a city such as Vancouver there are newspapers, magazines and books dealing with hockey that are readily available and up-to-date. However, also available are a number

of hockey books and other printed material which date back to well before the 1980-81 hockey season. As this past material is publicly available at the same time as the current information it is included for analysis here. Hockey rhetoricians regularly invoke the past in interpreting the present; this material has been incorporated into the analysis because it deals with information which is commonplace to the audience.

In the period following the original gathering of data, collection of materials has not ceased but it has become less systematic. Tapes have still been made of some sportscasts and some printed material has still been collected but more commonly, and in usual anthropological fashion, notes have been taken by hand.

The material gathered for this thesis has all been collected from naturally occurring situations. The statements made by any individual have not been elicited for the express purpose of the present study. Rather, this study makes use of statements made by individuals as they go about the normal task of communicating hockey information. Dealing only with statements made in such naturally occurring situations does at times make it difficult to collect specific information when it is required by an ethnographer. Without responses to specific questions, the investigator must be led by the data to important questions and must be willing to search much further when clarification is required. The main benefits of such an approach are that it does not skew the data too much to the investigators interests and assumptions, thereby preserving the integrity of the data. The difficulties encountered in conducting an investigation are more than compensated for by the benefits -- the data is as close to unaffected by the investigator as is possible to obtain

in anthropology.

Having made these features of the present work clear, it is now necessary to indicate something of the way in which the argument contained in this thesis is developed. This takes the form of a chapter by chapter summary of its contents:

Chapter II identifies the field of study in this thesis as the public cultural system of hockey. The theoretical basis for the analysis, developed primarily from the anthropological study of political rhetoric, and the methodological approach herein adopted, known as situational analysis, are then introduced and discussed.

In Chapter III the ethnographic context for the analysis of the cases of luck examined is introduced. This takes the form of an analytical description of the public culture of hockey as it relates specifically to the concern with winning and losing. Objective and moral dimensions of winning and losing are here identified.

Chapter IV provides the analysis of five specific cases in which luck is used to interpret or explain hockey events. Using the rhetorical approach to analyze these situations, it is possible to identify some of the ways in which luck is managed in the public culture of hockey. The use of luck in these situations is interpreted in light of meanings and values in the public culture of the game.

Chapter V, the final chapter, summarizes the argument and the material presented in this thesis in order to draw conclusions. Conclusions are drawn concerning the use of luck, the organization of meaning in the public culture of hockey and the applicability of the rhetorical approach beyond political analysis.

## CHAPTER II

### HOCKEY AS PUBLIC CULTURE

## I

Robert Paine has recently written that "the anthropological raison d'etre is, precisely, to explain cultures -- even to themselves" (1981a:1). Paine's concern is with Canadian politics, with a specific focus on what he refers to as "the culture of public politics" (1981a:3), and his recognition that anthropologists have thus far failed to provide an adequate analysis of this important sphere of Canadian life. It is Paine's contention that anthropologists have failed in this task because they have allowed themselves to be informed about Canadian politics by the so-called "media experts" instead of including these people in their analyses as a fundamental part of the ethnographic setting. For Paine, the "culture of public politics" refers to political happenings which are publicly staged for an audience; he is not overly concerned with the backstage machinations and political intrigue which lead to these type of political presentations. Similarly, his concern is with the rhetorician's 'reading' of his audience rather than with the audience itself. Of particular interest to Paine are "the rhetorical processes that nourish, and constrain, this kind of public culture" (1981a:3).

It is both interesting and important that in his attempt to convince his audience of the importance of words in the public culture of politics, Paine first chooses to invoke the prominence of words in the public culture of sporting events: "Words move the mind in an incredible way: ask why, when we are looking at a sports feature on TV, do we need the commentary?" (1981a:4). This illustration is not developed any further by Paine -- the important role of words in the public culture of sports is left as self-evident, so obvious in fact that it needs no further explanation for anyone. We are left, in good rhetorical fashion, to draw the correct

conclusion: that words are of considerable importance in the public culture of sport. Whatever the merits of Paine's assessment of the state of the anthropology of Canadian politics, there can be no denying that anthropologists have as yet failed to explore the public culture of Canadians' most visible contribution to the sporting world: ice hockey. If words are important in sports, as they are in politics, then the rhetorical aspects of the public culture of hockey certainly deserves our attention.

Canadians are told many things about hockey but one part of the message never changes: hockey is important in our lives as Canadians. It is, as journalist and broadcaster Peter Gzowski has written, The Game of Our Lives (1981). But it is not just hockey that is important in Canada, it is big-time professional hockey as it is played in the National Hockey League (NHL) that captures the attention of hockey fans of all ages. Gzowski's book is about the importance of hockey in our lives, but for his book to ring true he must, as he does, write of the NHL and the game as it is played there. It is the NHL that is the "game of our lives." Another author, reminiscing of his youth in Winnipeg and the role of hockey in his life at that time, writes:

As a child, when I crayoned the colors seemed to end up as hockey uniforms. When I kept a scrapbook, they somehow soon filled with pictures of hockey players. When I drew and did caricatures, the subjects were the big guys in the NHL. It happened that way. (Ludwig, 1974:xiii).

Ludwig's point is not that his childhood was singular in this attraction to hockey, but rather that this was commonplace. In Canada, youngsters from an early age learn to associate hockey with the NHL. The uniforms worn by young players reflect this association as regardless of whether



purchased in a store or provided by an organized team the jerseys worn to play hockey in are copies of the players' big-time counterparts.

In Canada and the USSR in 1972 the NHL, under the name Team Canada, took part in an eight game challenge series often referred to as "the match of the century." It was the first time that the best Canadian hockey players, those in the NHL, had played an International match against one of the best amateur teams in the world. Although the outcome of the series was much closer than many had thought it would be -- Canada won 4, lost 3 and tied 1 -- hockey supremacy for Canada was maintained, somewhat tarnished, but maintained just the same. The series was not, however, important just to the players as the Canadian public and hockey fans everywhere found the series captivating. In Canada the series was reported as news, not just sports. The Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, dropped the first puck for the ceremonial face-off in Montreal and the two teams played to capacity crowds in the four games played across Canada and in the subsequent four games played in Moscow.

While the arenas were filled, millions of other interested fans watched the series on television or listened to it on the radio. As the series unfolded it became clear that hockey had become much more than just the game played on the ice between the two teams; in Canada it was transformed into a match between Canada, the inventor of the game, and a world super-power that had learnt the game from the team they now opposed. It was master against pupil, good against evil as the several thousand Canadian fans that had made the trip to Moscow noisily chanted "Da Da Canada, Nyet Nyet Soviet" (Ludwig, 1974:225). When the series was over Team Canada was welcomed home in Toronto as "in a downpour, sixty thousand or seventy

thousand hockey fans waited for three hours for the team to arrive" (Ludwig, 1974:247). Perhaps the ultimate statement of the political meaning of this series was made by Paul Henderson, the player who scored the winning goal in the decisive eighth game with only 34 seconds left to play, when he was later quoted as saying: "When I scored that winning goal I knew what democracy was all about." In Canada, the series was far more than just eight hockey games.

It is not just International competition that captures the attention of the hockey public in Canada; it is International play when the NHL players are involved that is of public interest. Amateur hockey receives little media coverage when the NHL is playing either domestically or internationally. In Canada, "Hockey Night in Canada" (HNIC), the twice weekly national telecast of NHL regular season and playoff games has for a long time been one of the most popular television shows (Ozon, 1973:4). Its effect on the lives of Canadians has been significant in that millions of people arrange their lives so that they might watch these telecasts. As one observer has put it:

...it has enormously modified the habits of life, the lifestyle of millions of people. For instance, to plan a social function in British Columbia before 9:00 p.m. on Wednesdays or Saturdays is useless if it is to be successful. Conversely, to plan anything after 9:30 p.m. on the same nights in Newfoundland has the same effect. In my opinion, "Hockey Night In Canada" affects the habits of family units more than any other thing that happens on a regular basis. It's true and it makes no difference what professional oriented entertainment is opposing it (in Ozon, 1973:8-9).

Hockey effects the lives of many more people than just the 11,691,524 people that attended NHL regular season and playoff games in the 1980-81 season (Andrews, 1981:300). It also influences the millions who do not attend

but who listen to, watch, or read about the game.

Yet, people do not give the game importance in Canada by just passively following it. People give it importance through their actions and accounts of these actions. In virtually every book on hockey and the NHL there is a recounting, in some form, of the now famous "St. Patrick's Day Riot" which took place on St. Patrick's day, 1955, in Montreal. Varying in length from a few paragraphs up to entire chapters, the accounts of this famous incident always contain certain basic facts. Maurice "Rocket" Richard, a great scorer and leader of the Montreal Canadiens, entered into a stick-swinging incident with Hal Laycoe, a journeyman defenseman with the Boston Bruins, near the end of the 1954-55 NHL season. Laycoe is portrayed as the instigator of the incident, usually by his own admission, but it is Richard who was the more severely penalized. Because he struck an official, a linesman named Cliff Thompson, Richard was suspended for the rest of the regular season and for all of the playoffs while Laycoe was allowed to continue playing.

When Detroit visited Montreal on 17 March 1955, the first home game for the Canadiens following the Richard suspension, the Red Wings and Canadiens never finished the game. As Clarence Campbell, President of the NHL and the man who had suspended Richard, and his secretary prepared to occupy their usual seats they were pelted with all manner of thrown objects, culminating with the explosion of a tear gas bomb. As the bomb detonated, the Forum quickly emptied as the crowd rushed out and down St. Catharine Street in a frenzy, looting and burning as they went. As a result of this riot some 100 hockey fans were arrested and an estimated \$100,000 worth of damage was done. The city was only quieted down after

Richard himself appeared on television and urged the fans to go home. Hockey, we are told, is so important in Montreal that people were willing to go to considerable lengths when they thought that the star of their team had been wronged.

In the playoffs of the 1981-82 NHL season the Vancouver Canucks played in the Stanley Cup finals against the defending champions, the New York Islanders. Never before in their previous eleven NHL seasons had a Vancouver team gone beyond the first round, of four rounds, of post-season play. As the Canucks moved through the playoffs the people of Vancouver and British Columbia, and then slowly across Canada, began following the team as they won game after game. Then, in the semi-finals against the Chicago Black Hawks, long time rivals of the Vancouver team, the Vancouver coach, Roger Neilson, raised a white flag -- in the form of a white trainer's towel -- in surrender to the referee. Vancouver was losing to Chicago in the game and Neilson wanted to indicate to the Chicago team, fans, and to everyone else that the Canucks had not lost the game by being out-played by Chicago; they lost because the referee had taken it from them by his poor officiating.

This raising of the towel cost the Vancouver team over \$10,000 in fines to the NHL, but it also gained them considerable support from their fans back in Vancouver. When the Canucks returned home, a few days later, to host the Chicago team, the Pacific Coliseum was a sea of waving white towels. Throughout the remainder of the Chicago series and all through the finals the white towels were waved and displayed all around Vancouver. The white flag, traditionally a sign of defeat, was transformed into a symbol of victory for the Vancouver hockey fans. Its meaning was reversed as it became a symbol to rally around and to cheer the Canucks on to victory

with. Along with the towels, posters appeared in gas stations displaying the slogan "Go Canucks Go" in bold lettering, bumper stickers could be seen on numerous cars praising the talents of the Vancouver goaltender, decals bearing the Canuck logo were affixed to objects all around the city providing a constant reminder of the team's fortunes, and signs could be seen invoking nothing more than "Towel Power," a phrase everyone was assumed to understand. Restauranteers interviewed on Vancouver television admitted that the performance of the Canucks in the playoffs was seriously eating into their business as people stayed home to watch the games on television or attended the games instead of going out to dinner. Lounges with large screen facilities, however, were filled to capacity as towel waving hockey fans sang the new found "fight song" of the Canucks as they watched, cheered and drank. Hockey in Vancouver moved from the sports pages to the front page.

Few Canadians ever play in the NHL, but anyone, including the players, can take part in the public culture of hockey. The above illustrations are introduced as evidence of the widespread significance and cultural importance that many people do, in fact, give to hockey. The point is that any spectacle such as this, that affects the lives of so many, deserves our serious attention. Yet anthropologists have not taken up this task. We have not, as Paine has urged us to do, explained ourselves to ourselves as far as hockey is concerned.

## II

When anthropologists study foreign or "exotic" peoples there is a willingness to explore the games and sports of the people that they live with. Somehow this willingness does not make itself felt when it is

ourselves that we are studying. When Clifford Geertz writes of Balinese cockfights as "deep play" he shows how this Balinese spectacle can help us to understand something of all the people involved, not just the participants (Geertz, 1972). Similarly, Manning can write of "Celebrating Cricket" in Bermuda and relate it to Bermudian politics in a fashion that makes us see the cultural importance of this event not just for the players but for the spectators as well (Manning, 1981). When William Arens, an anthropologist writing on the passion that Americans have for their football, states:

...if an anthropologist from another planet visited here, he would be struck by the American fixation with this game and would report on it with all the glee and romantic intoxication usually reserved for the exotic rituals of a newly discovered tribe (Arens, 1979:37).

While Arens's account of the importance and meaning of American football is somewhat impressionistic, it does have the merit of recognizing the necessity of dealing with the public culture of the game in any analysis that is offered. Like Geertz and Manning, Arens recognizes that the cultural importance of these sporting events cannot be found by focussing only on what happens on the playing field. These events can only be understood if they are treated as public culture.

In the analysis of hockey, it is only Wyllie, writing on "The Big Hockey Ritual" (1975), who has attempted an analysis of the public culture of the sport. Masquerading under the fictitious identity of Angus M'Bongo, a young Swazi anthropologist, Wyllie provides a humorous account of the public culture of hockey in Canada. In presenting this analysis in a humorous fashion Wyllie is able to caricature and misrepresent some aspects of hockey, as an outside like M'Bongo is likely to do, but his analysis

is successful because the seriousness of what he is sending up is well understood by his audience. In this piece, Wyllie does make it explicit that it is "big hockey" that is of most interest to the public: "...it is the Big Hockey ritual which attracts the most public attention in North America..." (1975:9). The Big Hockey ritual is the NHL and, as such, it is the public culture of the NHL that should attract our analytical attention.

In the attempt to deal with the public culture of hockey the academic literature on the sport is of very little use. This material tends to focus on the amateur game and to discuss the professional game only in the attempt to document the perceived negative influences of the professional game on the game played by amateurs. The recent works of Vaz (1982) and Goranson (1982), to note but two examples, both do this. Vaz attempts to document the alleged "professionalization" of young hockey players through the influence of the NHL and Goranson attempts to document the effects of violence in the NHL on the level of violence in amateur hockey. While these are in many ways worthwhile studies, even a cursory review of the popular literature on hockey, such as can be found in The Hockey Bibliography (Thom, 1978), reveals that this academic emphasis is somewhat misplaced. In the popular literature it is the NHL and things related to the NHL that are written, sold and read. The existence of the popular culture of hockey is recognized, as in the piece by Wyllie, but it is not usually treated as a subject worthy of serious analytical treatment. Even the insights developed by those examining the amateur game are not of much use in the analysis of the public culture of NHL hockey. These studies tend to focus on problems of socialization, motivation, team dynamics and violence on the ice. If this focus is applied to the study of the NHL, the

result is not a study of the public culture of hockey but a study of the NHL players. As noted above, in the review of Geertz, Manning and Arens, this focus leaves unexamined much that is important.

The public culture of hockey, as it is used here, refers to all that information and interpretation which is made available to anyone who is interested in looking for it. This feature of availability makes some hockey information public while some remains private and unavailable. Being public information does not mean that every individual must have access to it; public here means that the information is intended for an audience which is larger than the players of the NHL game. Studies of public culture are becoming more common in anthropology, as can be seen in the recent work of Paine (1981a; 1981b), the work of Szwed on Newfoundland (1966), and the work of Gusfield on "the culture of public problems" (1981) which, although not the work of an anthropologist, is heavily indebted to anthropological research. With this focus on public culture anthropologists are moving away from the concern with what is going on backstage as the most important story and recognizing that what happens up front is what most people see and take part in. To focus on the private culture would be to focus on the players and other insiders.

So much information about hockey is generated every day during the long NHL season (and somewhat less during the off-season) that it is impossible for any single individual to be aware of it all. A wealth of information is produced and circulated through so many media channels, what Paine would refer to as the "media mix" (1981a:9), that it is impossible for any individual to consume it all, no matter how hard they may try. There are radio reports, television reports, play-by-play accounts



on radio and television, newspaper stories, magazine articles, and even conversations with friends and acquaintances in which hockey information is communicated. Every team in the NHL has some sort of radio or television contracts (Andrews, 1981:11-31), and receives other coverage in the local media, although the degree of coverage varies around the league. It is not only the volume of information that makes it impossible for any individual to receive it all, it is also the geographical spread over which the information is generated. No individual can watch television reports, listen to radio reports, read all the newspapers and listen to all the people on the street as they talk hockey in every NHL city at the same time. It is just not physically possible for anyone to do so.

There are some ways in which this inevitable lack of all the information is rendered relatively unimportant. First, there is the recognition that no-one has all the information, not the professional players nor the media experts. While no-one has all the information, there are ways in which a great deal of information can be obtained. The Hockey News, published weekly during the season and monthly in the off-season, contains articles and feature stories from around the NHL as well as reports on the other leagues which train players for the NHL. The wide distribution of The Hockey News makes this information readily available to people everywhere. Also, there are the HNIC telecasts which are available from coast to coast, hockey books which must be written for a large audience if they are to be successful and the reporters who travel with the touring NHL teams, filing reports on both the league and the home team. The material in these different reports can never be about just a single team or individual player, but must always include information about the NHL in general. It

is the NHL that serves as the context for all this information and interpretation. Because those who report on hockey do not know exactly who their audience is, their reports have to be recognizable as hockey to a large number of people. Therefore, if the public culture of hockey is understood to be about hockey first and the specifics of any particular story second, then the public culture of the game can be understood without necessarily requiring access to all the currently available information.

One of the most prominent features of the public culture of hockey is that it presents itself as being the "inside" story of what happens in the game. That the information communicated is the "inside" view is stressed in several ways. Newspaper stories, and other written accounts, abound with quotations from NHL players, coaches, managers and anyone else who is professionally associated with the game. Television and radio broadcasts contain interviews with the players and others who quite freely describe hockey as it is played in the NHL. Television and radio broadcasts of NHL games have "colour" commentators who are by and large former players and coaches, such as Gary Dornhoefer and Don Cherry on HNIC telecasts. These "colourmen" are continually asked to provide a view of the game as the professionals see and understand it, by telling the public what is happening down on the ice or in the dressing rooms. Popular books on the NHL, which tend to focus on the biographies of the players, are virtually all subtitled in a way as to make it clear that they contain the inside story on what it is like and what it takes to play hockey in the NHL. Other books, such as Gzowski's (1981) are involved in the same game, chasing the players for the inside story. Gzowski spent one whole season with the Edmonton Oilers, travelling with them, joking with them, practising with them and even

working with them. He constantly reminds the reader that he was there as he writes his account from the players' and coaches' interests out, presenting other individuals only insofar as they affect the players and the coaches. It is the "inside" story in the public culture of hockey which is made public.

It is interesting that the players themselves read, watch and listen to the same public culture that is available to everyone. The public culture of hockey is not just for those who are "outsiders" and who want to know the "inside" story. It is also for the "insiders" who live the game. Gzowski presents several incidents, all of them presented as being quite common and normal, of the players on the Oilers passing around and reading The Hockey News and the sports pages from the papers in the different cities they visit (1981:16; 19; 119). Players and coaches may at times deny that they pay any attention to the media, but this can often be shown to be a false claim. For example, on 13 March 1981 Harry Neale, then coach of the Vancouver Canucks, verbally attacked a Vancouver sportscaster for publicly saying things that Neale thought were uncalled for. The sportscaster had criticized Neale's handling of a player's career. Neale began his assault, aired on a post-game radio show that follows all Canuck games, with the statement that "If I've heard five shows this week...." The fact that Neale had assured the local media that he never paid any attention to them when he first arrived to coach the Canucks was quickly noted by another sportscaster on the same show, after Neale had left. Neale's outburst was nicely turned into a success story for the media -- they finally had him listening.

The public culture of hockey is an expressive culture. It involves

a great deal of information and the interpretation of this information. There are reports of the on-ice happenings, of course, but there are also a number of reports dealing with such topics as contract negotiations, the economics of the league and its teams, the structure of the playoffs and the personal lives of both past and present hockey people. The only feature which at first glance seems to unite all this information is that all is concerned with the NHL. As there is so much information on so many specific aspects of the public culture of the NHL it is not possible to offer a systematic treatment of the entire public culture here. This wealth of material is only referred to here insofar as it relates to using luck to interpret or explain winning and losing in hockey.

### III

In this thesis, the public culture of hockey is treated as a cultural system (cf. Geertz, 1964, 1966, 1975). It is treated as such because hockey information is understandable without having to be invented anew on each occasion that it is communicated. That is, there are a set of assumptions made by both the creators and the consumers of the public culture of hockey concerning what is expected in any communication event and how the information communicated will be ordered. Some things have to be made explicit while others can be left implicit and still be understood. The idiom of hockey does not need to be created in each account. This feature seems common to sports in general. In a review of sports talk, dubbed "sportugese" by Tannenbaum and Noah (1969), Watson and Seaton draw two conclusions:

...first, that sportugese is a verbal code understood by those who use it; and second, that the ordinary sports

reader is at least as competent as the expert in handling this verbal code (Watson and Seaton, 1979:306).

The two conclusions follow directly from the work of Tannenbaum and Noah. As a cultural system, then, hockey is an activity around which there are a related set of understood values and meanings shared by both expert and fan. In looking at the public culture of hockey in this way, an explanation is produced by analytically placing the use of luck in the public cultural system of hockey. Thus the use of luck in hockey is examined, freeing us from having to map its use in every conceivable context. The context here is defined by the concern with hockey.

This sort of approach in anthropological analysis is not unique to Geertz. It is used in much modern social anthropology and is perhaps most explicit in Gluckman's now famous phrase: "An African townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner" (1961:69). Growing out of research undertaken in the Copperbelt region of Central Africa, Gluckman's argument is that to understand African townsmen and miners sociologically they must first be considered as townsmen and miners and not as tribal peoples with these characteristics. They must first be related to others in similar social situations. This approach was common in the research carried out by the members of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in central Africa but it has not been confined only to those who worked out of the Institute.

More recently Henriksen's analysis of the Naskapi Indians in northern Quebec and Labrador has also found this approach useful (Henriksen, 1973). In his volume Henriksen deals with two very different ways in which the Naskapi deal with social relationships. In the summer the Naskapi are on the coast in a village and are dependent upon welfare payments and the

Canadian economy. Here goods and services are paid for with money. In the winter the Naskapi leave the coast and venture inland to search for caribou. Cash and the Canadian economy are left behind as goods and services are shared through mutual obligations. The Naskapi cultural system changes when they are in different contexts and these changes in activity must be considered in any analysis of the Naskapi culture.

Another example of this approach is Zulaika's analysis of Spanish fishermen (1981). Zulaika states his aim to be to "uncover the modes of thought developed by the fishermen in the course of pursuing their occupation" (1981:ix). He is not concerned with the "modes of thought" of these people when they are not fishing; it is this activity of fishing and the modes of thought associated with it which are of interest to Zulaika. His debt to Geertz on this point is made explicit as he states that his interest is "with fishing as a cultural system" (Zulaika, 1981:ix; emphasis in original).

An important feature of the concept of cultural system as it has been developed by Geertz is that the ways in which meanings and values associated with an activity or sphere of life are organized is not very well developed. It is, after all, one thing to study a set of meanings and values as they are associated with an activity but quite another thing to demonstrate the processes by which these meanings and values are ordered in specific instances within this activity. This focus becomes more important when it is recognized that there can exist disagreement and lack of consensus among the individuals involved over the 'correct' organization or ordering of any meanings or values. In hockey, for example, disagreements over the relative importance of some meanings and values are common. In fact,

such disagreements are fundamental to the public culture of the game. For every individual in hockey who claims that the key to winning hockey games is a good offense there is to be found someone else who claims that the key is defense. It is even possible that the same individual could assert both positions, on different occasions and in different situations.

The processes of ordering the meanings and values within a cultural system is of considerable interest as it is the focus on such processes that will reveal how meanings and values can be both created and maintained. Meanings and values can be contradictory but still remain as parts of the same cultural system. It is here, in the analysis of the processes by which a cultural system is internally ordered, that the recent work in the anthropological study of political rhetoric proves useful. It is by approaching the public culture of hockey in a manner similar to the way Paine and others, most notably those who contributed to the volume Politically Speaking edited by Paine (1981), have approached the analysis of rhetoric that the processes for ordering the cultural system of hockey can be made clear. In this task we are guided by Paine and his emphasis, noted earlier, on "the rhetorical processes that nourish, and constrain, this kind of public culture" (1981a:3).

#### IV

Paine's essay "When Saying is Doing" (1981:9-23) serves as a statement of theoretical orientation for the case studies he introduces in Politically Speaking. In this essay Paine makes several distinctions which must be dealt with in order to proceed with the analysis the public culture of hockey as rhetoric. The first distinction which Paine draws our attention to is the difference between rhetoric and just 'talking about' (1981:9).

In rhetoric, according to Paine, "saying is doing" and "the 'doing' and the effect are inseparable" (Paine, 1981:9). Rhetoric in politics, Paine argues, is most usefully considered as a form of action, the conscious aim of which is "to organize the experience of those who are to be persuaded" (1981:10). Political rhetoric can inform and influence about events, even events that the audience does not witness first-hand. The rhetorician, be he a politician or a media expert, in effect creates the public meanings of these events through the action of his speech. Rhetoric is an action which conveys its own messages, it is not dependent upon other types of action for the meanings that are communicated. For example, one prominent aspect of all political contests that are witnessed in Canada are the promises which all campaigning candidates make. These promises have an effect on the audience even if they are never physically acted upon. It is the act of promising which is both the saying and the doing.

By implication, just 'talking about' something is not in Paine's conception of political rhetoric, a form of action. The contrast that Paine makes between rhetoric and just talking about is not drawn in absolute terms, the most it seems to be is one of degree. Nowhere does Paine draw a hard and fast line between the two types of speech acts so that any talk could be clearly categorized as one or the other type. It would seem that Paine's purpose is different than such a simple classification of speech acts. Instead, it would seem that much of the distinction which he draws is for academic emphasis, for the purpose of analysis. Just 'talking about' something becomes rhetoric when the analyst chooses to interpret it as such. Seeing a speech act as 'doing'



rather than merely 'talking about' is a stance that can be adopted for analytical purposes. It follows that rhetoric is not confined solely to political contexts. If the 'saying' can be seen as 'doing' then it does not matter what the subject under consideration is, it can be investigated as rhetoric.

In the public culture of hockey it is possible to read and hear reports about hockey without seeing the game or the action that these reports are about. These reports can be interpretations of what happens on or off the ice, including speculation about possible happenings which may be of interest to those interested in the NHL. For many people these accounts, no matter whom or where they come from, are what hockey is all about. It is in these accounts that the organization of the experience of hockey for those involved is most clear. These accounts are not dependent upon what happens on the ice for their effect, their presentation is their own effect. For example, a common topic of discussion in the public culture of hockey is the practice of trading players from one team to another. Many more possible trades are talked about than ever take place. Thus, discussion of this part of the game has a value its own. The public culture of hockey can be seen as a type of action, for in hockey saying is doing. As such, the public culture of hockey can be investigated as rhetoric.

Paine introduces a second set of related distinctions in order to clarify when a rhetorical analysis is applicable. He contrasts rhetoric with propaganda and at the same time contrasts persuasion with coercion (Paine, 1981:20). Rhetoric is seen as convincing through persuasion while propaganda convinces by coercion. The basis of this distinction lies in

Paine's conception of the audience. Rhetoric persuades with the understanding that the audience has a choice between different options presented by different rhetoricians. With propaganda the audience is convinced by coercion because they are not presented any options. Paine recognizes that this distinction also is one of degree rather than absolutes. This is because "rhetoric is itself devoted to the reduction of an audience's perception of choices" (Paine, 1981:21).

In the public culture of hockey there are a number of different sources of information and interpretation which an audience can choose from. As Paine notes:

But audiences are not defenceless. One speaker's style can be compared with another's, and audiences will do this, as much as they are able, on their terms (1981:12).

Statements made in the public culture of hockey are evaluated and discussed. In this way individuals interested in hockey exercise considerable choice as to whether they accept the way that any individual attempts to organize their experience. The attempt at organization can always be denied by members of the audience, a fact that all rhetoricians must take into account. In the public culture of hockey there are numerous media experts, among others, who must all seek out their stories and present their interpretations; these stories vary a great deal. In this respect, then, the public culture of hockey more closely resembles Paine's notion of rhetoric than that of propaganda.

The "key notions" which serve to guide the theoretical orientation of the specific case studies in Politically Speaking are "'context,' 'strategy,' 'performance' and 'persuasion'" (1981:2). These key notions serve, in part, to distinguish the approach adopted in the Paine volume

from an earlier statement on the nature of political rhetoric by Maurice Bloch (1975). For Bloch, political rhetoric is understood to be a "formalised language" the correct use of which leads not to the negotiation of the political order but instead to its required acceptance. Formalization in political rhetoric is not the central feature of the disagreement for as Paine states:

Certainly there are notions of formalization in various chapters of this volume, but the disagreement with Bloch is fundamental. It reaches even to the epistemological standing of the social world: something 'given' or something negotiated? The principal difficulty arises over the way Bloch associates formalization with an absence of negotiation between speaker and audience (1981:2).

The theoretical orientation of the studies contained in the Paine volume are indebted to transactional theory as it has developed in social anthropology. Social life is not treated as a static given, it is always in the dynamic process of being negotiated and formed. This approach leads the analysts to the study of the individuals who are publicly producing the rhetoric.

Meanings and values do not organize themselves in social life; they must always be organized by someone. This is one of the central features of the transactional approach adopted in Politically Speaking:

Our focus is upon the organization of 'meaning' in the verbal culture of politics; how it is selected, constructed and communicated--or 'lost.' Thus whether the rhetoric is purple prose or plain talk, establishment or radical, the chapters are about different cultural forms of rhetorical persuasion, about the setting of rhetorical 'traps' and about how rhetorical strategy and the actual performance of a speech take account of the occasion or context (Paine, 1981:1).

It is this focus on the dynamics of the processes of organizing meanings that is of considerable importance in the examination of the cultural

system of hockey. By analyzing the processes by which meanings are organized in this public culture it is possible to understand how conflicting meanings can exist as parts of the same cultural system. In the culture of public politics it is always an individual who is seen to organize the specific meanings presented on any particular occasion. Others may help to write it or be quoted in it but it is always an individual that presents it. In hockey this is also true. It is only ever a single individual who publicly presents the organized meanings on any occasion. Even when a group of individuals appear together, as in a television interview, each individual presents his own interpretation or explanation and the participants are not compelled to agree amongst themselves. Even in a newspaper article, which may contain many quotations, it is still an individual reporter who decides on how the quotes and his opinion are to be linked together. This is done according to the meaning that the organizer wishes to convey to an audience.

Recent investigations into what has come to be known as the "new rhetoric" (see Perelman, 1974; and Burke, 1969) also exerts some influence on the way the analyses are developed in Paine's volume. While the formal discipline of rhetoric may be, as Paine notes, "a minefield of arcane terms" (Paine, 1981:2), the new rhetoric focuses its attention not on this terminology in the attempt to understand argumentation but instead focuses on the processes by which a rhetorician attempts to persuade an audience. It is an essential claim of the new rhetoric that no argument can be understood without considering the role of the audience in its construction. The importance of the audience in the emerging anthropological study of political rhetoric is stated by Paine: "We take the view

that political legitimacy is mainly the problem of getting people to listen, or rather, to accept what is said" (1981:9). But, as Paine shows, this need not necessarily mean that the audience has to be persuaded to accept the rhetorician's views; it means only that the audience needs to be convinced that the rhetorician represents their views (1981:12-13).

In persuading the audience that their views are being represented the rhetorician must "make assiduous use of ambiguity" (Paine, 1981:17). By making ambiguous statements the rhetorician allows the audience to reach conclusions without having everything spelled out clearly for them. In this way, different members of the audience can interpret the same words in different ways and still provide the necessary legitimacy for the rhetorician (Paine, 1981:18- ). In the public culture of hockey there is also the difficulty of getting the audience to listen. The rhetorician in hockey must justify to the audience his claim to knowing about the game. To do this the rhetorician must indicate that he has inside information and that his interpretation of events is consistent with other available hockey information.

In order to accomplish this the rhetorician in hockey must always work from a 'reading' of his audience. One Vancouver sportswriter is said to write for the fans in the bleachers, not the ones in the box seats: "This mythical Regular Guy in his mind acts as a kind of superego over columns that never betray standard expectations" (Stanley 1980:112). Another sportswriter, on a between-periods interview of a television broadcast of a hockey game, spoke of evaluating his reports: "Judging from the reactions you get talking to fans, and you do talk to fans all the time...." No one who communicates hockey information is free to

'create' any meaning that they wish. If they want their audience to listen to them, as an indication of their legitimacy, they must then frame their communication in a way that makes it both recognizable and understandable as hockey.

Another source of theoretical inspiration for the studies that Paine introduces is the recent and rapidly developing interest in sociolinguistics or, as Dell Hymes would have it, the "ethnography of speaking" (1962) or the "ethnography of communication" (1964). Hyme's work in this area has primarily been confined to programmatic statements concerning the type of research which should be carried out, but these statements indicate that he has been influenced by Kenneth Burke and research in the "new rhetoric" (Hymes, 1966). In his programmatic statements for this area of study Hymes demonstrates a concern with the contexts and codes of communication. This is of interest to those analysing rhetoric because it directs attention to a central feature of all written or spoken rhetoric: it must aim to be appropriate for the context in which it is delivered. The task in the study of rhetoric, when rhetoric is treated as a code is to understand the form that is used to convey the content (Paine, 1981:12).

For Hymes, communication is an on-going process and to understand any single communication event it is necessary to examine the social context in which it takes place (Hymes, 1964). In approaching political rhetoric in this manner, an election is seen as being considerably more than just the final count of votes. A politician usually has abundant time to fill once an election is called, and a large portion of this time is filled with campaign speeches (Paine, 1981:11). The individual speeches made during this time must be, if they are to be understood,

placed in the context of the on-going election campaign. Following Hymes' lead, in order to aid in the understanding of these speeches it is analytically useful to consider them as coded, the code of which requires 'breaking.' This is part of the approach adopted in the studies Paine introduces (Paine, 1981:10). These insights can also help to guide the investigation of the public culture of hockey. The public culture of hockey is an on-going event which is marked by numerous situations when hockey information is made available.

As an on-going event, hockey information must always be related to what is currently happening in hockey and to events which took place in its past. Even if these connections are made, it is not possible to communicate just anything at anytime in the culture of hockey. The rhetorician of hockey must always be concerned with the appropriateness of how and what is being communicated. In Hymes' conceptual scheme this would be expressed as a concern with the correct code for hockey information. For the rhetorician of hockey to make inappropriate statements, for whatever reason, is to endanger their reputation for knowing the game. If you don't know the talk, you can't possibly know the game. This is easily turned into an attack on the legitimacy, the claim to be worth listening to, when hockey is the subject. In a newspaper article dealing with the television broadcasting career of Howie Meeker, a former player and 'rookie-of-the-year' in the NHL, Elliott Pap notes that no-one's judgement or knowledge of hockey is immune from evaluation by an audience. When Meeker informs Pap that he would like to continue to do the HNIC telecasts for another ten years Pap concludes that: "His critics may not appreciate that bit of news but for his fans, hey gee whiz, it's gotta be super!" (1982:E1).

These three theoretical sources, transactional analysis, the "new rhetoric," and sociolinguistics, provide the major analytical guidance for the studies Paine presents in Politically Speaking. In not one of these studies is a theory mechanically applied to the ethnographic data being considered. The emphasis in these studies is on the explanation and interpretation of the ethnography. The theory involved in these studies, while important, is used to help in this task rather than the other way around, where the ethnographic data becomes subservient to grand theoretical considerations. The same approach will be adopted here. It is the ethnographic data which is of prime interest here and the theoretical insights developed for the analysis of rhetoric are used to aid in this task of making it understandable. The analytical tools developed by Paine and his contributors for the purpose of examining political rhetoric supply the majority of the insights used here, but no one approach is adopted and applied mechanically to the analysis of the uses of luck in the public culture of hockey. To phrase the relationship between data and theory in terms of that between master and slave, the theory here serves the data rather than the data serving the theory.

## V

The method used to organize the data in this thesis is one which was developed by anthropologists working in complex societies. Often referred to as the analysis of "social situations" (Garbett, 1970) or as "the extended-case method" (Van Velsen, 1967), this method was introduced by Max Gluckman in his analysis of a bridge opening ceremony in modern Zululand (1940). In this piece Gluckman focuses his attention



on one happening, his social situation, and makes sense of it by tracing the relationships between the ceremonial opening of a bridge out to the larger context of the society in which this event took place. This use of material by Gluckman, with whole sections pulled from his fieldwork notebooks (1940:2), led to a very different handling of ethnographic data in social anthropology by those who chose to adopt it.

Instead of merely using the specific data collected as "apt illustrations" of the general points that the anthropologist wishes to make in an analysis, Gluckman placed the data at the centre of the study. Instead of using different pieces of his ethnographic data to illustrate the general features of White-African relations in Zululand, Gluckman set out to make sense of one specific situation which he had observed and recorded. This particular situation could only be made understandable for Gluckman by relating it to the larger social structure existing in modern Zululand at that time. This approach and way of treating ethnographic data placed the emphasis on the specifics of the material which the anthropologist collected rather than on the somewhat confusing generalities which could be culled from this data. It is understandable why such a method would be developed by anthropologists carrying out research in complex societies.

This way of presenting ethnographic data set the stage for such analyses as Turner's Schism and Continuity in African Society (1957), Van Velsen's The Politics of Kinship (1964) and J. Clyde Mitchell's The Kalela Dance (1956). These ethnographic studies did not just use the method developed by Gluckman, they also modified it and developed it even further. By the early 1960s anthropologists were not just using

this technique as a methodological tool, they were beginning to explore it and write on it in and of itself. Gluckman presented an early discussion of the use of data in British social anthropology in which he noted the shift from the apt illustration to the analysis of social situations (1961). Van Velsen also discusses the merits of this approach, first in a short introductory note to his volume (1964) and then later in a longer article devoted entirely to the way this method is used in anthropology (1967). Three years after Van Velsen's article was in print an article by G. Kingsley Garbett also presented an extended discussion of this method (1970). Neither Van Velsen (1967) nor Garbett (1970), however, introduced any new ethnographic data in their articles as they confine themselves to drawing out some of the implications of the method. Such reviews were rendered useful because of the continued use of this method by anthropologists.

Although this method has been developed in many different ways, for many different purposes, it is useful here to indicate the two major directions in which these developments have led. This can profitably be done by comparing its use in the recent work of E. Marx (1976) and Don Handelman (1978), each of which is representative of one of these two directions. It is important to remember that in Gluckman's original piece using this method the focus was on a single event, the opening of a bridge in modern Zululand along with the ceremonies which accompanied it. In Handelman's analysis of child abuse in urban Newfoundland, he takes as the unit of study 'cases' of child abuse. Not only are cases bureaucratically recognized, but such an approach is also analytically fruitful (1978:16). By following through an individual case of child

abuse Handelman traces and documents the way such cases are bureaucratically dealt with as new information is accumulated and interpreted. Handelman's use of this method is quite close to the way that Gluckman originally used it in this way, although Handelman stresses the on-going nature of the cases.

For Marx, however, the extended-case method means something quite different. Starting rather polemically, "While some social scientists have used the method very effectively, often without mentioning it by name, others have falsely claimed to be using it" (1976:2-3), Marx is quite clear on how he believes the method should best be used. In his study of inter-personal violence the use of this method involves detailing several cases or situations which are prepared for analytical purposes. These cases are developed and recorded through a "lengthy dialectical examination" (1976:3) of the observed occurrences and the anthropologist's theoretical interests. Through the development of a number of such cases the sociological problem with which the analyst is concerned can be examined in depth. These cases, when they are presented, are not just the material for a sociological analysis, they are in fact "the end product of sociological analysis" (1976:3). These cases are not drawn directly from the anthropologist's notebooks; they are the analytical creation of the anthropologist, each containing the necessary information needed to make it understandable. The material contained in the cases and the connections drawn between the elements so contained is based on the theoretical problem the analyst is working on. It is not just the specific situations which the anthropologist is interested in, it is the regularities which can be demonstrated to exist through the analysis

of a number of cases relating to the same analytical problem. In adopting this approach to the extended-case method, Marx differs considerably from the approaches of Gluckman and Handelman. While maintaining the same concern for the specifics of the ethnographic data, Marx deals with the questions which cannot be dealt with if Gluckman's approach is strictly followed. Through the comparative analysis of a number of different cases, Marx is able to address questions concerning the meaning of violence in several related contexts and thereby demonstrate regularities in its use.

In this thesis, the approach developed by Marx is used to organize the data. This choice is made on the basis of the analytical question which is being pursued here. It is through the observation and analytical development and examination of several cases of the use of luck in the public culture of hockey that its use can be understood. All the cases of luck discussed here are therefore concerned with the same analytical question and it is this focus which helps to determine which features in each case are incorporated into the description of the situations. Through the examination of a number of cases in which luck is used in hockey, something of the range of situations in which it can be used in and the ways it can be used are made understandable.

### CHAPTER III

#### HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

## I

In his analysis of "political rhetoric in the new Newfoundland" Robert Paine writes that "the first thing that must be done (in any study of political rhetoric) is to take account of the cultural context in which the speeches are made" (1981b:2). After noting the importance of this aspect of social analysis he then proceeds to indicate something of the particular culture of public politics in Newfoundland. Analytically, it is only against this cultural background that his anthropological interpretation of the rhetoric used in the 1979 provincial election can be adequately developed and presented. This emphasis on analyzing social or cultural phenomena in context is one of the central tenets of modern social anthropology (Beattie, 1964:10). It is only when examined in their specific ethnographic contexts that such phenomena can be seen to be meaningful.

In the analysis of the use of luck in the public culture of hockey this same tenet holds true: if the use of luck in hockey is to be rendered anthropologically understandable, then it must be examined as it is used naturally, embedded in the cultural context of the game. However, it is not every aspect of the public culture of hockey which must be presented in order to make its use understandable. The important aspects of this public culture must be identified in order to limit the presentation of contextual material. Without such identification, the task of describing the cultural context would remain forever unfinished and the analysis of the use of luck would remain to be done. In any presentation of material, if it is to be successful, there must be some clear organizing principle or focus of attention which identifies the relevance of what is being presented. Thus, while the use of luck must be interpreted within the

cultural context of the game of hockey, this context is far too vague and unspecific to facilitate an analysis. Before the use of luck can be examined, the relevant aspects of the public culture of hockey must be identified and described.

As a competitive sport, every game in hockey is an attempt to establish a winner and a loser; it is a "zero-sum" game in this respect. A team is declared winner on the objective criterion of having scored the greatest number of goals during the time the game is played. While this ideal result of establishing a winner and loser is not realized in every contest, as in cases where the score remains tied upon completion of the game, this competitive nature of the sport permeates many aspects of the public culture of the game. At the end of a tied game it is common to hear the phrase "a tie's like kissing your sister" -- it may be very nice but it is just not completely satisfying. Winners and losers are not just determined for single games in the NHL; the entire season, including the post-season playoffs, are directed towards this same end. It is commonly noted in hockey that only one team in the entire NHL ends the hockey year on a winning note, the team that wins the Stanley Cup.

To this concern with the objective outcomes of winning and losing in hockey must be added the evaluations made concerning the moral characters of winners and losers in this public culture. Writing on competitive play in general, historian Johan Huizinga makes this point:

Winning means showing oneself superior in the outcome of a game. Nevertheless, the evidence of this superiority tends to confer upon the winner a semblance of superiority in general. In this respect he wins something more than just the game as such. He has won esteem, obtained honour; and this honour and esteem at once accrue to the benefit of the group to which the victor belongs (Huizinga, 1955:50).

In the case of hockey, the particular form of the public evaluations of honour and esteem that accrue to winners and losers must be considered. It is not just games that are won or lost in hockey; the reputations of teams and individuals as being either winners or losers are also involved in this process.

It is into this dual context of winning and losing in hockey that the use of luck must be placed if it is to be understood. Both the objective outcomes and the moral evaluations of winning and losing must be considered. It follows that the focus in this chapter will be on those aspects of the public culture of hockey which relate to winning and losing. Specifically, it is the organization of the sport as it is played in the NHL and the meanings and values associated with winning and losing in this context that are relevant here.

Ethnographic descriptions offered in anthropology are shaped, in part, by the analytical concerns dealt with in the particular studies. This being so, it is important that the account of the public culture of hockey presented here emphasizes those aspects of the sport concerned with winning and losing. Other accounts of hockey, such as journalist Gerald Eskenazi's A Thinking Man's Guide to Pro Hockey (1972), do offer attempts at making this public culture understandable but their purposes are very different than those at hand. For example, while Eskenazi does deal with the two facets of winning and losing, he does so as a contributor to the public culture of the game and not as an anthropological analyst. Such accounts as this are interpreted here as being data, a part of the public culture of hockey, and are not accepted as satisfactory analyses.

In describing the relevant features of the public culture of hockey



for this analysis some mention must be made of the method of presentation adopted. In treating hockey as a cultural system, the relevant features of this culture are here described as a coherent and consistent system of organized meanings and values. This description is an analytical abstraction developed from the observation of a large number of unique occasions when this public culture is given order by individuals. The social processes involved in organizing these meanings and values by individuals in specific situations are not dealt with here. Instead, it is the analytical description of the patterned organization of these meanings and values which serves as the context in which specific cases of the use of luck in the public culture of hockey will be examined.

In adopting this approach, the concern with winning and losing in the public culture of hockey is treated as comprising the "external determinants" for the analysis of the use of luck (see Hannerz, 1980: 144-147). This approach closely approaches that developed by the so-called Rhodes-Livingstone anthropologists who, while recognizing the complex colonial context in which their observations were made, tended to concentrate their attentions on "a local field of social relationships accessible to observation" (Hannerz, 1980:145). With regards to the complex social, political and economic context of these observable social relations in colonial Africa, "their presence and their general shape had to be acknowledged, insofar as they set the stage for local social life, but there would be no very elaborate or sophisticated inquiry into them" (Hannerz, 1980:145). In the present study, it is the use of luck in specific and observable situations which is examined with winning and losing in the public culture of hockey constituting the external determinants for the

analysis.

## II

Hockey is generally recognized as having its origins in Canada, sometime near the middle of the nineteenth century. By the 1890s difficulties in organizing regular games between teams from different areas, caused largely by local variations in the rules, were being resolved and the first amateur leagues were established (Ozon, 1973:30). The National Hockey League made its appearance in 1917 as the result of a business decision which saw several teams quit the National Hockey Association to form the new league. Although team membership has varied considerably over the years, this was the beginning of big-league, professional hockey as it is known today.

The founding of the NHL did not signal the first appearance of professional hockey. The sport was first played professionally in Houghton, Michigan during the 1903-1904 season and spread north to Canada shortly afterwards (Howell and Howell, 1969:206). As the better players became attracted to the professional teams where they could receive payment for their fun, and as the other professional leagues slowly disappeared or were bought out by NHL interests, the Stanley Cup came to be controlled by the NHL. By the 1926-27 season this cup, "one of the most coveted trophies in sport" (McFarlane, 1972:19), was in the sole possession of the NHL. What had been a trophy indicative of amateur hockey supremacy in Canada became what it is today, "the highest award for professional superiority" in hockey (Hewitt, 1970:19).

The NHL today operates as a highly organized business enterprise with league offices in New York and Montreal. The sport has become so

successful that one commentator has gone so far as to suggest that it is "the most productive money maker in the entire history of athletics" (McFarlane, 1972:12). No data is brought forward to establish the truth of this assertion, but the statement itself does indicate that money is one measure of success in the public culture of hockey. The league is a winner because,

Throughout its history the NHL has been a model of economic initiative and enterprise. As a business it has been successful beyond anything its founders might reasonably have expected (Kidd and Macfarlane, 1972:121).

The relationship between winning and money is made even more explicit by the late Conn Smythe, a former owner of an NHL franchise and builder of Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto, who states that "if you win games you sell tickets, so one supported the other" (Smythe with Young, 1982:246). As a business, the NHL must concern itself with making a profit, for without the financial success of the teams there could be no NHL and no games to win or lose.

The long NHL season, coupled with the lengthy playoff structure, are necessary for the financial success and survival of the league and its teams (Kidd and Macfarlane, 1972:19). Although hockey is a business in the NHL, its popularity is not reduced solely to economic concerns in the public culture of the game:

Money does not seem to be the prime factor in efforts to capture the Cup, although millions of dollars are often involved in the process. The glory and the prestige are far more important (McFarlane, 1972:17).

Winning the Stanley Cup is seen to have a moral worth which is valued far beyond the money involved. As Ken Linseman, an NHL Player, has put it:

The only way to classify yourself as a winner in this game is to have your name on the Stanley Cup and I want

both. I definitely would like to be a winner and I want a piece of that cup (in Brown, 1981:53).

To win the Stanley Cup is to "be a winner." That is, winning this trophy is an indication of the moral character of the successful team and its players. To the winners accrue honour, esteem, and prestige.

Profits and salaries are common topics for discussion in the public culture of hockey. Even though exact figures are rarely, if ever, known, much hockey discussion is couched in financial terms. Money is one measure of success for both teams and individuals: for a team, making a profit is seen as an indication of good management -- they are winners at the box office; for a player, making a large salary is seen as an indication that he is a good and valued player. It is fairly common to read of a player's contract being renegotiated upwards if his performance is far better than was expected at the time the original contract was signed. This is done to "keep the player happy" and to try to ensure that he will remain productive on the ice by recognizing and rewarding him for what he is worth as a player in relation to others. The more a player is publicly believed to earn, the better the player he is expected to be. The public culture of hockey often contains speculation about players believed to be over-paid; these are players who earn large salaries and yet don't seem to perform as should be expected. Over-paid and under-paid are evaluations made in the public culture of hockey based on speculation about the salary paid to a player in relation to his perceived moral character as a player.

While money is a commonly used idiom for the expression of moral evaluations in the communication of hockey information, it is not the only idiom available for this purpose. In many accounts of hockey

activities winning and losing are described and interpreted with no reference to the money involved. When money is mentioned in public accounts of hockey, it is not always seen as the central concern. In fact, it is quite common to see financial considerations deliberately placed behind other concerns when importance is discussed. As Conn Smythe, a former owner, has noted, "Hockey gave me my biggest push financially at first, but building great teams was the real kick I got out of it" (Smythe with Young, 1982:246). The "great teams" Smythe refers to were his Stanley Cup winners. Winning on the ice can, even for the owner of a team, be interpreted as being more important than winning at the box office.

### III

Like so many other activities, hockey is often described as a simple game to play but a difficult one to master. On this theme, one former NHL player has been quoted as jokingly stating that:

Playing hockey is the simplest thing in the world. All you have to do is skate up the ice with the puck and shoot it in the other team's net. Then you stop them from shooting it in your team's and you win the game. It's as simple as that (in McFarlane, 1971:125).

While McFarlane notes that the above characterization was intended to be humorous, there is still much truth to it. One of the things that makes it humorous is the publicly recognized amount of complexity and difficulty involved in the game that is left out. For example, the players do skate up and down the ice, but they do so at speeds approaching 25 miles per hour (Camelli, 1970:1). Similarly, when they shoot the puck at the net it is not uncommon for it to travel at speeds of over 100 miles per hour. While all this is happening, there is also

a great deal of physical contact between the players of opposing teams as they hit each other with their bodies and sticks. Hockey is played as it is humorously described above, but it also requires skill, talent, hard work and toughness by the players and discipline and strategy by the teams.

Hockey in the NHL is played on a rectangular 200ft. by 85ft. artificial ice surface known as a rink. The corners are broad and rounded, rather than sharp and square, and the whole rink is encased by a short wooden wall, known as the boards, which stand 3.5ft. high. This is topped with a protective shield of shatterproof glass which guards the spectators from errant pucks and sticks. Facing each other at opposite ends of the rink, 180ft. apart, are the two goals or nets. These are located in the middle of the ice surface, 10ft. out from the end boards. The nets measure 6ft. wide by 4ft. tall and do not present a large target at which to shoot the puck.

Sixty feet out from each goal is a coloured line in the ice known as the blue line. These two lines run the width of the ice surface and divide the 180ft. between the two goals into three equal sections. Between these two blue lines, and parallel with them, is a red line on the ice, commonly referred to as the centre line. This line runs across the width of the ice and divides the playing surface into two equal halves. A blue dot in the middle of the centre line indicates where the puck is dropped for the face-off which begins play each period and after each goal. These three lines are important for the interpretation of many of the rules of the game and also serve as orientation markers for the description of action in the game.

There are sixty minutes of action in an NHL hockey game; divided into three twenty minute periods separated by two fifteen minute intermissions. During the intermissions the ice is resurfaced while the players and officials rest in their dressing rooms. In the three twenty minute periods, time is counted only when play is taking place -- the official time clock does not run when play is stopped. Play can be stopped for a number of reasons, such as when a goal is scored, when a penalty is being assessed or when the puck is out of play by being covered by a player or shot out of the rink among the spectators. On such occasions play is resumed by dropping the puck after the two teams have lined up for the face-off. These stops in play add to the length of time it takes to complete a hockey game, making it common for an NHL game to last two and a half hours.

Hockey is played between two opposing teams but in order that the game run smoothly there are a number of officials trained and appointed by the league to see that the rules are fairly enforced. The most prominent of these officials are those who appear on the ice, skating among the players. These are the referee and his two linesmen. These three officials do not dress like the hockey players and are identified by their long black trousers and jerseys with black and white vertical stripes. The referee is distinguished from the linesmen by two red arm bands. The referee has the final decision in the interpretation of all rules during a hockey game; he is responsible for calling most of the penalties and for deciding whether or not a goal has been legally scored. The linesmen assist the referee by watching for minor violations of the rules and help to maintain order on the ice when the players

become too combative.

Each hockey team competes with six players on the ice at a time. The six players usually include three forwards -- a centre and two wingers -- two defensemen and a goalie. Basically, it is the forwards that are counted on to score goals while the defensemen and goalie direct their attentions towards stopping the opposing team from scoring. Offense and defense both require team work, however, with the forwards and defensemen contributing to both aspects of the game. Even high scoring forwards have to check if they are to remain in the NHL. Hockey is such a fluid game, with few set plays and almost no necessary breaks in the action, that offense and defense are largely determined by possession of the puck; if your team has control of the puck you are on offense and if the other team has control of the puck you are on defense. Only the goalie has a role which is entirely defensive, with specific rules to prohibit him from entering into offensive play beyond the centre red line.

Only penalties reduce the number of players on the ice at any one time. Penalties usually require that the player who commits the violation sit in the penalty box for a period of time, usually two or five minutes, while his team plays one man short. In two minute penalties, the most common type assessed, the player is allowed to return to the ice if the other team scores while his team is short-handed. During five minute 'major' penalties, the player is not allowed to return to the ice before his penalty has been served no matter how many goals the opposing team may score.

Hockey is played at a very fast pace and the players expend a great



deal of energy during a game. Often a player can spend only one minute at a time on the ice before he must be replaced. Today no player other than the goalie can physically play the entire sixty minutes of a game, making it necessary for each team to have more players available than just those required to fill the six positions on the ice. Substitutions can be made both during the play, maintaining the flow of action, or at stops in the action as players simply leave the ice to be replaced by fresh skaters from the team bench. Which particular players are on the ice at any time is the decision of the team's coach. These decisions are made for strategic reasons as the coach tries to obtain the best results for his players against the other team.

Every team in the NHL is allowed to dress twenty players for each game. It is common for a team to have twelve forwards, six defensemen and two goalies ready for each game. These are usually organized into four 'lines' of three forwards each, three sets of two defensemen and a starting goalie who plays while the other goalie, designated the back-up, sits on the bench ready to play if the starting goalie is injured or plays poorly. It is common for each of the forward lines to take their turn on the ice, referred to as a 'shift,' as a unit. Together they enter into the action and together they leave when their shift is over. Similarly, the defensemen play in units of two players with each pair starting and finishing their shift together. Due to the flow of the action in hockey, it is not always possible for these units of players to change together, although to do so is the ideal. During a game the forward lines and the defensive pairings do not change at one time and the defensemen change at another, usually after playing a slightly longer

shift on the ice.

The same forward lines and defensive pairings are not always maintained intact throughout a hockey game. At times a coach may shift players from one line to another or change defensive partners if he thinks the players may perform better. Known as 'juggling the lines,' the coach attempts to find a winning combination. If a player should be injured during a game and is unable to continue, then the coach will have to alter his strategy in order to fill in for the missing player. However the players on the ice may have been united, when they play together they do so as a forward line or a defensive pairing.

These are not the only reasons that may cause the organization of players on a team to be disrupted. Coaches often create specialty teams from among their players to deal with penalty situations. For example, when the other team is penalized and his team has the man advantage, a coach will often use his best offensive players together as a single unit, no matter who they usually play with. On such occasions the coach is concerned with scoring a goal on the power play much more than he is with keeping his lines perfectly ordered. If his own team is penalized and forced to play short-handed then the coach is apt to use another specialty team as penalty killers. These are not necessarily players who play together regularly on a line, but are put together by the coach to serve one special purpose. Such specialty teams create disorder among a team's forward lines and defensive pairings for longer than just the duration of the penalty. It may take several shifts before a coach can realign his players the way he desires.

## IV

Very few youngsters who play hockey ever have the opportunity to play in the NHL. Those who do reach the NHL come mainly from Canada, where they literally "grow up with the game" (Nixon, 1976). Recently there has been an increase in the number of American and European players in the league, but over 70 per cent of the players still come from Canada (Keating, 1982). The average career for a player in the NHL is less than five years duration and there is now a well recognized movement in the league towards employing younger players. It is now uncommon to see more than a few players in their thirties in any NHL game (Vass, 1983:13-15). The availability of players and the lengths of their careers are considerations which must be taken into account when management attempts to establish a competitive NHL team.

Successful NHL teams are not just accidents; they must be planned, developed and maintained. To win a Stanley Cup a team needs more than just twenty good or excellent players -- the abilities and styles of the players must complement each other and must include a balance of checkers and scorers with speed and toughness along with good goaltending. Coupled with the need for balance on a team is the need to build teams for the future as well as for the present. This means that a team should contain a blend of older and younger players so that the team will have some continuity and so that the older players, the veterans, can provide direction and leadership for the young and inexperienced players. In the NHL, leadership is rooted in the interpretation of moral worth; the player who can best supply leadership is recognized as "being a winner" or "knowing how to win" in the NHL, an attribute that is not equally

distributed among all players.

NHL teams acquire their players in three different ways. First, every year in June the league holds its annual draft of amateur players. At this time the NHL teams, in the reverse order of their finish in the previous regular season, choose eligible players one at a time. This method of selection is intended to provide the weakest teams the greatest chance for improvement. In selecting a player in this draft the NHL team receives the right to be the only professional hockey club in North America that can bargain for the players' services. The second way of acquiring players is by signing 'free agents' whose playing rights are not controlled by another NHL team. These players can approach, or be approached by, any NHL team for a tryout. The final way teams obtain players is through trading with other teams. Trades can involve players currently in the NHL, players in other leagues, money, future draft choices or any mix of the above.

It is often held that the draft is of prime importance in building a winning NHL team. This is where the teams have the best chance of obtaining players who can provide the future leadership of a team. Draft choices are much sought after, particularly the first few every year, with the better teams often attempting to trade some of their existing players for the future choice of a weaker team. While some of the weaker teams, referred to as the 'have-nots' in hockey, do trade away their draft choices for other players, this strategy for building a competitive team is often criticized because it trades the possibility of a winning future for the promise of an average present. It is common to hear a new general manager of a weaker team announce that his team will no longer trade away

their draft choices. This is usually heralded as a positive move towards developing a winning team by commentators in the public culture of hockey.

The drafting of players, the signing of free agents and the acquisition of players through trades serve as bases for evaluating teams and individuals as winners or losers. Teams are evaluated on how successful they have been in acquiring players, how successful the players are in the NHL and their contribution to the team's performance are all discussed and evaluated in the public culture of the sport. Based on how their choices are evaluated the management of a team develops a reputation for being able to recognize and develop talent or for being inept. In this way, the management of a team is evaluated as being a winner or a loser. For a player, it is playing in the NHL which is the first indication of whether or not he is a winner. Not making the NHL and being sent to the minor leagues to improve is commonly referred to as a type of "banishment" (Gzowski, 1981:144). It is near impossible for a North American hockey player to be publicly recognized as a winner without playing in the NHL.

There are twenty-one teams in the NHL, spread across Canada and the United States. The league is divided into two major sections, the Campbell Conference and the Wales Conference with ten teams in the first and the other eleven in the second. Each of these conferences is divided into two parts, the Norris Division and Smythe Division in the Campbell Conference and the Adams Division and Patrick Division in the Wales Conference. The teams in each division are grouped roughly by geography in order to lessen travel expenses and reduce player fatigue caused by travel. While all the teams in the league do play against each other,

the teams within in each division play each other more frequently.

An NHL season spans nine months from September to May and includes close to 1,000 hockey games. After the numerous pre-season games the NHL teams play 840 games to determine which teams advance to the playoffs. Each team plays 80 games in the regular season, 40 in its home town and 40 'on the road' in the arenas of other NHL teams. For each game played during the regular season a team receives 2 points for a win, 1 point for a tie and no points for a loss. Based on the number of points that are accumulated over the season each team can be said to have had a winning or a losing year, depending on whether more or less than half the available points were obtained.

All the teams that make the playoffs do not play each other. The playoffs are structured by having two teams play each other for a series of games with the winner of the best three of five or four of seven advancing to the next round of playoff action. Which team plays which in the playoffs is determined by the total number of points of each of the teams in the regular season and the division of the league in which the teams play. The top four teams in each division advance to the playoffs where a winner is first determined from within each division. The two divisional winners from each conference then play to determine which team will represent their conference in the Stanley Cup finals. It is the two conference champions who meet and challenge for this trophy. There are, however, trophies and banners for finishing first in each division for the regular season as well as for the divisional and conference champions determined in the playoffs. Speculation about which teams will make the playoffs and how they will fare begins by the

halfway point of the regular season and continues right through the playoffs.

Tie games are not an acceptable result in the playoffs. While they are tolerated in the regular season, in the playoffs every game must be resolved into a win or a loss. If a game is tied after sixty minutes of play then the two teams play extra time until one of them scores a goal and wins. Teams in the playoffs can win some games even if they ultimately lose the series. While tie games are not permitted, a series can be tied in games several times before a winner and loser are ultimately decided. The record of games won and lost in a playoff series is taken as a rough indication of how closely the two teams were matched when it is discussed in the public culture of the game. The teams are seen as more closely matched if one team wins a series four games to three rather than four games to none.

It is accepted in hockey that the best team wins the Stanley Cup. This is a tautology in the public culture of the game: if a team wins the Stanley Cup then they are the best team in hockey and if they fail to win it, no matter what their regular season record may be, they are not the best team in the sport. To suggest otherwise is to disrupt the moral order of the sport. However, winning and losing as moral evaluations in hockey also contain a degree of relativity: only one team wins the Stanley Cup to be sure, but other teams and individuals are seen as winners and losers to varying degrees. Making or not making the playoffs is a commonly referred to indicator of winners and losers for both teams and individuals. A poor season by a marginal team can be salvaged if the team makes the playoffs; a good season by a team that is expected

to do well can go for naught if the team is too quickly dismissed from playoff action. The performance of players is similarly evaluated and each is determined to be a winner or loser to some degree, depending upon such factors as making the playoffs, performance once there or his performance in relation to the performance of his team. There interpretations of performances, along with the inevitable evaluations of moral worth, make extensive use of statistics to give substance to their claims.

## V

Over the regular season, and again for the playoffs, a great deal of statistical information about NHL hockey performances is collected and made public. It is all but impossible to see, read or hear hockey communications without having this type of information somehow involved. This apparent fascination with statistics and numbers is not a feature of hockey alone. Its appearance in all sports has led one analyst to generalize that "modern sports are characterized by the almost inevitable tendency to transform every athletic feat into one that can be quantified and measured" (Guttmann, 1978:47). For teams and individuals in hockey, it seems that virtually all aspects of their performances which can be measured are measured and then, with an air of objectivity, publicly compared, ranked and evaluated.

As part of its formal organization the NHL has an Information and Statistic Bureau whose director, Ron Andrews, often receives public recognition for his statistical contributions to the sport. Many of the statistics collected by the Bureau are made publicly available through weekly bulletins during the hockey season and in an annual volume, known



as the NHL Guide, which summarizes team and individual performances in the regular season and playoffs for past years. As well as detailing overall performance records, these statistics measure offensive and defensive play in many different ways.

The most important statistic for every team in the NHL is the number of points accumulated in the regular season. It is this total, in relation to the totals of other teams, that determines whether or not a team makes the playoffs and, if they do, who their opponent will be. The more points a team collects the better the team is publicly considered to be; the fewer the points, the poorer the team. Team records are also collected for such aspects of play as penalty minutes, the number of goals scored for and against when teams are at even strength, the number of power play goals scored and the number of short-handed goals scored. On each of these dimensions of play the teams are ranked and this information is then used to interpret what happens on the ice, or what should happen on the ice, by setting up expectations and by interpreting actual happenings.

Individual player's performances are ranked according to such criteria as the number of goals they score, the number of goals they help to score, the number of penalty minutes they are assessed and the number of goals they score while performing on the specialty teams. Each player is also measured by a plus/minus rating, calculated by taking the number of goals his team scores at even strength when he is on the ice and subtracting the number of opposition goals scored under the same circumstances. This statistic is intended to provide a method of approximating the contribution of any individual to his team's performance.

For the goaltenders, the statistics kept are slightly different. As they have no real offensive contribution to make, their statistics are based almost entirely on their defensive play. The most important statistic, other than the number of games won, is their goals against average. This measures the average number of goals that the particular goalie allows during a sixty minute game. This figure is much discussed in hockey because it is taken as a fair indication of which team should have the advantage in any game. Added to this important statistic are the number of games the goalie has played, because it is important to know whether he consistently performs well or poorly, or if the statistics are misleading because the goalie has not played in many NHL games.

Time is important in all moral evaluations of hockey performances. It is commonly stated when something out of the ordinary takes place in the game that "it all evens out in the end." This is intended to indicate that while the best does not come out on top in every game, over a long season the best will show themselves to be the best and likewise for every other team or individual. The moral worth of teams and individuals is not dependent upon every performance; the moral worth guides performances and over time this worth is revealed to the public. This notion that everything evens out over time does not just have an effect on a single season's performances. It relates to the history of the league, its teams and its players. Great teams and great players must prove themselves to be so by standing the test of time. Similarly, over time the moral worth of every team and individual will reveal itself. To perform superbly one season means little if it is not repeated.

To be recognized as a winner or loser takes time in the public

culture of hockey. It involves a process that cannot be rushed. New players in the league are referred to as 'rookies' and one of the problems in understanding the play of these individuals is that it is not always clear whether they are really good or bad or if they simply have not started to play up to their true capabilities. It is recognized that some players may perform better than their capabilities for short periods of time, known as "playing over their heads," and that others may take some time to perform up to their abilities. For example, in the fall of 1979 sports columnist Dick Beddoes of Toronto referred to the spectacular early season play of Los Angeles Kings rookie Charlie Simmer by suggesting that "by Christmas everyone will be asking Charlie who?" Simmer's performance over the last few years has since shown that Beddoes' original evaluation was too hastily made. The difficulty in evaluating the performances of untried rookies still remains, however, and each new year brings the problem to the surface again. Veterans of the NHL, on the other hand, have a history against which short term performances can be measured and evaluated. This makes the play of known veterans easier to evaluate than that of the rookies.

The reputations of teams must also be established over time. Just winning hockey games is not enough for a team to become recognized as a winner. For example, in 1982 the Vancouver Canucks, a team that ended the regular season with only 77 points ended up playing the New York Islanders for the Stanley Cup. The Canucks, known as a "chronic loser" around the NHL, were later described as being elated about their success, but their celebration after the game that got them to the finals was described by two Vancouver sportswriters in this way: "But the words

spoken in the dressing room that night weren't those of a winner, rather those of a team that was winning" (Gallagher and Gasher, 1982: 123). Without a tradition of winning, the Canuck's performance was not immediately taken as indicative of their true character as a team. Stephenson has shown that there is a great deal of continuity in teams' performances from one year to another in the NHL, with it being quite uncommon for a team to improve or deteriorate more than one or two places in the overall standings (1980:15). In their drive to the Stanley Cup finals in 1982 the Canucks played far beyond what could be expected from their regular season performance, they played "over their heads." In any NHL contest or season, teams and individuals play not only their opponents but also their own histories and traditions.

It is commonly recognized in the public culture of hockey that statistics do not tell the entire story. There is considerable dispute over what the statistics 'really' mean and in most cases the numbers provide only the raw materials for evaluations, without leading inevitably to one 'correct' moral evaluation of performances. The collected statistics and calculations require interpretations and this requires some notion of what is important in the game. Along side the formal numerical rankings and evaluations are numerous accounts which provide non-statistical evaluations of teams and individuals. These informal rankings in many ways deny that the statistics are correct by discussing such things as the most overrated players, the most overpaid players, or the most underrated players. These informal rankings and evaluations suggest that the statistics do not reveal what is truly important in the game and set out to rectify this shortcoming.

Good numbers and statistics are not enough to establish teams or individuals as winners in the NHL. Playing and performing well are necessary for such an evaluation but they are not sufficient. The necessary attributes required to be a winner in the NHL are often phrased as "talent and character." In hockey there is an old and often repeated adage that "talent gets you there, but it takes character to keep you there" (cf. Imlach, 1982:47). Harry Neale, formerly coach of the Vancouver Canucks, once elaborated on this theme during an interview, stating that: "All talent and no character doesn't go anywhere. All character and no talent doesn't go anywhere either. You need both of them to be successful in this league." It is not enough to have talent or character in hockey; to be successful and a winner requires a combination of both of these attributes.

Talent is seen as innate ability in hockey, with some teams and individuals publicly recognized as having more of it than others. Some players receive recognition as great natural goal scorers and this, by the very use of the word "natural" is seen as an innate ability. It is commonly acknowledged that defensive play can be learned while offensive success requires skills and abilities which cannot be taught nor learned. Great goaltending, for example, is not usually seen as due to natural ability alone. Fast reflexes may be important and may even provide success for a short time, but most emphasis is placed on what has been learned in order to play the position professionally. Offensive play is accorded higher esteem than defensive play in hockey and great offensive players are born while defensive players are trained and developed. When young forwards are sent to the minor leagues

"for seasoning" the most common explanation given is that they have to work on their defensive play, players are not sent down to learn how to score goals.

Talent, however, is not always seen to be measured accurately by the statistics of teams or individuals. Consistently performing above, below and even equal to the publicly perceived talent of a team or individual is believed to be due in part to "character."

In hockey, character is not a single facet of the play of any team or individual. It involves a number of attributes which may be present in different and varying degrees. All of the attributes which constitute character in hockey cannot be examined here, but some of the more central features of it can be introduced. One feature that identifies a team or individual as having character is the amount of effort that is put into the game. It requires hard work to be successful in the NHL and it is common to hear such phrases as "you make your own breaks in this game" or "he gives 110 per cent out there every night." According to one coach and general manager in the NHL, "work and wins go together" (Imlach, 1982:99). Without hard work, talent will not fully develop and perform to its full capabilities. Character, in the form of hard work, is a much valued attribute in the public culture of hockey.

Another attribute of character, and one that is related to hard work, is referred to as the desire to win. Players or teams cannot be satisfied with losing if they are to be winners. Desire can be seen in the way that defeat is dealt with and in the way that effort is expended in the attempt to win. A team or individual that "gives

up" when they are losing is publicly recognized as not having the necessary desire to be a winner. Even if they have less talent than their opponents, a team should want to win every game. Desire helps to make the most of available talent and the lack of desire, usually talked of as "complacency" or "just going through the motions," can seriously undermine any estimation of a team or individual as a winner. Winners in hockey must always indicate that they have the desire to win and must never be satisfied with their performance.

To have character in hockey, individuals must be seen to place the good of the team above their own personal goals. It is common to hear players diminish their own accomplishments in relation to the success of their team. If they have performed well but their team has lost, they can often be heard to remark to the effect that individual performances or goals don't mean a thing if their team doesn't win. Team performances determine whether or not they make the playoffs, and so to sacrifice themselves for the good of the team is an indication of good moral character. Players who appear only concerned with their own performances and not with those of the team as a whole are generally described as "selfish" and "not a good team man." No matter how well a player may perform, if he is perceived to be selfish it is very hard for him also to be seen as a winner. Hockey is a team sport and as such requires that the players work together for the benefit and good of the team. Players who do not do so, who will not sacrifice themselves for the team as a whole, are considered to have less character than players who publicly acknowledge the pre-eminent importance of the team. Players who are willing to take

a hard check, risking their own injury, in order to make a play that will help their team are much esteemed in the public culture of hockey. Those who make such sacrifices are commonly said to "have a lot of character."

The final attribute of character to be discussed here is that of "humbleness." Individuals in hockey should not publicly brag about their own good performances. Not only does bragging emphasize the individual at the expense of the team, but it also calls into question the player's ability to perform. For example, a player known for his offensive production cannot score a goal on every shot he takes and nor can he expect to collect points in every game he plays. To brag is to suggest that the player can control his own performance to a degree that is just not possible. To brag, then, is to court failure. Individuals avoid bragging about their own performances by bragging about their team-mates. When asked about outstanding personal achievements, players tend to stress how well their entire team played, often mentioning by name the players they played with. It is also possible to recognize superior performances by praising the performance of the opposition. If the opponent played extremely well but lost, it is an indication that your team played even better and is the superior team, although this conclusion need never be drawn explicitly.

Teams and individuals may be seen to have the requisite talent and character to be winners, but this is not a sufficient explanation in the public culture of hockey. It is not true that teams with an abundance of talent and character are always successful. The failure of talent and character to necessarily produce a winner is often



explained in the public culture of hockey by the presence or absence of "confidence." Without confidence there can be no hope for success in the NHL, no matter how much talent and character is perceived to be present. As Boston Bruin rookie Gord Kluzak has stated in an interview, after his rather inauspicious beginning in the NHL, "I haven't lost confidence. I'm not going to. You always have to have confidence. You need confidence to be successful in this league." It is confidence that unites talent and character in winning performances. Without confidence, there is no hope that a team or player can demonstrate being a winner.

Confidence is a much desired and sought after asset in hockey. Once it is achieved, in conjunction with talent and character, it must be maintained if success is to be sustained. Confidence cannot easily be maintained or achieved by playing poorly or by not playing at all. It is difficult for a team or a player to develop or maintain their confidence when they do not regularly perform as winners should. Gary Dornheofer, a former NHL player who is now employed as an HNIC broadcaster, once noted during a hockey telecast that "winning breeds confidence." Winning performances on the ice help to build confidence which in turn helps to establish teams or individuals as winners. Once again, in the public culture of hockey it is confidence that is recognized as wedding talent to character to produce both wins and winners.

## VI

In summary, while only one team wins the Stanley Cup and ends the season on a winning note, the public evaluation of winners and losers is

not nearly so clear cut. Teams and individuals who do not win the Stanley Cup are not automatically seen as moral losers. Being a winner or loser in hockey involves more than this single dimension of evaluation. Similarly, being a winner or loser involves more than objectively winning or losing a specific number of hockey games or scoring a certain number of goals. Mere statistical results and the amount of money earned may serve as indicators but they are not necessarily determinant. Winners and losers in hockey are moral evaluations made along several such dimensions, emphasizing different aspects in different situations, making it difficult to clearly identify any team or individual as being definitely one or the other.

Winners and losers as moral evaluations in hockey operate as two polar ends of a continuum along which all teams and individuals can be located. These evaluations necessarily involve the objective records of performances on the ice, but they are not entirely dependent upon them. Statistics do influence determinations of teams and individuals as winners or losers but they do not determine them. Rather, these are the raw materials out of which evaluations are constructed. In order to be recognized as a winner or a loser, a team or individual must be publicly perceived and presented as behaving according to a set of cultural assumptions concerning the way that hockey should be played. Such evaluations always involve an implicit, if not explicit, understanding of the histories and traditions of the teams or individuals being evaluated.

It is in this context of winning and losing, winners and losers, that the use of luck in the public culture of hockey is to be understood.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MANAGEMENT OF LUCK

## I

This chapter presents the analysis of five cases in which luck appears as a significant factor in the public culture of hockey. Using Paine's recent contributions to the anthropological study of political rhetoric as a guide, these cases are presented and analyzed by demonstrating how the hockey rhetorician makes connections, either implicitly or explicitly between the specifics of a single hockey situation and what are therein presented or assumed to be the relevant meanings and values in the public culture of the game. This way the rhetorical occasion on which an interpretation is publicly presented can be ethnographically located within the cultural system of hockey in a fashion which recognizes the common existence of the idiom of luck as well as differences in its particular users' interests in the sport. This approach directs the analysis to the particular processes by which meanings and values in this public cultural system are given order.

The category of 'luck' as it is used in the public culture of hockey is not expressed in only one way. At times hockey rhetoricians will speak or write of 'luck' in their analyses of the sport as in, "they sure were lucky out there tonight." On other occasions 'luck' is expressed as 'puck luck' making the concept appear uniquely related to hockey by emphasizing the importance of the way in which this little rubber disc is manipulated by players or teams. Statements such as "great puck luck out there tonight" or "all he needs is a little more of the old puck luck around the net" appear frequently as interpretations of hockey events in the public culture of the game.

The existence of luck in the public culture of hockey is also

phrased in other ways. Remarks about "getting the breaks" or "not getting the breaks" as well as statements concerning the way the puck is "bouncing" for an individual or team are statements about luck in the public culture of hockey. Writing on 'luck' in hockey, Gerald Eskenazi, a long time sports journalist, has stated that "Luck is for losers. They say that the puck isn't bouncing right,..." (1972:208). Statements such as this attest to the fact that while 'luck' in hockey can be phrased in many different ways, it always refers to the moral order of the game. That is, luck is an interpretation of events which have taken place in hockey in light of the moral order of the sport as a cultural system.

Not included in this analysis of the category of 'luck' in hockey are the related, but structurally different, categories of 'superstitions' and 'flukes.' Superstitions in hockey are unlike luck in that the purpose of superstitions is to alter the performance of players or teams rather than to interpret the performance. Superstitions are usually used to produce favourable results and not to produce or explain what are seen by the participants as unfavourable results. The distinction made here between luck and superstition is structurally similar to the distinction between magic and sorcery which, following Evans-Pritchard's early account in Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande (1937), has been found so useful in understanding African witchcraft beliefs (Arens, 1980:165-180). In this literature magic is seen to be used as an interpretation of an event whereas sorcery is seen as the deliberate attempt to produce a desired result. In the public culture of hockey, luck is used as an interpretation of an event or events while superstitions are

attempts to produce some desired result by following some formula, be it dressing in a certain order, wearing certain clothes or even eating special foods on the day of a game.

Also not included under the rubric of luck in this analysis is the category of events described as "flukes." In hockey, "fluke" is used to explain a goal that is perceived to have been scored accidentally. It is not the result of talent and character, it is the unintentional consequence of play. In contrast to goals which are well executed ("pretty" goals) or those that are due to hard work, a fluke goal is often described as "tainted." Objectively it may count as a goal, as it is noted that "they all count in the end," but because it is seen as unintentional the scoring of such a goal is not an indicator of the moral worth of the scorer.

Over an NHL season luck, in its many guises, is used on many more occasions than just the five cases examined here. While luck is commonly used as an explanation or interpretation in the public culture of hockey, the search here is not for conditions which determine its use. Such an approach would have the unfortunate effect of making the use of luck in the public culture of hockey appear far too mechanical when actually luck constitutes only one of a number of possible interpretations which can be selected by a rhetorician. Instead of attempting to locate contextual factors in the public culture of hockey which might determine that luck should be used in a particular situation, the focus here is on producing an analytical understanding of the meanings which are publicly presented by hockey rhetoricians as they make use of the concept of luck. As such, the public culture of hockey is here dealt with as exerting a

constraining or limiting influence on the situations in which the use of luck appears as an interpretation of hockey events rather than as determining its use in specific situations.

If luck is used too often by a rhetorician, the rhetorician's credibility as someone who understands hockey may be subject to challenge. On 22 February 1981 Harry Neale, then coach of the Vancouver Canucks, offered a post-game analysis of a Canuck defeat as: "I personally thought we were outlucked tonight, and I haven't used that very often lately." What is important in Neale's use of luck here is his need to indicate that he hasn't used it as an interpretation too often. Furthermore, he emphasizes that he is putting credibility on the line by prefacing his remarks with "personally." Neale here appears to recognize when the use of luck may and may not be a suitable interpretation to be offered publicly.

For a hockey rhetorician to use luck too often to explain outcomes can lead to comment or censure by other hockey rhetoricians. In a book dealing with the playoff performance of the Vancouver Canucks in 1982, Tony Gallagher and Mike Gasher, two Vancouver sportswriters, write of a former coach of the Los Angeles Kings:

He protected his players better than Cooperalls. Nothing was their fault. It was always the injuries they had or the bad bounces, a plausible explanation when coaching girls' softball but rarely credible in the NHL (1982:86).

In this passage the two authors, Gallagher and Gasher, are accusing the coach of mismanaging the use of luck as an interpretation in the public culture of hockey. Not only has the coach used it too often, he has used it as an excuse to protect his players from criticism rather than

as a serious interpretation of hockey events in the public culture of the game.

The five cases presented here for analysis have been selected from a large number of situations in which luck is used as an interpretation in the public culture of hockey. As each situation is different from every other situation in some respects there is no way to ensure that any five such situations are entirely representative of all the situations in which luck appears in this public culture. Given that the analytical focus in this thesis is on understanding the meanings which are constructed by hockey rhetoricians as they use or manage the concept of luck, the concern here is not whether the cases are representative but that they can be analytically understood in their own right. That is, the analysis presented here gives primacy to the situations examined as important ethnographic data, the importance of this material does not need to come from any test of how representative these five situations are in relation to all other situations in which luck appears in this public culture. Each time luck is used as an interpretation in the public culture of hockey it is worthy of having analytical attention directed towards it.

Indeed, one of the difficulties in even attempting to make any five situations representative of all such situations in the public culture of hockey is that the dimensions along which such a measure is to be made must then be selected in advance of the analysis. Such an approach biases any analysis using this method by determining which features are relevant before the analysis has been conducted. While it is not possible or necessary to establish the representativity of the cases here analyzed, an attempt has been made to take into account some differences in the



cases examined. These cases have been drawn from various media channels, as presented by different hockey rhetoricians and have been drawn from situations spread over time in the NHL season. Of the five cases presented here, three are drawn from regular season play and the other two are from the Stanley Cup playoffs. The particular cases chosen have not been selected merely as cases of the use of luck in the public culture of hockey which, like all such cases, are worthy of the analytical probing of an anthropological investigation. These five cases have been selected from all the available cases because they seemed particularly interesting.

## II

### Case 1: "Great puck luck out there tonight."

On 10 October 1980 the Detroit Red Wings visited Vancouver to play the home town Canucks in what was officially the seventh game of the 1980-81 NHL season. For both Detroit and Vancouver this was the first game of their eighty game regular season schedules and it resulted in a 5 to 3 victory for the Vancouver team. The win did not come easily for the Canucks, however, as they had to come from behind and score 3 goals in the final 4 minutes of play to emerge as the winner. This game, like all Vancouver Canuck games, was broadcast by a Vancouver radio station and, through a series of affiliated radio stations referred to as "the Canuck network," relayed to listeners throughout the province of British Columbia. A regular feature of these broadcasts is the post-game show "Overtime" which purports to provide "an in-depth analysis of this game and a look around the NHL." "Overtime" is not just for those who are not in attendance at a hockey game; on the completion of every Canuck home game there is an announcement made over the public address system

at the Pacific Coliseum encouraging those who have attended the game to listen to the radio as they make their ways home.

It was on "Overtime" following this Detroit loss to Vancouver that Al Davidson, the host of the show when the Canucks play in Vancouver, used puck luck as an interpretation of what had happened on the ice that night. In the ten minutes that Davidson dominated the discussion in "Overtime" on this occasion he used the concept of puck luck more than seven times. Statements such as "Great puck luck out there tonight" and "They (the Canucks) just didn't have the puck luck for the first two periods" were used to explain team performances and the outcome of the game. While Davidson's remarks were directed more towards the play of the Vancouver team, as they are the team which received the most media coverage in Vancouver, his remarks were not confined to the play of the teams as teams. He also used puck luck in his interpretations of the performances of individual players. Speaking of Canuck forward Brent Ashton, who failed to score on several good chances during the game against Detroit, Davidson commented that: "He's an honest player who gives you that muscle on the wing; he just needs a little more puck luck around the net." For Davidson, it seems, when a team or individual is successful, puck luck is present; when success is not attained, puck luck is absent.

In none of the more than seven instances that Davidson used puck luck during this one broadcast did any other broadcaster question its suitability. In fact Tom Larscheid, the next most prominent figure on this show after Davidson, engaged in a discussion of puck luck with him. Not only does puck luck exist in the public culture of hockey, it is

acceptable as an "in-depth" analysis of hockey events. It is interesting that in the two daily Vancouver papers published on the following day, 11 October 1980, no mention was made of puck luck in the analyses of the game. The interpretation of the game between Detroit and Vancouver offered by Davidson was not explicitly denied; the newspaper accounts only offered different interpretations of what had taken place in the Pacific Coliseum on the previous evening. In fact, there was no indication that the hockey rhetoricians responsible for the newspaper accounts were even aware of the interpretation offered by Davidson.

The use of luck in Davidson's interpretation may be partially explained by personal choice--he chose to phrase his interpretation in the idiom of puck luck rather than, for example, talent and character. Still, the meanings Davidson creates by making such a choice need to be examined. In order to analyse anthropologically the interpretation which Davidson offered following the Detroit loss to Vancouver it is necessary to indicate the basis of his claim to legitimacy as a hockey rhetorician and to indicate the public reputations and traditions of the two teams that played the game that night. It is only when these factors are taken into account that an analytical understanding of Davidson's use of puck luck as an interpretation can be developed.

Al Davidson is known in the Vancouver media as "Big Al" or "Tiger." He is sports director for CKNW, the major sports radio station in Vancouver, and he has been in the business for many years. His early training in sports broadcasting is not often mentioned, but every now and then he hints that he received his training in Toronto under Foster Hewitt, the dean of all Canadian hockey broadcasters and the man recognized

as the first person to announce a play-by-play description of a hockey game over the radio. According to Davidson's hints, it would appear that he left Toronto when it became clear that promotion would be difficult as long as Hewitt was in charge, particularly because Hewitt had a son, Bill, who was interested in following in his father's footsteps.

As the sports director for CKNW Davidson broadcasts regular sports reports dealing with all sports, he conducts interviews between periods in all Canuck home games, he is the featured broadcaster on "Overtime" following all Canuck home games and in the past he has served as the colour commentator on Canuck radio broadcasts. His knowledge of the game of hockey is based on a long time association with it in Toronto and Vancouver and not on his having played it at the NHL level. In the time he has observed the game he has seen much more than a player whose average career in the NHL is about five years. When Davidson speaks, the authority for his interpretation stems from this association with the game and his ability to recall past players and events and not from his own athletic ability. When Davidson states "Great puck luck out there tonight" he does so with many years of experience as a hockey rhetorician in support of this interpretation.

When Al Davidson used puck luck as an interpretation of performance and outcome in this Detroit loss to Vancouver he did so with an understanding of the respective moral worths of these two teams. Without such an understanding he would not have known whether the performance and outcome was in or out of character for the teams on this occasion. In terms of public moral evaluations these two teams were both losers. While Detroit

had once been a winner, with some seven Stanley Cups to prove it, in the past ten years the Red Wings had made the playoffs only once and then they were eliminated in their first playoff series. The Vancouver Canucks had made the playoffs more times than Detroit in this ten year period, a total of four times in ten seasons, but they too had lost and been eliminated in their first series on each occasion. Between these two teams they had obtained more than eighty points in regular season play only three times during this same ten year period, twice by the Canucks and once by the Red Wings. On only three occasions had either of these teams won more games than they lost in this period.

These two teams did not show any indication of changing this trend in their performance records during the pre-season schedule of the 1980-81 NHL season. The Canucks compiled a record of seven losses and two ties in their nine pre-season matches and Detroit had performed only marginally better. The pre-season records of both these teams were discussed by Davidson and the other hockey rhetoricians on "Overtime" as they offered their explanations and interpretations of what had happened on the ice the night Vancouver defeated Detroit. The pre-season records were the best indicators of performance for these two teams as the new season began. It was only by examining these records that the hockey rhetoricians could make any statements about whether or not either of the two teams had improved themselves during the summer, through their draft choices or trades.

With his emphasis on puck luck as an interpretation of why Vancouver won this game "Big Al" Davidson is able to explain why they were successful without having to commit himself to stating that they were the most

talented or hard working team on this occasion. In terms of public evaluations or moral worth, both Detroit and Vancouver are losers and Davidson understands this. Yet by using puck luck to explain the outcome of this game he can praise the home town Canucks, for having the puck luck, while not having to suggest that they deserved to win on the basis of superior talent and character. Having to score 3 goals in the final 4 minutes of play against a team that is publicly recognized as a loser is hardly admirable in hockey.

Case 2: "Bounces, breaks and hard work."

In the spring of 1980 the New York Islanders won their first Stanley Cup after only eight seasons in the NHL. The following season the performance of the Islanders was watched very closely as they tried to prove that they were indeed the best team in the NHL and that they had deserved to win the coveted trophy. While they were ultimately successful in defending their Stanley Cup victory, by finishing the 1980-81 season as the best team in regular season action and by winning their second Stanley Cup, the season was not one long success for the Islanders.

By the end of February, 1981, with only one fifth of the NHL regular season left to play, the New York Islanders were the second best team in the league, three points behind the first place St. Louis Blues. By most accounts in the public culture of hockey, their season was not a success because the quality of their play was not up to the high standard that won them the Stanley Cup the previous spring. As then Canuck coach Harry Neale remarked, echoing the sentiment of many other hockey observers, "They didn't win the Stanley Cup (playing) that way." Not only were the

Islanders hurt with injuries to some of their top players, but they were also referred to as "slump-ridden" and even accused of "masquerading as Stanley Cup Champions." Second place overall was not good enough for a team that had won the Stanley Cup the previous year; they were expected to be and perform as the best.

On 25 February 1981 the New York Islanders were defeated by the Calgary Flames by a score of 11 to 4. This game was referred to as a "drubbing" for the struggling Islanders as it set a record for the most goals allowed in a single regular season game for the New York team. When the Islanders arrived in Vancouver on 26 February, to hold a team practice and to prepare for their game against the Vancouver team on the 27th, Bryan Trottier, one of the best players on the Islanders was interviewed and questioned about the performance of his team. The interview took place in the Pacific Coliseum just after an Islander practice. Trottier and many of the Islanders were still on the ice and the interview was conducted with Trottier leaning against the boards. Trottier was one of the Islanders who was out with injuries at the time yet he was considered by the interviewer to be close enough to the team to know what the problems were. Although he was still fairly young, only 24 at the time, he had won trophies in the NHL as the best rookie his first year, as the most valuable player in the league, as the scoring champion in the league and he had been selected as the best centre in All-Star balloting. Trottier was a leader on the Islanders and as such he would know why they were not performing the way so many people expected them to after winning the Stanley Cup.

As a leader on the Islander team Trottier had been interviewed on

many occasions and on this occasion he handled himself with a great deal of confidence. Responding to questions in interviews is not easy for players. Often they are not asked questions at all as interviewers make statements to which they are expected to respond. Yet Trottier handled the interview easily and responded to the questions or statements as though it was the first time they had been presented.

When the subject of the Islanders' poor performance in the 1980-81 season was raised, Trottier responded by referring to how: "We haven't been getting the breaks lately, the puck just hasn't been bouncing for us early in the season we're still just struggling. Lately the breaks have started to go our way a bit and we seem to be turning it around." Then, as an after thought, Trottier added, "Of course we've been working real hard and concentrating on our defensive play lately and, other than Calgary the other night, it's starting to pay off." The interview then went on to deal with Trottier's injury and when he was going to begin playing again. During this interview other Islander players could be seen skating around the ice and every now and then one of them would skate close to where the interview was being conducted and either say something or playfully spray Trottier with loose ice. The scene behind the interview was one of playfulness and good times.

When Trottier offers explanations for his team's performance which stress getting the "breaks" or the "bounces" he does so as a player who has much respect in hockey and who knows of what he speaks. His insight into the game and his team's performance is publicly recognized--he is someone who "has made a relentless climb to the pinnacle as a premier offensive threat" (Fischler and Fischler, 1979:579) in hockey. His



legitimacy comes from his ability to perform at a very high level of competence in the league. As it is this "inside" view of hockey which is given precedence in the public culture of the game (see chapter II), Trottier's explanation is readily accepted by the interviewer as being satisfactory. The interviewer did not ask Trottier what he meant by "getting the bounces" or "having the breaks go their way."

The Trottier interview was shown twice on Vancouver television, once on the early evening sports and again on the late night sports. The Canucks were out of town on the 26th of February, playing the Kings in Los Angeles, while the Islanders waited in Vancouver for their return. With this lack of Canuck players and management to interview, the local sports media focused attention on the Islanders to provide more background information about the opponents than is normal. This makes it possible to place any interpretation into the larger context of recent performances, slumps or streaks, that may influence the outcome or interpretation of the game.

In offering his interpretation of the Islanders play in the idiom of luck, getting the lucky bounces or breaks, Trottier is not challenging any evaluation of his team as a winner. If the Islanders, as Stanley Cup champions, are not playing the way many people expected them to be, it is not because they do not deserve to be the champions. If the lucky breaks or lucky bounces had not favoured the Islanders it was because they were for a while unlucky, and not because the other teams were superior. Trottier adds that the Islanders have really been working hard lately and that, "after all, you make your own breaks." Here Trottier adds an explanation which tends to diminish the importance of

luck, as hard work makes its own luck. This reveals a tension in the way that luck is managed in hockey. To explain success or failure in terms of luck diminishes the important role of moral worth, talent and character. After all, if luck is used as an explanation of both success and failure these other attributes are less emphasized. Success does not relate to moral worth if it is due to luck alone and for this reason Trottier is quick to indicate how hard the Islanders are working. It is by tempering luck with hard work that Trottier is able to explain poor performances by the Islanders without calling into question their status as champions. Yet if he was to suggest that the lucky bounces or breaks were solely responsible for the success of the Islander team he would be denigrating their stature as champions and winners. To do so would undermine their confidence.

### Case 3: "Winning and losing with luck."

On Sunday 28 December, 1980 the St. Louis Blues defeated the Vancouver Canucks, in Vancouver, by a score of 3 to 2. By all accounts, the Canucks were the better team in this game but it was the Blues that collected the 2 points. The publicly recognized explanation for this was the play of the St. Louis goalie, Mike Liut. A headline in one Vancouver paper's sporting section announced rather humorously the next day that "St. Liut and a little luck save Blues." This case is an analysis of one reporter's account, with generous quotations from the players, interpreting what had taken place that night. The report was published in a Vancouver newspaper, on the front page of the sport section; the reporter, James Lawton, an English sports reporter, was hired to add depth to the Vancouver Sun newspaper. He is known around

Vancouver for his wordy and at times over-written copy, a fault that is usually explained by noting his English ancestry. In the column discussed here he compares several players, from both teams, and relates this to the philosophy expressed in Rudyard Kipling's poem "If." Lawton draws specific attention to the lines, "If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same, yours is the Earth and everything that's in it. And -- which is more -- you'll be a Man my son." It is this spirit that he sees Mike Liut, the St. Louis goalie, expressing when he describes his performance. Lawton expresses it this way:

If it wasn't clear on the ice that Liut was heading for some special place in the game there was revelation enough in the dressing room. Liut was easy with his triumph. It wasn't something he wanted to hang on the wall. He said he "lucked out" on a save from Kevin McCarthy which really demanded music from Wagner or maybe Tchaikovsky.

It is here that Lawton presents Liut as offering luck as an interpretation of at least one important save in the game. In a very close game, Liut maintains his composure and suggests that one of his best saves was due to luck. He demonstrates his confidence by being "easy with his triumph."

When questioned further about the nights performance, Lawton quotes Liut as responding:

How do I rate this performance tonight? In the top bracket. It was a winning performance. That's how I grade them, winning and losing performances. The rest doesn't mean a thing. Tonight was one game in 80.

Here the emphasis on winning and losing is evident, as Liut places this above all else. The only way to be a winner is to win hockey games, as the Stanley Cup cannot be won without doing so. Also, the emphasis on the team and its performance rather than on individuals is present

as he down plays his role in the victory and emphasizes that only winning and losing are important in the long run, not who won or lost a game for the team.

The St. Louis Blues were third in the overall standings when this game was played. The St. Louis team had been a recognized loser for several years, after a few years of success in the years just after the expansion of the NHL in the mid 1960s, and this was their first season to look like they might again become a winner. As a team, the St. Louis players were struggling to display that the values associated with being a winner were among the attributes they possessed. Liut's statement, that one of the most important saves of the game was made by luck, diminishes the importance of his role as an individual player in the team's victory and emphasizes the importance of winning and losing in hockey.

The Vancouver Canucks were also struggling to become something other than losers in the 1980-81 season. At the time they played St. Louis in late December, the season was less than half over and the Canucks were the number six team in the league. To be doing so well after 37 games was quite unexpected at the beginning of the season. One of the main reasons for the improvement in the Canucks play was the acquisition of Dave "Tiger" Williams in a trade made on 18 February 1980. Williams became the leader of the Canucks on his arrival, providing the team with both toughness and, for a time, goal scoring. The 1980-81 season was to be Williams's personal high. In the game against St. Louis Williams scored his 19th goal of the season and was described as "Vancouver's sharpest player of the night" (Lawton, 1980). In describing the Canucks performance against Liut and the Blues, Williams

is reported as stating:

We didn't have the puck luck. It left us tonight. It's gone for the moment. I'm not worried how it affects us in the future. It has already affected us. We lost the points. We slipped. Yet, Liut is right. He played well, but the important thing was that he won.

In this quotation Williams explains the Canuck loss through the loss of puck luck (see Case 1).

In explaining the loss as being due to the loss of puck luck Williams does not call into question the moral worth that the Canucks are trying to forge for themselves. As they struggle to overcome a tradition of being a loser it is important that their confidence be maintained. To talk of the loss of the puck luck for the game allows Williams to explain the loss of a game that the Canucks dominated while still preserving a claim to being better than this single performance. Puck luck is, for Williams, an idiom through which this can be accomplished. It is important that Williams, like Liut, places great emphasis on the outcome of the game. It is winning and losing that matters in the NHL and, as he notes, the game has been lost and there is nothing that can be done to change that.

In the interpretations offered for this one game, luck is used by both the winner and the loser as an explanation of what took place. The winning team, through the mouth of one of its star performers, credits luck for one of the key saves in the contest while the losing team, through a player recognized as a team leader, claims that the Canucks have just lost the puck luck on that night. While luck is used in both instances the two interpretations use it to construct very different meanings, meanings which are dependent upon the specific

interests and situations of the two teams. In both instances the idiom of luck is used, and accepted by Lawton, as the members from both teams attempt to explain what happened on the ice. In both instances, however, the interpretations that are constructed by Liut and Williams, and quoted by Lawton, must be related to values which are present in the public culture of hockey.

In this instance both individuals stress winning and losing as key values in their interpretations but both are also concerned with confidence. Liut demonstrates his confidence through his easy handling of the victory and his humbleness in accepting that an important save was just luck. Williams, in his use of puck luck, can be seen as trying to maintain the confidence of the Canuck team. Therefore, the puck luck just left them on that night and there seems to be little question in his mind that it will soon return. In winning, Liut and the Blues demonstrate that they have confidence while for the losing Canucks an interpretation of the outcome is offered that attempts to maintain confidence.

#### Case 4: "Luck and the Stanley Cup."

In a small and inexpensive paperback volume detailing the resurgence of the Boston Bruins hockey team in the late 1960s, Stan Fischler makes the following statement:

Manager Schmidt made it clear that nobody could tell him that the better team won the series, and there were other murmurings about the Canadiens being "lucky." But Boston columnist Tim Horgan reduced the Bruins wailing to its proper place when he denounced it as sour grapes and commended the Canadiens as true champions (1969:179).

The context of Schmidt's remarks and the "other murmurings" referred to in this passage is the Boston Bruin loss to the Montreal Canadiens in the semi-finals of the 1968-69 Stanley Cup playoffs. The winning Canadiens advanced to the Stanley Cup finals where they met the St. Louis Blues, a recent expansion team in the NHL, and easily won the Stanley Cup 4 games to 0.

The author of this passage, Stan Fischler, is a sports journalist who has covered hockey for many years. Operating out of New York he has covered the Rangers for a daily paper, he writes a regular column for The Hockey News and he has written more books on hockey than any other author. His claim to legitimacy as a hockey rhetorician comes from this long association with the game and not from having played it professionally. In fact, it is common for Fischler to make an occasional disparaging remark about his ability as a player when he was younger. When he introduces this paragraph into a book, he does so with a reason. It is not just an explanation of who won the Stanley Cup for the 1968-69 season, it also communicates information about the way a victory or loss in the Stanley Cup playoffs can be explained.

The Boston Bruins had been moral losers for many seasons prior to the 1968-69 season. They last won the Stanley Cup in the 1940-41 season, when one of their star forwards was Milt Schmidt, the manager referred to in Fischler's book. Prior to the 1968-69 season the Bruins had finished out of the playoffs in 8 of 10 years, ending up in last place for many of these seasons. With the arrival of Bobby Orr, their youthful All-Star, and several other key players acquired through trades, the Bruins began to improve and show signs that they might become

a winner. When they lost this close series to Montreal, a team which has always had the reputation of being a winner, Schmidt and the others referred to in the Fischler text refused to accept that the Bruin loss was to a better team. One of the ways of expressing this sentiment was to claim that the Montreal Canadiens had been lucky to defeat the much improved Boston team.

It is important that in Fischler's account of this use of luck, it is a Boston columnist, Tim Horgan, who denies all such interpretations placed upon the series. Horgan, a local Boston figure, does not allow Schmidt and the others to make such claims and have them stand undisputed in the public culture of hockey. Horgan's attack on such interpretations indicates that Schmidt's and the others interpretations are not accepted by all, not even all Bostonians, because they appear to be biased in supporting the home team and fail to give credit to the Montreal Canadiens. As a local reporter in Boston, Horgan's criticism is important in demonstrating that even a local audience does not necessarily accept any interpretation of events that is offered.

In Fischler's presentation of this account there are two important points that are made. First, the Boston Bruins are a much improved hockey team that is winning hockey games and, as a consequence, is struggling to be recognized as a winner. That they are not yet a winner is shown not just by their loss to the Montreal Canadiens, but also in their attempt to explain the loss by suggesting that the Canadiens were just luckier. In the attempt to explain the loss of a best 4 of 7 game series by luck Milt Schmidt, the man who speaks for the Bruin team that he manages, denies the role of proven talent and character in the



outcome and performance of hockey events.

Secondly, in using luck to explain the winning of the Stanley Cup, Milt Schmidt and the others involved call into question the moral order of hockey itself. If the championship is to be won on the basis of luck, what is the point of trying to build a better team or the evaluation of the moral worth of particular teams and individuals? In the public culture of hockey, luck is not an acceptable explanation for what takes place during the Stanley Cup playoffs. As Gerald Eskenazi has pointed out, "Sure, there's luck for a play, even a game, even a few games. But luck has little to do with finishing first, or winning Stanley Cups" (1972:209). Luck cannot explain long term performance, and being a winner is based on just that -- success over time. When a team that has not performed particularly well during the regular season begins to win in the playoffs they are often referred to as a "Cinderella" team. That is, like the young lady in the fairy story, the team's true moral worth had not been apparent through the long season. However, in the playoffs the team finally began to play as it could and as it should. It is not that the team must go through some radical change in the playoffs, just that the moral worth that was always there somehow makes itself present.

In this case, the use of luck to explain the Canadiens' victory over the Boston Bruins was not well managed. An interpretation was suggested but was found wanting by some hockey rhetoricians. When Fischler includes the case in his volume on the Boston Bruins, he indicates that luck is not an acceptable way to explain a loss in the Stanley Cup playoffs. Luck may be acceptable in some situations, but the playoffs

are not such a situation. In the playoffs, true moral worth is demonstrated with winners and losers clearly decided. To suggest that the outcome indicates anything different is to suggest that in all hockey there is no final criterion for determining moral worth; this is unacceptable in the public culture of the game. An individual or individuals may attempt such an interpretation, but their hopes of persuading their audience that this is so are, it appears, slim.

Case 5: "It must be the lucky team that wins."

On the 19th of April, 1982, the Vancouver Canucks were engaged in a difficult playoff series with the Los Angeles Kings. It was a quarter-final playoff series and it represented the first time in the history of the franchise that the Canucks had advanced beyond the first round of playoff action. The city of Vancouver became extremely interested in following "their" Canucks as signs appeared everywhere in the city offering encouragement to the players, surveys of the "man on the street" were conducted with playoff predictions being made and the headlines in the local papers became more concerned with hockey than with world affairs. Sports in Vancouver became a front page story rather than merely serving to front the business section in the newspapers. The same was true in all other local media as the performance of the Canucks became news and not just sports.

The scene is a television news studio as it appears on the television screen, just as the newscaster, an attractive young lady named Pamela Martin, has finished reading the news copy and turns to introduce the sports section of the late night news broadcast. This is a brief interlude in this show which traditionally involves an exchange of witty banter

between the newscaster and the sportscaster. This is a period of transition in the news show during which a change in formality was communicated to the audience. The topic usually has to do with sports and it provides the newscaster an opportunity to introduce the sportscaster along with some notion of what sporting events will be covered.

On this particular occasion the Vancouver Canucks had defeated the Los Angeles Kings by a score of 5 to 4 and in doing so took a lead in the quarter-final, best-of-seven series, 3 games to 1. The games had all been decided by a single goal's difference, two of them in overtime. As the newscaster turned to the sportscaster she remarked, "Well John, I've only ever seen two or three real hockey games but these last couple have seemed so close that it's just luck that determines who wins and who loses. They seem to be so evenly matched that nothing else could really matter." The sportscaster's face immediately developed the expression of a man deeply concerned, indicating that this was not to be a session of witty repartee. He immediately began to discuss the series and to explain that the result of the series could not possibly be decided by mere luck. His response was immediate: "No Pamela, that's not really true. These two teams are very competitive and very closely matched but the whole point of the series is that it can't be won on luck. They are very competitive teams and very evenly matched but the best team will ultimately win." The newscaster left the discussion at this and smiled, letting the sportscaster perform his segment of the show.

From this brief introductory segment of the sports broadcast, several points can be drawn. The newscaster was a woman and while women do attend

hockey games and follow the sport it is traditionally a male sphere. This is not absolute but it certainly is the trend. Women in any capacity in the league are seen as something of an oddity, yet it is still possible for a woman to be a sports reporter or to follow the game from home. More important than the fact that the newscaster was a woman was that she declared herself to be outside the group of people who share an interest in the sport.

In being an outsider to this group, a group whose membership is determined simply by the sharing of an interest in the sport, the woman newscaster is making statements about the game which are interpreted by the sportscaster as attacking its integrity. By suggesting that the winner of a playoff series could be determined by luck she is undermining the entire moral order of the sport and the importance of the Stanley Cup. If this award, the highest honour to be won in hockey, is to be won by the luckiest team, then the competition and the moral aspects of the game are rendered irrelevant. Winners and losers in this context would simply be determined on the basis of the fortuitous outcomes of a few games which take place at the close of the regular season. Pamela Martin indicates that she is an outsider to hockey when, in her opening remarks, she states that she has only ever seen two or three hockey games. In the public culture of hockey, she has no right to make statements about the sport when, by her own admission, she has no knowledge of the sport.

The sportscaster to which Pamela Martin made these remarks is John McKeachie, a well known sports figure in Vancouver. He works for a television station which broadcasts regular sports reports as well as

a number of NHL regular season games during the season. This gives him access to the local players as well as others from throughout the league as they pass through Vancouver. McKeachie is devoted to sports and has been described in one account of the Vancouver sports media in the following way: "His adoption of standard sport cliches is wholehearted" (Stanley, 1980:120). McKeachie adopts the standard sport cliches as a way of providing legitimacy for his interpretations of sports events. He knows how to talk the talk of sports. In covering Vancouver sports, McKeachie tries as hard as he can to be closely associated with the teams and the players. When, in 1975, the Canucks won their first Smythe Division title, McKeachie was tossed into the showers by the players during their celebrations, a sign he interpreted as indicating that he was close to the team. McKeachie spends much of the time in his reports indicating that he interacts with the players in a personal manner. In being this close to the players, he knows the inside information about what is going on in hockey.

In this case there are two points which should be emphasized. First, when Pamela Martin suggests that the team that wins a close playoff series is successful because they are lucky, she does so as an outsider to the game. This means that she does not understand the moral order of the game and that she is not capable of evaluating the performance of the events that are witnessed. In the eyes of John McKeachie, she does not possess the knowledge of hockey that is necessary for an interpretation to be offered. She does not know that it is not acceptable for luck to be used as an interpretation of success or failure in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Secondly, McKeachie responds to the statements made by Pamela Martin even though he knows that she is an outsider to the sport. In doing so he treats her statements about the Los Angeles and Vancouver playoff series as he would any other statement made in the public culture of hockey. Just as Horgan would not allow luck to be used as an interpretation of the Bruin loss to the Canadiens, McKeachie will not allow the outcome of the quarter-final series between Los Angeles and Vancouver to be determined by luck. Instead of allowing the viewing audience to deal with Martin's remarks as they see fit, McKeachie enters into the discussion to try to indicate why her interpretation should not be accepted. In doing this he makes his case for the benefit of his audience as much as for the benefit of Pamela Martin. To allow her remarks to stand unchallenged might be interpreted as agreement with her interpretation. As a hockey rhetorician, McKeachie defends what he takes to be the integrity of hockey by indicating that the interpretation offered by the outsider is not consistent with the meanings and values associated with this aspect of the game. Not only must he deal with an interpretation or explanation offered by an outsider, but he must also deal with the use of luck in understanding events in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

### III

Having examined these five specific cases in which luck is used, it is now necessary to draw from them some general observations concerning the place of luck in hockey. Four related properties of luck emerge from the discussion of the five case studies presented above.

1. Luck is temporally limited.

Time is an important factor in making evaluations of performance in hockey because it is believed that over time all things even out. Over a long duration, the longer the better, all the chance happenings even themselves out and the true character or moral worth of players and teams are revealed. Time is required for character and moral worth to be revealed because minor fluctuations in every measuring standard are everpresent as teams or individuals may perform very well or very poorly for greater or shorter periods of time. These fluctuations in performances are publicly examined and commented on by hockey people, as trends are looked for as indication of change or stability in the moral standing of the observed.

The use of luck as an explanation in hockey is only appropriate for short term phenomena. That its use is publicly unacceptable in interpretations of entire playoff series is evident from cases 4 and 5. Playing 80 regular season games followed by the playoffs is a period of time for which luck is an unacceptable explanation. Teams may be very closely matched in skill and character but the team that wins a playoff series is, in the end, publicly determined to be the better team. The playoffs are one forum in which moral worth is publicly demonstrated every year. To suggest that luck can explain playoff performances, as some of the rhetoricians try to do in cases 4 and 5, amounts to asserting that moral worth cannot be known.

Even during the regular season, the use of luck is not an acceptable explanation for long periods of time. Playing very well or very poorly for a while can be interpreted as being due to luck but the longer these

periods last, the more they appear to reflect character and moral worth. When Bryan Trottier, in case 2, speaks of the New York Islanders slump and explains it by the bad breaks or bounces the team had been experiencing, he notes that the slump was coming to an end through hard work. As the Islanders apply themselves, and so show their true character, the puck begins bouncing for them; they "make their own breaks" as they begin to work hard. The New York team's slump is explained as a short term aberration from their known moral worth as Stanley Cup champions.

Luck may explain objective outcomes for a short time but ultimately moral assessments will be made. Luck is one way of explaining fluctuations in performances while overall moral worth is being evaluated.

## 2. Luck is a consensual category.

When an explanation or interpretation using luck is publicly made, its acceptance is not guaranteed. In the public culture of hockey any statement made can be subjected to scrutiny and evaluation. The rhetorician who offers an explanation which makes use of luck cannot do so with any certainty that it will be accepted by a public.

This is perhaps most obvious in cases 4 and 5 above, where interpretations using luck are publicly and explicitly denied. In case 4 the use of luck was argued to be unacceptable because it was offered as an interpretation of a playoff performance and because its use was seen to be closely grounded in self-interest. In case 5 the use of luck was publicly denied because, as a self-proclaimed outsider, Pamela Martin does not understand the meaning and importance of the playoffs in hockey. Her use of luck in this context is unacceptable to John McKeachie, as a



defender of the game's integrity, because to accept luck as an explanation here would be to render the whole sport trivial.

In the other three cases presented the uses of luck are not publicly denied or debated. In the Trottier case, not being publicly challenged allows the interpretation to stand as being acceptable. In cases 1 and 3 the use of luck is not just left unchallenged, it is positively reinforced. While Davidson, in case 1, begins his discussion by referring to puck luck his co-host, Tom Larscheid, publicly agrees with his statements and even uses the phrase himself. In case 3, Liut and Williams both use luck in presenting their interpretations and Lawton, in praising them both, publicly records and sanctions their statements.

The successful use of luck is contingent upon the hockey rhetorician offering the explanation understanding something of the witnessing audience and their assumptions and expectations. Luck is dependent upon what is publicly known about performers; it does not create this type of knowledge. Reputations and moral worth cannot be based on luck, but the use of luck is dependent upon the public knowledge of such hockey information.

### 3. Luck is reconciliatory.

Luck reconciles the harsh world of objective wins and losses with the complexity of known character and moral worth. There is an inherent ambiguity in hockey in that performance is never entirely consistent with perceived character. This ambiguity creates a tension which must regularly be dealt with even though it can never be entirely resolved.

Luck articulates a zero-sum game with one in which there are ways of winning and losing in other realms. Wins and losses in hockey are unambiguous. Tie games are recognized as being unsatisfactory and

every game is structured (ideally) to produce a winner and a loser.

But in the realm of character and moral worth there is a great deal of ambiguity. Liut, in case 3, emphasizes that for teams in hockey there are only two types of hockey performances: wins and losses. This is what the game is all about as face-offs are won or lost, periods are won or lost, games are won or lost, series are won or lost and, finally, the Stanley Cup is won or lost. All of these performances are easily observed. Yet when the moral realm is considered, the picture is not nearly as straightforward or clear-cut. Teams and individuals are hierarchically ranked not just by objective criteria but also on various criteria from the realm of moral worth.

Luck serves as a buffer between these two realms, as it exists as a possible way of interpreting wins and losses without questioning the public moral evaluations of teams and individuals as being winners or losers. While Liut and Williams both divide hockey performances into wins and losses, each uses luck to interpret why these outcomes occur.

#### 4. Luck is contextual.

In hockey, there is an inherent conflict between the simplicity of wins and losses and the diverse and complex meanings that are communicated about these outcomes. In the use of luck these two aspects of hockey are united into an interpretation making the game meaningful. In case 5 examined above, John McKeachie denies Pamela Martin's use of luck in interpreting wins and losses in the playoffs. Her use of luck does not recognize the moral dimension of these results and, therefore, does not see the outcomes as meaningful; only as stark wins or losses. However, the public culture of hockey is about much more than just outcomes, it

is about the public meanings that are given to these results.

These meanings cannot be separated from the action of the game if they are to be acceptable to the audience in hockey. In case 4 an explanation of the Boston loss to Montreal is attempted through the use of luck, but this interpretation is publicly denied -- luck itself, and the meanings created by its use, is not acceptable without having substantiation in observed action. In hockey, actions devoid of interpretation are merely outcomes. It is only when these outcomes are interpreted within the moral context of the sport, in terms of character or moral worth, that such actions and meanings are united.

Neither outcomes nor moral worth alone provide a sufficient account of hockey for aficionados. In the five cases of luck analyzed here, luck serves to articulate these two aspects of the public culture of hockey as interpretations and explanations are formed. Luck is used to unite the specific events observed with the character or moral worth of the participants and, from this union, make the game meaningful.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has presented an examination of the use of 'luck' in the interpretation and explanation of events which take place in professional hockey. It is concerned with hockey as it is played in the National Hockey League and the public discourse through which the game is made meaningful. Luck is a useful starting point in this endeavor because in a game which emphasizes skill, talent and character luck would seem, on first sight, to indicate that mere chance can determine winning and losing. Yet this is not so in hockey. Luck here is understood as a cultural category and it is through an analysis of the ways in which it is used that the place of this category in hockey discourse can be understood.

In approaching this analysis, materials were systematically collected from a number of media sources: television, radio, newspapers, books and magazines have been used as data in order to understand something of the rhetorical processes by which this material is ordered for public consumption. This material is identified as the public discourse of hockey based on its availability -- some information is made public while some remains private and inaccessible. While this information may be publicly available, the interpretations that are presented in it are not created anew on each particular occasion. In hockey there are recognized phrases, terms for facets of the play, and features of the game which are meaningful and valued without having to be demonstrated by hockey rhetoricians on every occasion. The existence of a hockey jargon which is understood by both hockey rhetoricians and their audiences indicates that there exists to some degree a common sharing of assumptions about what constitutes acceptable statements in the public discourse of

hockey.

On the basis of this, hockey is analytically identified as a cultural system -- an activity around which a shared set of meanings and values are organized. These meanings and values are given order through their relationship to this particular activity. While the public culture of hockey, the meanings and values communicated through its public discourse, is usefully thought of as being a cultural system, a major problem with this conceptualization is that it does not indicate the processes by which the meanings and values are organized on any specific occasion. That is, the meanings and values appear to be too static and rigidly tied to the activity. In the public culture of hockey disagreements over interpretations are both common and important. This recognition directs the analysis presented here to an anthropological approach originally developed for the study of political rhetoric and to apply this approach to the analysis of a new cultural realm, that of hockey discourse. By using a method of analysis originally developed for the study of political rhetoric, the analysis presented here can take account of individuals, identified as hockey rhetoricians, presenting their interpretations of hockey events. It is by adopting this approach that the processes by which the cultural system of hockey is organized can be demonstrated: it is organized by specific hockey rhetoricians on specific rhetorical occasions.

In applying this rhetorical approach, with its emphasis on the notions of strategy, performance, persuasion and context, the methodology adopted here is one developed by anthropologists working in 'complex' societies: the extended-case method or situational analysis. This method

emphasizes the analysis of particular, observable events and through them the general social forms of the object of study. Here, five cultural texts in which luck is offered as an interpretation of hockey events are examined and from the analyses of these five cases some general conclusions about the subject of the investigation are made. These cases must be set in context so the relevant features of the public culture of hockey are introduced.

The ethnographic presentation of the public culture of hockey emphasizes winning and losing as both objective and morally valued concepts in hockey. This contextual material includes a description of how the game is played, the essentials of how the league is organized, the rules of play and, finally, the meanings and values which, for a large part, underlie this dual concern with winning and losing. This takes the form of an outline of the relationship between talent and character in the interpretation of winning and losing as well as specific remarks about the role of confidence in uniting these two features of team and individual play. These features are treated as the "external determinants" for the analysis of luck. It is in this context that the cases examined must be situated.

In the analysis of the place of luck in the public culture of hockey, luck is first distinguished from superstitions and flukes. Superstitions and flukes are determined to be beyond the scope of the present study. The five cases in which luck is used are then introduced one at a time and are individually analyzed. In the analysis of these five selected texts, connections are made between the use of the idiom of luck as an interpretation or explanation and the meanings and values

identified earlier as comprising the relevant aspects of the public culture of the game. Of the five cases examined, three are drawn from regular season play and two from the playoffs. Furthermore, these cases were selected because they were communicated through a variety of media channels. It is demonstrated that the use of luck is understandable in hockey when interpreted within this cultural context.

After the five cases had been individually analyzed, some more general observations concerning the place of luck in the public culture of hockey were formulated. These observations took the form of identifying four related properties of luck as it is used in the public culture of hockey. From these general observations, luck is seen as operating as a short-term interpretation in hockey; if its use is to be successful then it must be accepted by the audience to which it is offered and the hockey rhetorician must 'read' what is acceptable and what is not; luck is used to reconcile the harsh world of wins and losses with the diverse and complex meanings that are created through winning and losing as indicators of character or moral worth; and, finally, luck is seen as articulating the meanings between the objective and observed world of actions and the meanings that are attached to these actions. This analysis demonstrates that through the use of luck the game of hockey is made meaningful.

One further general conclusion, which is demonstrated by the research carried out in this thesis, is that the rhetorical approach is of considerable value as an analytical tool beyond the realm of political analysis. In this case, it has been the analysis of the public discourse of hockey as rhetoric that leads to the recognition of the way in which the cultural system of hockey is given order as well as the methodology



for the interpretation of what that order means. As such, this thesis is an ethnographic contribution to the understanding of hockey in Canadian society as well as a contribution to anthropological theory concerning how certain features of modern life, particularly public culture, can be anthropologically examined.

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