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Gridiron and Coal: The Making of Rugby Football in
Industrial Cape Breton: 1900 - 1960

Daniel A. MacDonald

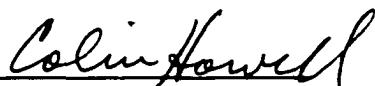
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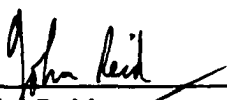
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Canada

**Gridiron and Coal:
The Making of Rugby Football in Industrial Cape Breton 1900-1960**

**Submitted by Daniel MacDonald
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of
The Masters of History Degree**

**Saint Mary's University
History Department**

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Abstract/Executive Summary

Gridiron and Coal is a thesis that explores the nature of industrial and cultural production. For decades rugby football teams from the mining districts of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia played their game to the rhythm of their industrial experience. Conversely their industrial experience was contoured by their production of the game. This symbiotic relationship took place over a contested terrain of class warfare, regionalist imaginations, expressions of masculinity and ethnic identification. Players endured wage cuts, strikes, spatial and temporal challenges to the game. Nonetheless, throughout the twentieth century the game has competed with changing national rugby football codes which ensured that Maritime rugby football did not simply wither away. Instead it faced potent challenges to its popularity by emergent national codes which finally overtook the local and regional game by the 1950s. With the waning acceptance of a once popular fall pastime came a reduced urgency to debate Industrial Cape Breton's working class and the region's role in the making of football. Instead workers from the mining districts developed different forms of leisure to fill the void left by rugby football. Games like darts, horse racing and bowling became popular, especially in the fall. National football (Canadian Football) became accessible through the medium of television and the talent pool from the Industrial districts dried up. In conclusion, a history of rugby football in Cape Breton is best thought of in terms of changing working class leisure patterns perpetuated from within and without the region.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the following people who aided in the historical production of this thesis. My immediate family and parents, as well as my wife's, deserve mention. The staff of The Pas Medical Centre and the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, especially the nurses- thanks for your help. The people of the Cree Nation in Moose Lake, Manitoba, especially Jenny and Fred.

Thank you also to Stephanie McKinstry, Michael Earle, John Bodner, Michael Robidoux and of course, John Reid who read earlier drafts of chapter three. The graduate history and Atlantic Canada studies students I met at Saint Mary's who inspired and challenged me throughout my studies. The staff at UCCB, especially Don MacGillivray, Terry MacLean and my spiritual advisor/English 100 professor Mary Keating. At Saint Mary's I wish to thank Mike Vance and John Reid for their inspiration and intellection. My advisor Colin Howell deserves special mention for introducing me to sport history and allowing me much intellectual freedom with subtle, yet timely interventions. Like most of my other professors Colin is both a friend and mentor whose relentless encouragement were especially important during moments when I lost my way (inside and out of the classroom). Most of all I would like to thank him for rekindling my love of sport.

To my sister Donelda I would like to say thanks for your constant materialist badgering and to my sister Joanne for whose theoretical knowledge assisted my interdisciplinary outlook. I would also like to thank my brother Ronnie who spent literally thousands of hours in a field beside my house helping me play and practice hockey, baseball, soccer, football, etc... and regaling me with tales of the 1970's Montreal Canadiens. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my wife, Jenny, who has stood beside me for more than ten years when others would or could not. Through many

high school suspensions, my illnesses, poverty and such she has stuck it out and I thank her.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to those who fight daily for better wages, human rights and basic dignity- those who can see beyond what Ian McKay has called “an almost drugged liberal consensus”.

Introduction

there is a cultural battle to be fought, let alone won ¹.

The history of rugby football in Canada has a long and misleading tradition of being written as if the east coast did not matter. By contrast, this thesis is centred on the mining districts of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and on the national significance of their experience of the game. Many of the most talented rugby football players in what can loosely be termed eastern Canada (i.e. Quebec and the Maritimes), emerged in the hard-scrabble mining towns of industrial Cape Breton in the first half of the twentieth century. Unlike most other sports - with the obvious exception of baseball - rugby football in Cape Breton quickly became a workers' sport. This means simply that workers came to dominate the sport almost immediately upon its introduction to the region at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, links between working class and bourgeois teams were decisively severed in industrial Cape Breton before world war one. Thereafter, the game became a center-piece of Cape Breton's working class sporting culture, and remained so until well after the second world war.

Although rugby football played in Cape Breton was not that which was played in central Canada, or in accordance with an emerging Canadian code, rugby football and Canadian code football, existed in a symbiotic relationship. In Cape Breton the modified rugby rules contained in the emerging Canadian code were diligently resisted and

¹Tony Bennett, "The Politics of 'the Popular' and 'Popular Culture'", in Tony Bennett, Colin Mercer and Janet Woollacot (eds.) *Popular Culture and Social Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1986), p. 6.

Canadian code football's existence on the Island was thwarted on every occasion until after the second world war. The pre-eminence of Canadian football in the 1950s, and its integration into the post-war myth-symbol complex of Canadian nationhood, implied that if one was not playing Canadian code football, one was somehow un-Canadian. My primary thesis statement, therefore, is that this is a story of rugby football in Canada, and particularly its central place in Cape Breton working class culture. It is neither a celebration of the triumph of Canadian code football, nor a study of rugby football as a cultural anachronism. It was never inevitable that the Canadian code would take over and leave an immense void in Cape Breton sporting culture - *never*. My objective in the pages that follow, therefore, is to re-think what has been written on *Canadian* football and to figure out why the Maritime story has never been fully explored.

It must be said from the outset that I have been and remain a staunch fan of Canadian code football for over twenty years. Recently I had the pleasure or perhaps displeasure of watching my Montreal Alouettes play in the Grey Cup final for the first time since 1977. This earlier event I can't remember, but have heard about on numerous occasions from my older brother. This year the Alouettes lost on a controversial failed two-point conversion attempt in the dying seconds which, if successful, would have tied the game. It was just one of a number of exciting Grey Cup football matches that have taken place over the over the last decade or so. The promise that Canadian code football continues to offer is of an open, exciting game quite unlike the plodding American version. Recently, however, the CFL has marketed itself as 'radically Canadian', focussing its advertising upon the seemingly essential qualities of the Canadian game. Those who choose to market the game based on its *Canadian* character, however, forget the history of rugby football as it developed across the land, and assume that the triumph of the Canadian code was the natural and inevitable outgrowth of Canada's emergence as a modern nation.

My objective in writing this thesis was to demonstrate that “it was not always this way,” a phrase that my friend and mentor Don MacGillivray once uttered to me, though in a different context. In such a simple phrase there is an important insight for historical researchers. It implies history’s emancipatory potential. When switched around, it suggests that “things will not always be this way”², thereby confirming history’s change across time and space with the realization of human impact and without the reductive forward moving *spirit* of time (implying simply that change is necessary and subject only to time which it is not). This is reminiscent as well of what Michel Foucault (drawing from Baudelaire) has written of *modern man or woman*. “Modernity is not... sensitivity to the fleeting moment it is the will to *heroize the present*”³. Indeed, it was this very will to *heroize the present*, which led the Maritime Rugby Union and the mineworkers of Cape Breton to seize the game and make it theirs, to change it if necessary, but continually to fight for their right to play it. It was not simply meaningless and increasingly anachronistic play, but was bound up with the production of culture and the conflicts inherent in the working class’s confrontation of totalities.

For years Cape Breton produced some of Eastern Canada’s best rugby football players, but this is no longer the case. The mass production of the Canadian code has meant the withering in Cape Breton of a rugby football tradition. Remember, however, that “things need not always be this way”. Today a resurgence of rugby football is taking place. The reasons are several and simple. For one, rugby football is cheap in comparison to the costs associated with the Canadian code. One needs only a pair of shoes, shorts a jersey and a ball, and a game can begin. In addition, women’s teams have recently flourished on campuses across Canada, in part because it is inexpensive, something the Canadian code cannot boast about. In this sense, rugby is hardly out of

²This was also said by Don MacGillivray to my sister, an M.A. student in history at Memorial University, and also had nothing to do with rugby football. Nevertheless it is sage advice.

³Paul Rabinow (ed.) *The Foucault Reader* (New York 1984) pp. 39-40.

date: it is instead experiencing a period of growth. For this, and for many other reasons, it deserves careful attention as both an historical and contemporary cultural product.

Before launching directly into the thesis let me summarize the chapters and explain their titles where necessary. The first chapter, entitled *The Coin Toss*, is a brief testimony to my historiographical roots, and outlines my approach. The title is meant to suggest the economic and class interests associated with the game, and to present a number of lines of interpretation open to those who would study sport history, including modernization models, post-modernist forays into myth, symbol and discourse, and to debates within Marxism. My basic argument is that nothing foreordained that Canadian code football would emerge hand in hand with a modernizing nation-state. I suggest that we throw out the presentist interpretation advanced by nationalist sport historians that Canadian football sprung somehow from the Canadian *character*, and that we treat the game instead as a form of cultural expression developed in a contested social, ideological, and economic terrain. Canadian code football was manifestly created by its proponents, as was rugby football in the Maritimes. When one tells the story in this way, not only Maritimers, but working class Maritimers, become active agents in the construction of football in Canada. At the same time, the games they produced reflected the material context in which they were constructed. My desire to provide a materialist explanation of the genesis and development of rugby football, I should point out, is part of my own tradition and part of me being a working class man. I have also been influenced by Colin Howell's challenge to sport historians that they not omit materialism from their historical toolbox as they emphasize sport's connection to issues of identity construction and nation-building⁴.

⁴For a hardcore materialist rendering of sport history see anything by the young scholar Anthony "Tony" Joyce (a former PhD student of Bryan Palmer - small wonder). Especially C. A. Tony Joyce "Sport and the Cash Nexus in Nineteenth Century Toronto," *Sport History Review* 30 (1999), pp. 140-167.

The second chapter, entitled *Class, Contention and Continuity*, is an overview of the social milieu in which the game was first made. Cape Breton at the turn of the century was experiencing rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, and it was in this context that the Island's working class was making itself. The game was portrayed by bourgeois promoters as something of a tonic to the working classes of Cape Breton. The reforming impulse, evident among those who initially plumped for the game, was coloured as well by an Imperialism which defamed both the American and *Upper Canadian* games based on their professionalism and overt roughness and asserted the virtue of amateur competition. The residual Victorian amateur ideal of *play for the sake of play* died slowly, and over the years the press in Cape Breton and elsewhere began to accommodate itself to the *Upper Canadian* game as something different yet not necessarily antagonistic. During the 1950s Cape Breton rugby football withered, and in the context of a consensus-oriented post-war culture, Canadian code football rose to ascendancy.

The first rugby league in Cape Breton began at the turn of the twentieth century, dominated initially by bourgeois teams from Glace Bay and Sydney that competed on a more frequent basis than working class teams. Working class teams operated sporadically from year to year, hampered by limited material resources, but they demonstrated nonetheless a remarkable and continued representation from the colliery districts in and around Glace Bay. During the class warfare that accompanied the strike in the coalfields during 1909-1910 no worker teams played, but the league pressed on by using off-island competition, which perhaps not surprisingly, was welcomed by the fans. As World War One approached, however, working class teams recovered from the conflict in the mines and brought it to the field. In fact, by the start of the Great War rugby union football was dominated by working class teams both in terms of representation and championships won. It continued as a working class sport until its demise in the 1950s.

The third chapter, *Grid Iron and Coal*, deals mainly with class and regionalism in the immediate post-war era. To offset the threat during the 1920s of what was now being styled as *Canadian*, rather than *Upper Canadian* football, the Maritime Rugby Union (MRU) reached back in time for a solid identity. Although the class warfare and material privation of the early 1920s in Cape Breton had led to the temporary collapse of most of the teams - even a cup donated by the incumbent president of the British Empire Steel Corporation, who employed most of the teams' working class members, was promptly returned - by the late 1920s Cape Breton teams returned to the field with vigour. This helped the Maritime Rugby Union (MRU) to construct a counter offensive to Canadian rugby football. For every organizational manoeuvre the Canadian Rugby Union (CRU) took to promote the Canadian game, the MRU provided an alternative. The MRU hoped not simply to answer the threat of Canadian rugby football, but to disseminate the Maritime game throughout the country. In this sense, the adherence to rugby football codes in Cape Breton can be seen as a kind of sporting populism, coloured in some ways by the antimodernism that many have noted was characteristic of Maritime intellectual life in the interwar years, and by many years of struggle pitting workers against absentee owners of its steel and coal industries. The adherence to rugby football, moreover, stood in frank opposition to the self-styled modernity of the Canadian game. In this period of hardship and class conflict, the Caledonia Rugby club, whose roster was made up largely of colliery workers, emerged as perhaps the finest club of the day, winning a number of Maritime and Eastern Canadian championships.

My fourth and final chapter is focused on the last-ditch attempt to combat the encroaching influence of the Canadian code after the second world war. Rugby union, a slow fifteen player game with poor ball visibility was discarded altogether for a game known as rugby league. League was a much faster and slicker game that was popular with the English working classes. The switch to rugby league was an attempt, as in the interwar years, to renegotiate the football power relations in Canada, and was less about

the style of the game than it might appear at first glance. What we have here is another populist effort to generate a Maritime power bloc which resisted the dominance of Central Canada. Sport *intellectuals*⁵ played their part and contributed to the construction and deconstruction of the bloc, which ultimately disintegrated. Colleges were switching to the Canadian code and inter-colliery rivalries died as the mining industry changed. As we shall see, the failure of the bloc to accommodate working class needs, women, and provincial identities contributed to its undoing. With the increased acceptance of the Canadian code, rugby league was relegated to pockets of play around the province outside larger metropolitan areas. The promise of national integration premised the decline of the regional game and the primacy of Canadian code football. Guided by the logic of capitalism, the emergent Canadian Football League, established in 1958, concentrated upon larger cities and never seriously contemplated expansion into the Maritimes. I have entitled this chapter *Cape Breton and the Regional Reinvention of Rugby Football*.

This brings me to my final point. "There is a cultural battle to be fought, let alone won" was a famous phrase penned over a decade ago by Tony Bennett. His criticism of *the left* was that it had become too economic. These words have echoed in the work of Colin Howell. "I can't help but think," Howell writes, that 'historians have tended to discount the social and cultural practices whose history does not at first glance contribute to an understanding or regional economic development'.⁶ Neither Howell nor Bennett

⁵ Antonio Gramsci has written "The notion of 'the intellectuals' as a distinct social category independent of class is a myth. All men [and women] are potentially intellectuals in the sense of having an intellect and using it, but not all are intellectuals by social function" He goes on to distinguish between *traditional* (literary, scientific, etc.) intellectuals which have an "interclass aura". On the other hand he suggests *organic* intellectuals are characterized "less by their profession which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing their ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong". Antonio Gramsci *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York 1971) p. 1. The making of rugby football has been constructed by both working class sport intellectuals and middle class sport intellectuals (referred to by Gramsci as "bourgeois refugees") for working class players. Their function has been to gain or fragment consensual forces of rugby football in Cape Breton sport discourse.

⁶ Colin Howell, "Two Outs: Or, Yogi Berra Sport and Maritime Historiography", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 1

have ever argued that material conditions are unimportant, only that materialist analysis can and should point the way to more significant studies relating to the production of culture. The truth that all historians can take heart in is that again “Things will not always be this way”. As such we are poised to fight many battles. Bring them on.

Chapter One

The Coin Toss

In a recent *Acadiensis* review essay entitled “Canadian Sport History” Nancy Bouchier posed the following questions: “What is to be made of non-dominant models of sport?” and “What do they tell us about Canadian culture?”.¹ These are daunting questions for anyone investigating the making of rugby football, its pre-eminence in Cape Breton before World War Two and decline in the 1950s, and the rising ascendancy of Canadian code football thereafter. They are difficult questions for a number of reasons, but especially since non-dominant sporting forms can become dominant, and vice versa. Should we even assume, for example, that Canadian code football is the dominant form of football in Canada today? Considering the popularity of the American version and the time and space given it by network television in Canada the issue is at least debatable. The issue becomes even more confused when one considers the rising popularity of men’s and women’s rugby football teams at the collegiate level in the last few years. Over the first half of the twentieth century Canadian code football was only dominant in southern Ontario. The rest of the country played other codes: on the east and west coasts English rugby football was dominant, while the prairies enjoyed an Americanized version. Before making their peace with advocates of the Canadian code, the regions would exact concessions that contoured and changed the Canadian game. This invites the second daunting question: how does one insert Maritime rugby football into a larger national football narrative that addresses the issues raised in Bouchier’s article about dominant and non-dominant forms of sport?

To begin with, we must put aside the common sensical yet ahistorical argument that equates English rugby with conservatism and Canadian football with progress. This

¹Nancy Bouchier, “Canadian Sport History”, *Acadiensis*, XXXVIII, II (Autumn 1998), pp. 98-102.

presentist distinction serves to reinforce regional stereotypes – the ‘conservative’ Maritimes played rugby – while Ontario and the Prairie west created a new, innovative and more modern game. Since both games were at various points labelled as ‘rugby’, ‘football’, ‘rugby football’, and ‘gridiron’, the Maritimes should not be dismissed so cavalierly. Rather, the adherence to rugby football in Cape Breton should be accepted on its own terms, and understood as part of a trenchant and sustained critique of that which came out of Central Canada. Seen in this way, the history of rugby football can be connected to the broader debate about the place of the Maritimes within the liberal capitalist Canadian nation-state.

There is more here, however, than just an expression of regionalism. My next concern is this. How does one integrate class struggle into the formation of regional sport identities? Since sport is a central constituent in the cultural production of any community, it follows that those who produce it are also important historical actors. In Cape Breton the game was dominated by working class men, especially after World war One. For over twenty-five years the region’s finest teams came from Glace Bay and surrounding areas. In addition to those who played, there were authorities, intellectuals and thousands of working class spectators who contributed to the game and in turn helped to create Maritime sporting identities. To represent the historic and complex Maritime resistance to the game that emerged in Ontario as static conservatism, especially given its strong working class voice, is both wrong-headed and insulting.

Throughout the following chapters I will be discussing and implementing theoretical concepts from Antonio Gramsci and Anthony Giddens in order to provide a more nuanced rendering of rugby football’s history. Both Gramsci and Giddens give primacy to human agency, and suggest that power relations are not static, but always in the state of being formed, negotiated and renegotiated. For the last few decades Gramsci

has become popular with sport historians and the academic *Left* in general.² His concept of hegemony required a rejection of simplistic top-down power relations in favour of a “to and fro negotiation between competing social, political, and ideological forces through which power is contested, shifted or reformed”.³ The goal of hegemonic authorities, Gramsci argued, has been to continually secure the consent of the ruled rather than to dominate through the implementation of cruder instruments of control. In so doing they must, to some degree, be responsive to those who resist and in turn modify their authority. It is within this equation of negotiated power relations that questions of regional identity and inequality, inter and intra class, gender and ethnic constructions are addressed. However, since hegemonic projects are maintained historically the exercise of power can never be constructed as a *once-and-for-all* proposition.⁴ This open-ended reading of contested power relations suggests the emancipatory possibilities confronting those who have made and are currently making history.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony is an important alternative to structural Marxism. Structural Marxists have been criticized for their rudimentary treatment of sport as a simple reflection of the capitalistic ethos. In their view sport functions simply as a form of labour reproduction; it serves to create an efficient, vigorous workforce that possessed and projected such values as “competitiveness, hierarchy, and chauvinism”.⁵ Jean-Marie Brohm has further suggested that sport negates class conflict by socializing participants with “reactionary political views”.⁶ Sport becomes an implement of social control wielded by a unidimensional dominant class to further its economic agenda. Sporting

²Richard Gruneau, “Notes on Popular Culture and Political Practice” in Richard Gruneau (ed.) *Popular Cultures and Political Practices* (Toronto 1988), pp. 11-32.

³Christine Gledhill, “Genre and Gender: The Case of the Soap Opera” in Stuart Hall (ed.) *Representations and Signifying Practices* (London 1997) p.348.

⁴Richard Gruneau, “Notes on Popular Culture and Political Practice”, pp. 24-25.

⁵Stephen Jones *Sport, Politics, and the Working Class: Organized Labour and Sport in Inter-war Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1988) p. 7.

⁶Richard Gruneau *Class, Sports and Social Development* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press 1983) p. 37.

forms are thus created and handed down from above without any acknowledgement of class struggle, resistance or negotiation.⁷ To adhere to such a model would place the study of sport and social history into a quandary of deterministic and immutable circumstances.⁸

On the other hand to deny the relationship between sport and capitalism based upon assumptions about the unencumbered decision making of free-floating human agents would be historically fallacious and serve to legitimize this relationship. It may be true that sport has fostered competition, hierarchy, meritocracy and chauvinism, but it is also true that sport (in this case football) cultivates teamwork, discipline, solidarity, and collective interest. While it would be tough to argue that sport is divorced from capitalism, it has also never been its handmaiden. The reasons for this are that *teamwork, discipline, solidarity, and collective interest* have been important values for workers as they offered up trenchant criticism of their capitalist employers. These qualities have served working class athletes of Cape Breton well in the past. Whether they were playing gridiron or mining coal the logic of capitalism appeared ever-present, but this should not lead historians to reduce sport history to the study of capitalism.

Another impediment to an accurate assessment of rugby football in Cape Breton has been the modernization thesis. According to Allen Guttman, modern sports are identified by their “secularism, bureaucratization, quantification, specialization, formal organization”.⁹ Although the modernization model is essentially descriptive – simply delineating the difference between modern and traditional sporting forms – it nonetheless

⁷ John Hargreaves, “Sport and Hegemony: Some Theoretical Problems”, in Hart Cantelon and Richard Gruneau (ed.) *Sport Culture and the Modern State* (University of Toronto 1983) p.105. Since those adhering to this type of analysis demand that sport serves a *function* it would be helpful to read a critique of *functionalism* as a school of sociological thought. See Anthony Giddens *A Critique of Historical Materialism* (2nd ed.) (London 1995) pp. 15-18.

⁸ Another criticism which goes beyond this paper is that if Capitalism is a pre-condition for sport then would this not deny the historical existence of pre-Capitalist sport?

⁹ Colin Howell, “On Metcalfe, Marx and Materialism: Reflections on the Writings of Sport History in the Post-modern Age”, *Sport History Review* 29 (1998) p. 101.

favours and celebrates the *historical winner* and obscures moments of genuine resistance, negotiation and accommodation that contributed to the making of sporting culture. This approach can be traced back to Max Weber's usage of the term 'rationalization' which refers to a historical process in which various human institutions become exposed to rigorous scientific anatomization. After their careful scrutinizing and moulding, the fragments are reassembled for the purpose of increasing efficiency and productivity. This theme, implemented by Allan Guttman, treats the modernizing of sport "as on balance beneficial and, in any event, historically inevitable".¹⁰

The modernization model is rigidly periodized, overwhelmingly linear and according to John Hargreaves, "can be just as deterministic and reified a view of social life as orthodox Marxist theorization".¹¹ Within the modernization model hegemonic authority can easily be justified. Consider Colin Howell's critique of the modernization model as it has often been applied to native people. Howell notes that the "'common sense' application of the modernization model provided a rationale for ignoring the plight of native people: their difficulties were considered to be simply a product of their own inability to adjust to modernization".¹² The modernization model has come under attack from another direction as well. Increasingly, scholars influenced by postmodernist theory have rejected the conceptual framework of history as a broad process or grand narrative of development like that applied by modernization theorists.¹³

If one were to apply the modernization model to the history of rugby in Cape Breton one would arrive at some seriously misleading conclusions. It would likely suggest the linear development from an intrinsic, traditional, amateur form of rugby to a

¹⁰Donald MacIntosh and David Whitson *The Game Planners: Transforming Canada's Sport System* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press 1990) p. 11.

¹¹Hargreaves, "Sport and Hegemony", p. 110. Colin Howell alludes to this point in Howell, "On Metcalfe, Marx and Materialism", p. 101.

¹²Howell, "On Metcalfe", p. 100.

¹³Catriona M. Parrot, "About Turns: Reflecting on Sport History in the 1990's", *Sport History Review*, 29 (1998) p. 105.

performance oriented, calculative, professional sport like Canadian football. This would suggest that places such as Toronto and Ottawa that engaged in professional football were progressive. As for the Maritimes, it would be relegated to a pre-modern, conservative status, undermining recent attempts by historians to 'normalize' the region¹⁴, and further contributing to the misunderstanding of the region's contribution to the Canadian project. Ralph Davies in his attempt to write a history of rugby in Nova Scotia, perhaps unwittingly, reinforced this pervasive myth. He notes that due to the English conservatism of "old families" in Halifax, Nova Scotia as a whole "kept faithfully" to rugby in the face of growing pressures of Central Canadian and American football.¹⁵ Yet the elite families of Halifax held little sway over the colliery districts of Cape Breton where rugby football was so popular. Working class players set themselves in opposition to middle class teams in Halifax such as the Wanderers. It is unlikely, moreover, that English conservatism had much of an impact upon a Cape Breton workforce that was predominantly Scottish and Catholic. Evidence suggests, in fact, that those involved in rugby in Cape Breton were actually quite progressive. They developed rigorous training methods, attended lectures, constructed a sophisticated *feeder system* for younger players, and studied league rules so every player could equally be called upon to challenge a referee's ruling if deemed necessary. And, off the field they fought wage reductions, built unions, joined co-operatives, and voted for labour candidates.¹⁶ It was these dynamic communities that produced some of the most successful rugby teams in eastern Canada from the 1920's to the 1950's.

¹⁴Ian McKay, "Of Karl Marx and the Bluenose: Colin Campbell McKay and the Legacy of Maritime Socialism", *Acadiensis*, XXVII, 2 (Spring 1998) pp. 3-4; Colin Howell, *Metropolitan Images of the 'Peripheral' Maritimes*, unpublished paper, Saint Mary's; Ernest R. Forbes, "In Search of Post-Confederation Maritime Historiography: 1900-1967", *Acadiensis*, VIII, 1 (Autumn 1978).

¹⁵Ralph Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* (Masters Thesis, Dalhousie University 1979) p. 5.

¹⁶David Frank, "Tradition and Culture and the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century" in Ken Donovan (ed.) *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785-1985* Sydney 1985, p. 203. See also Neil Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club*, unpublished Master of Physical Education Thesis (University of New Brunswick 1988) pp. 35-40.

Furthermore, because of its American bias, the modernization thesis holds little promise for understanding the global game of rugby football. Consider Allen Guttman's assessment of modern football in the United States, especially since he is the most famous and articulate exponent of modernization. Guttman notes the impact of McGill students who, in their match with Harvard in 1874, introduced rugby to the United States. It was during the 1880's that the game became modernized, Guttman suggests, pointing to the implementation of the static scrum line, the reduction from fifteen to eleven players, and the invention of the first down. However, it was not until 1906 with the introduction of the forward pass that the game became *recognizably* modern. The most disturbing aspect of this strange analysis is that if American football is considered *modern*, and progressive, then other rugby playing countries fall short in comparison. At once Guttman offers up a strangely inward-looking examination of rugby football and presents it in a universalist fashion.¹⁷ For all other countries, Guttman suggests, rugby "provides ample instinctive satisfaction. It [like professional football] is a team game which affords an outlet to the primitive desire to bang into people [and] satisfies the modern hunger for quantification"¹⁸, but it does not have the forward pass.

Employed in this way, the modernization thesis favours the 'historical winner' and simultaneously reflects and reinforces that which is common sense. Common sense, moreover, is often both constructed and manipulated in the rituals associated with sport. Consider the Canadian Football League's 1968 Grey Cup final featuring the Ottawa

¹⁷ Apparently this is not the first time this American Imperialist idea has been taken to task. John Lowerson suggests that at a conference in Berlin in 1993 "The distinguished American scholar Allen Guttman, in a keynote paper, suggested that the United States' exporting of their sports as an element of economic liberalism represented an unmitigated good by replacing the near-barbaric primitivism of local games. The anger in the audience was almost palpable..." John Lowerson, "Opiate of the Masses and Stimulant for the Historian? - Some Issues in Sports History", in William Lamont (ed.) *Historical Controversies and Historians* (London 1998) p.204.

¹⁸ Allen Guttman *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press 1978) pp. 128-130.

Rough Riders and the Calgary Stampeders. The game was held at the splendidly decorated Canadian National Exhibition field and was transmitted (in colour) by the state-run Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Each end zone displayed an enormous maple leaf with Grey Cup/Coupe Grey written below. The ceremonial kick-off was performed by the then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. In the wake of the nation's centennial demonstrations of the year before, this demonstration, like those before and since, fashioned a mythical bi-cultural Canada united in playing a distinctively Canadian game. This also served to explain away alternative football codes as something anachronistic, relegating them, if you like, to ancient history.¹⁹ Even global capitalist sport manufacturer Adidas has suggested in recent commercials that the CFL is not simply Canadian football, but football played 'the Canadian way'. The triumph of the Canadian code was in this way naturalized: it was part of the modernization process, and of the 'universe unfolding as it should'.

Clearly Canadian football's myth/symbol complex is inextricably linked to global capitalism and the task of nation-building. At the 1968 Grey Cup, Quebec's allegedly 'quiet' revolution, western provincial discontent, and southern Ontario's anti-American nationalism were all dissolved into national theatre in which the voice of a united Canada spoke loudly. This is hardly surprising since even sport historians who construct national narratives without reference to the modernization thesis usually end up reinforcing its effect. Leading Canadian sport historians like Bruce Kidd and Alan Metcalfe (both indebted to Gramscian and Marxist traditions of inquiry) and Frank Cosentino have constructed volumes of meaningful Canadian sport history. They have done so, however, without even an obligatory mention of football in the Maritimes except to confound readers about the static conservatism of its football (usually identified solely as English

¹⁹Consider Saint Mary's privately funded female and male rugby football teams in relation to its mega-funded, over privileged, and wholly celebrated championship male Canadian football team.

rugby).²⁰ In a recent article Bruce Kidd has commemorated the role of Ontario in the production of Canada's sport systems. He writes that "for most of the twentieth century Ontario sports leaders have taken it as an article of faith that their interests and Canada's were the same, no matter how galling this view was for many in other regions of the country".²¹ Kidd goes on to suggest that Canadian football's 'distinctive' character can be credited to Ontario conservatism.²² While this may be so, Kidd overlooks the historical development of Canadian football's so-called distinctive character and the place of the Maritimes in this story.

Football in Canada has been a site for regional struggle. Rather than bursting into minds of clever Ontarions who somehow managed to tap into the Canadian essence, the nature of football in Canada was continually negotiated and renegotiated. In constructing Canadian code football Ontarions had to win consent from both the Western and Maritime provinces. The Canadian Rugby Union (which preceded the Canadian Football League) conceded to several rule changes drawn from the American game in 1921 to entice the American-influenced Western Canadian Rugby Union to support a nation-wide football code. However, it was not until the 1950's and the promise of full-scale national integration that accompanied the development of the welfare state and nation-wide television broadcasting, that the Maritimes finally consented to the Canadian code. While Western Canadian resistance has been well documented²³ the Maritimes contribution has not.²⁴ The reason for this can be found in the presentist assumptions of

²⁰See Frank Cosentino *Football: The Grey Cup Years*, (Toronto 1969); Bruce Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* (Toronto 1996); Alan Metcalfe *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914* (Toronto 1987).

²¹Bruce Kidd, "Ontario and the Ambition of Sport", *Ontario History*, Vol. LXXXX, No. 2, (1998) p. 15.

²²Kidd, "Ontario and the Ambition of Sport", p. 64.

²³See Frank Cosentino, "Football" in Don Morrow, Mary Keyes (eds.) *A Concise History of Sport in Canada* (Toronto 1989); Frank Cosentino *Canadian Football: The Grey Cup Years* (Toronto 1969).

²⁴There are Neil Hooper's *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Club* and Ralph Davies' *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia*, but neither have successfully inserted Maritime football into a larger national historical context.

those who have written about Canada's football history, and the lingering mythology associated with the indigenous nature of the Canadian code.

When one reads the work of both Ralph Davies or Neil Hooper one is almost irresistibly drawn to the assumption that there are two games here, each with their own separate history. The Maritimes played English rugby and the rest of Canada played football. This is true to a point, but also misleading. It is true that between 1900-1955 that much of Canada played what was termed the *Canadian code* while the Maritimes played various versions of English rugby code football. However the strict division between rugby and football is unwarranted and exists only in the form of a historical intervention. This becomes clear when one looks at the terminology employed to describe what was being played. In the Maritimes, the terms 'football', 'rugby football', 'rugby' and 'gridiron' were used interchangeably over time with varying frequency to describe its game. In 1902, for example, *The Sydney Record* reported that local athletes came together and decided that "a football league was organized".²⁵ Over fifty years later Donald McInnis from Glace Bay suggested during a controversy in Cape Breton that "I am trying to promote football and the only way to promote football is playing it before fans".²⁶ At the same time the parent body governing the Canadian code was called the Canadian *Rugby* Union and its players also used the terms 'football', 'rugby football', 'rugby' and 'gridiron to describe its game'. It is important, therefore, to emphasize the symbiotic relationship between the Maritime and Canadian games. This suggests in turn the need to understand Maritime Rugby Football as part of a broader process of regional resistance to and negotiation with football powers in Central Canada. Maritime rugby can be thus described as a meaningful form of cultural production that existed in relation to other forms of rugby football in Canada.

²⁵*The Sydney Record* 6 October 1902

²⁶*The Post-Record* 10 November 1953.

As mentioned before, my concern is not simply to address the making of rugby football in the Maritimes as a regional question, but also to address how the game was shaped by class forces and by material conditions. Two fine books are especially pertinent to my own work. The first is by Stephen Jones, a brilliant young scholar who died tragically before the publication of his last and finest work. *Sport, Politics and the Working Class* is an examination of the dialectical relationship between organized labour and sport during the interwar years in Britain. As a Gramscian/Marxist, Jones sought to write the British working classes into sport history and shows how through processes of negotiation with local employers, athletic churchmen, social reformers, and the state, the working class managed to affect the very constitution of sports in Britain. In Wales for example, as in Cape Breton, workers from the pit-towns gained control of rugby at levels of playing, watching, and officiating. In his analysis Jones suggested "historians should still be sensitised to this duality of structures and agencies, and the way in which groups are able to develop and transform sports against the background of objective material and social conditions".²⁷ Jones's materialist approach provided something sorely missed in today's writing of sport history, especially in North America.²⁸ His analysis of professional sport and its commodification derives from Marxist theories of accumulation, reproduction, and legitimation, which protect him from descending into a cultural analysis removed from economic realities.²⁹ Within my own work the dialectical relationship between sport and workers was continuously contoured by, yet never solely determined by the worker's material existence. For example, while the strike of 1909-10 severely affected worker representation in the Cape Breton rugby league, the strikes of

²⁷Stephen Jones *Sport, Politics and the Working Class* (Manchester 1988) p. 11.

²⁸For thoughts on this issue see Howell, "On Metcalfe. Marx and Materialism", pp. 96-102; Parratt, "About Turns: Reflecting on Sport History in the 1990's", pp. 4-17. A reading of these two articles would be incomplete without reference to Bryan Palmer, a materialist historian. See his thorough "The Poverty of Theory Revisited: Or, Critical Theory, Historical Materialism, and the Ostensible End of Marxism", *Left History*, 1, (Spring 1993), pp. 67-101.

²⁹Jones *Sport Politics and the Working Class*, pp. 54-55.

the 1920's were met with staunch resistance in which the rugby field served, among other things, as a theatre in which class, local communal and regional political concerns were dramatized. During the post- World War Two years the inability of the Maritime Rugby Union to overcome class and regional divisions contributed to its unravelling.

The second book, *Making Men: Rugby, and Masculine Identity* edited by John Nauright and Timothy Chandler is a collection of essays dedicated to rugby and the construction of masculinity. The objective of the book was to analyze the creation and maintenance of "white, middle class and male defined patterns of cultural behaviour and the incumbent ideological underpinnings"³⁰ that sustained them. Issues of both class and manliness are treated as mutable concepts that differ according to time and place. James Martens has a particularly fine chapter concerned with the power struggle between Northern England's industrial bosses and their workers versus Southern England's middle-class. At stake were regional bragging rights, amateurism versus professionalism, inter and intra class allegiances, and struggles over a legitimate conception of masculinity. Other authors within the text went beyond individual and collective notions of masculinity and sought to uncover the implicit relationship between gender and national identity. Based on theoretical conceptions of Anthony Giddens and Benedict Anderson, David Andrews' chapter on Welsh rugby proves enlightening. Andrews suggests rugby was an integral part of the 'imagining' of modern Wales at the turn of the century. It became central to the articulation of a middle class masculinity that served to promote a 'distinct' sense of nationalism within the larger British Imperial project.³¹

Within Industrial Cape Breton similar struggles occurred over similar issues with sometimes similar, but often very different results. In terms of masculine sensibilities the

³⁰Timothy J. L. Chandler and John Nauright, "Introduction: Rugby, Manhood and Identity" in Timothy J. L. Chandler and John Nauright (eds.) *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity* (London 1990) p. 1.

³¹See James W. Martens, "Rugby, Class, Amateurism and Manliness: The Case of Rugby in Northern England, 1871-1895", pp. 32-49; David Andrews, "Sport and the Masculine Hegemony of the Modern Nation: Welsh Rugby, Culture and Society, 1890-1914", in Timothy Chandler and John Nauright (ed.) *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, pp. 50-69.

struggles over legitimation turned on questions of amateurism and professionalism which veiled inherent class tensions. Before the Great War, notions of amateurism were connected to Victorian concepts of character building that emphasized the aesthetic quality of play. Workers from the collieries resisted these notions by stressing success on the field which procured a sense of local community and colliery pride. During the interwar years, characterized as we have seen by nostalgic antimodernism, the Maritime region's rugby players were set in opposition to those of 'Canada' and the United States. It was the task of Maritime athletes to uphold a sense of purity and manly self restraint where others had failed by descending into professionalism. Because of successive wage reductions and the onset of the Depression many miners could not and in some cases refused to aspire to such an ennobling sense of manliness. Some players turned to professional boxing for the excitement and subsistence it provided which ensured their controversial welcome to the field when rugby season resumed. By the late 1930's however amateur rugby was cleansed of professional boxers and amateurism had ascended to legitimacy though in a far less rigid sense.

These texts highlight recent trends in sport history. For Jones in the 1980's materialism was central to his analysis of sport. He considered it to be a form of cultural production that was born out of and contoured by class relations. The substantial work of Jones is countered by the somewhat trendy work of David Andrews in the 1990's, yet they both have similar theoretical foundations. Andrews' work concerning Wales teeters on the assumption of a large-scale psycho-social crisis brought on by the rapid advancement of industrial capitalism. This precipitated the re-imagining of the 'Welsh community' and hastened its advancement from a pre-modern to modern community without any real sense of historical process with the noted exception of this apparently cataclysmic moment. It is from Anthony Giddens's text *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* that Andrews rests this admittedly compelling thought. From the outset it is not Giddens's objective to debunk Marx's historical materialism or render it

redundant, but to offer corrections to the ambiguities and inconsistencies that reside within it.³² The outright rejection of materialism by Andrews' blemishes an otherwise fine article.

This rejection entails a cleavage between the realms of materialism and idealism that simply is not there. For Gramsci "ideas and material conditions are always bound together, mutually influencing one another, and not reducible one to the other. Ideas have to be understood in relation to material circumstances. Material circumstances include both the social relations and physical means of production".³³ For Andrews materialism did not fit within the applied 'representational' template and was removed. In the collieries of Cape Breton the interplay between material circumstances, class relations, notions of gender and race, discourses of amateurism and professionalism were essential to the making of rugby football - as were representations of 'imagined communities'.³⁴ For example the heightened regional consciousness during the inter-war years provided a solid defense against the Canadian code. The popular imaginings offered by a potent combination of the emergent rugby union and the Maritime Rights Movement mythologized the evils of central Canada since Confederation. As the regional consensus gave way to provincial identities the decline of rugby football followed. In Nova Scotia a further polarization occurred between Cape Breton and peninsular Nova Scotia (the Mainland) and for football players this had its roots in class differences as well. During the post-World War Two years the absence of a sustained

³²"Marx's analysis of the mechanisms of capitalist production" writes Giddens "remains the necessary core of any attempt to come to terms with the massive transformations that have swept through the world since the eighteenth century". Anthony Giddens *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (Great Britain 1981) p. 1; Andrews' quote from Giddens appears on pp. 193-4.

³³Robert Cox "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method" in Stephen Gill (ed.) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism* (Cambridge 1993), p. 56.

³⁴Benedict Anderson, author of *Imagined Communities* (Verso 1991) has alluded to a link between 'scientific' materialism and idealism. He suggests "What are we to make of a scientific materialism which formally accepts the findings of physics about matter, yet makes so little effort to link those findings with the class struggle, revolution, or whatever. Does not the abyss between protons and the proletariat conceal an unacknowledged metaphysical conception of man?", pp. 10-11 - footnote 3.

regional bloc left the Maritimes without a cohesive identity. The Canadian code represented a sport that was both fashionable and exotic. It offered the opportunity to compete outside the region and contribute to the production of the nation. Over much time, space and struggle the national imagery associated with football supplanted regional counterparts.

It is hoped that my work will legitimize the study of rugby football in Canada whether contemporary or historic, especially for that which stands outside the realm of the 'Canadian' code. More importantly however, is the attempted illumination of those who made the game, who believed 'their football' was meaningful enough to at least rival, if not better, other codes in Canada. Given the centrist nature of Canadian historical work I have relied on theoretical concepts which allow for negotiation between competing powers, racialized discourses, and spatial contestations which have all been and continue to be formed on or around the rugby football field. Unlike others who have worked within the realm of rugby football and Nova Scotia, such as Ralph Davies and Neil Hooper, I refuse to lament or give credence to the death of rugby football for several reasons. The first is the recent global audience of three billion who tuned in to see the, albeit, commercialized rugby union World Cup in Wales. The second is that in the Maritimes privately funded university rugby football clubs abound for both men and women, something the privileged Canadian Code clubs can not yet boast about. The third and final reason is, and this will probably not go unchallenged, I don't believe we have reached the end of history just yet and as such many chapters concerning football in Canada remain to be written.

Chapter Two

Class, Contention and Continuity

Rugby in Cape Breton was in some ways anomalous. While many of the larger urban centres of the country had already turned to professional football by the 1920s, industrial Cape Breton adopted amateur rugby union as its fall sport. This was hardly strange considering the cultural, social, and economic dissemination of the game. Already popular in much of the Maritimes, rugby had been introduced in its organized form at the turn of the century by several middle class Montreal anglophones hired to work at Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation. Like many other games in Canada, rugby fell under the regulatory control of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA). Considered the 'cradle of Canadian sport', Montreal was a city with considerable influence and much capital invested in industrial Cape Breton. In fact Ian McKay has recently suggested that Montreal was the "informal capital of much of the Maritimes".¹ It would thus seem that the introduction of organized rugby to Cape Breton represents another indication of Montreal's metropolitan influence over the Atlantic Region.²

What was anomalous, at least in a Canadian context was that by the first World War the game was dominated by working class teams. Elsewhere, in Montreal and Halifax for instance, rugby was played by young bourgeois males, sons of merchants, clerks, and university students.³ In the early years in Cape Breton the game had also been dominated, in terms of representation and championships won, by middle class teams from Glace Bay and Sydney. After 1906 however, working class teams from Reserve,

¹ Ian McKay *The Eclipse of Region in the Contemporary Writing of Canadian Social History* p. 9. A paper presented at the 1997 Atlantic Canadian Workshop.

² McKay, "Of Karl Marx and the Bluenose: Colin Campbell McKay and the Legacy of Maritime Socialism". p.3. This is in reference to McKay's echoing of the need to "[re]construct" the region's history as something other than a conservative backwater.

³ Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* pp. 9-10.

Sydney Mines, Dominion No. 6, and Caledonia each shared the championship. On the eve of World War One working class teams from the colliery districts had shared in five of the six championships they contested. The 1909 and 1910 seasons were exceptions to this because of an extended strike which caused working class teams to withdraw from league play.

On one level, rugby in Cape Breton reflected the maintenance of British male hegemony. Imperialist discourses of manliness, courage, respectability and discipline were expounded by its promoters. Hybrid rugby games such as Canadian and American football were deprecated for their deviation from ideal amateurism and their embracing of immoral professionalism. Such arguments were legitimized through the popular press which exaggerated the roughness of professional football. Still, rugby was regarded as a 'manly' sport, and assisted in the construction of both masculine and feminine identities. Like other team sports across the country during this time women were discouraged from participating. Based on Victorian notions of the fragile female body and emergent fears of racial degeneration, perspective mothers were encouraged to avoid team sports. This was naturalized by the largely medical belief that team sports were overly competitive and thus dangerous. Women were encouraged to partake in less 'taxing' forms of exercise. More feminine 'arts' were advocated while masculine sports were discouraged and disparaged.

Any discussion concerning the game must begin with the transforming influence of industrialization: "The busy streets are no longer silent and the byways are teeming with life [while] the pastoral scenes in the centre of town have faded away like a pleasant dream only to become populous with the spirits of industry"⁴, said the *Cape Breton Record* in August 1900. This editorial spoke of rapid industrialization, urbanization, heightened immigration, but also alluded to the social dislocation of such a transition

⁴*The Cape Breton Record* 10 August 1900.

from an agrarian to an industrial community. At the same time there was a curious⁵ optimism associated with the changes taking place. By the early twentieth century industrial Cape Breton appeared as a “dynamic” and highly industrialized community. The population increased substantially, more than tripling in the industrial region from 18005 in 1891 to 57263 by 1911.⁶ The two most visible industries which contributed to the accelerated growth were the Dominion Coal Company and Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation.

Dominion Coal Company was the result of the consolidation of the industrial region's coal fields in 1893 sponsored by Boston ‘speculator’ Henry Melville Whitney and a conglomerate of Nova Scotia coal operators and politicians. Within the next eight years Dominion Coal's production tripled which projected an external image of prosperity. The development of Dominion Coal ensured the integration of the Cape Breton coal industry within the larger national context of industrial capitalism, and the company established a directorial board spanning New England, Nova Scotia, and Montreal.⁷ In 1899 H. M. Whitney began another financial exploration that resulted in the Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation in Sydney. The inauguration of this latest venture received much applause within the city. With the coal mines working at extraordinary levels in the late 1890's and the establishment of the steel industries in Sydney and later in Sydney Mines (Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Corporation) in 1904 the demand for labour increased substantially.⁸ In fact both Dominion Iron and Steel and

⁵In light of turn of the century progressivist thought, this optimism is curious only when juxtaposed with the above noted social dislocation of a transition from agrarian to an industrial capitalist community. Of course this contradiction was, at least for workers a hard sell. See Ian McKay, “Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914”, *Acadiensis*, XIII, 1 (Autumn 1983) pp. 3-46.

⁶David Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation”, *Acadiensis*, VII, (Autumn 1977).

⁷Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry”; Donald MacGillivray, “Henry Melville Whitney Comes to Cape Breton: The Saga of a Guilded Age Entrepreneur”, *Acadiensis*, IX (Autumn 1979), p. 57.

⁸Ron Crawley, “Off to Sydney: Newfoundlanders Emigrate to Cape Breton, 1890-1914”, *Acadiensis*, XVII, 2 (Spring 1988); David Frank, “The Cape Breton Coal Industry”, p. 12; MacGillivray “Henry Melville Whitney”, pp. 65-69.

Dominion Coal sent agents in search of relatively cheap labour such as Newfoundland workers. Community leaders too occasionally solicited labour for the industrial region. Most of these recruits earned low wages and lived in virtual poverty.⁹

For some, the effects of industrial capitalism such as heightened class tensions, poor housing and sanitation, and stricter divisions between work time and leisure were cause for great concern. However it was not just spatial and material conditions that concerned people, but also the moral well being of the emergent urban working-class and their children. "In both Canada and the United States" writes Colin Howell, "progressive reformers sought to address the ills of a rapidly changing industrial-capitalist order".¹⁰ The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was most ardent in their task which was to uplift the virtues of Canadian males. They were devoted to the "temporal benefit of man" which they considered to be "the highest and noblest point any association can aspire to".¹¹ Their focus seemed not so much the refinement, but the installation of moral self-worth through physical, educational, and religious training. In the spirit of "manly, healthy, true Christianity" young boys were conditioned "for citizenship".¹² The YMCA however, was geared toward saving young middle-class boys and rarely extended their services to working-class youths who had their own definitions of what it was to be 'manly'.¹³ Despite this division, by 1901, the first organized season for rugby in Cape Breton, it seemed that without intervention young boys would succumb to their urban environments. Percy Stevenson of the YMCA in Sydney noted that "if we wish to have good men, we must get them while they are boys".¹⁴ It was within these reforming impulses that rugby in Cape Breton began.

⁹Crawley, "Off to Sydney", pp. 43-45.

¹⁰Colin Howell *Northern Sandlots: A Social History of Maritime Baseball*, (Toronto 1995) pp. 18-19.

¹¹*The Pictou News* 10 October 1884.

¹²*The Enterprise New Glasgow* 18 November 1893.

¹³John Springhill, "Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-class Adolescents, 1880-1914", in Mangan and Walvin (eds.) *Manliness and Morality*, p. 60. This was found in Colin Howell *Northern Sandlots*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁴*The Daily Post* 30 October 1901.

Several sources suggest that organized rugby was introduced to Cape Breton in 1899 by a group of McGill students “led by a Doctor Haszard” and a man from the “old country” simply named Jones who were hired to work at Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation.¹⁵ After only two years the Cape Breton Rugby Association had been formed with teams from Sydney, Glace Bay, Port Morien, and Louisbourg.¹⁶ The initial growth of the game can be attributed to several intersecting and mutually beneficial factors: the cultural dissemination of the game and the role of the media. Rugby union, the game that was played in Cape Breton at the turn of the century, was the preserve of the Montreal anglophone elite just fifty years earlier. They enjoyed a wealth of economic and cultural power and by the 1880’s had established and controlled nine national governing sporting bodies including rugby.¹⁷ The Montreal anglophones were aggressive and ambitious visionaries who figured prominently in the working of the National Policy and the project of nation-building. They introduced many sports throughout the country while remaining powerful cultural figures in Canadian sport until after the turn of the century.¹⁸ It was from this bourgeois cultural milieu, wrought with British sensibilities, that rugby in Cape Breton was produced, however it was maintained and reproduced, at least in ideal form, by the mass media.

“Perhaps the single most important factor contributing to ‘making of sports’” argues Bruce Kidd “was the celebrity given [it] by mass-circulation newspapers and magazines”.¹⁹ In Cape Breton the *Record*, founded around the turn of the century, expounded the virtues of English rugby in not only an intellectual, but a moral sense.

¹⁵Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* p.40; Hooper *A History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p.13. It is interesting to note that Dr. Haszard played as a quarterback for Glace Bay for several years which would contradict any long term employment at Dominion Iron and Steel which was located in Sydney.

¹⁶*The Sydney Post* 11 October 1902.

¹⁷Metcalf *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport 1807-1914* p. 25 and Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* p. 16.

¹⁸Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* pp. 16 & 33-34.

¹⁹Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* p. 20.

There were, of course, other newspapers in circulation at this time in the industrial area including the *Sydney Daily Post* and the *Glace Bay Standard* but neither afforded rugby football coverage comparable to the *Record*.²⁰ The paper was thus in a unique position of power from which to participate in the construction of rugby football. *The Record* defended the British game from the contaminating influences of 'Upper Canadian' (Central Canadian) and American football. It should also be remembered, suggests Elizabeth Beaton, that turn of the century Cape Breton newspapers, as well as many others, were written from a predominantly "white, male, authoritarian perspective".²¹

Almost immediately after the league's inception *The Record* began to defend the British game of English rugby football from the American and Canadian versions on the basis of the latter's roughness.²² It was an almost regular occurrence during the rugby season to see the publication of another death in American football.²³ In fact during the 1902 season just after the fifth American football death the headline warned "Play the English Game and Avoid Fatal Accidents".²⁴ The injuries and deaths were attributed to the players' preoccupation with winning. According to the bourgeois tenets of traditional English rugby the game was 'essential' in defining manhood. James Martens has written that the game was "to be played for comradeship, [and] fun"²⁵, but not winning. Critics across Canada implemented residual notions of Victorian amateurism to condemn American football and thereby confirm English rugby as the only righteous alternative. In North America, unlike England, noted Principal Auden of Upper Canada College, in reference to the rising tide of professionalism, sports were too "purposeful" and

²⁰This statement is made tentatively because while the *Glace Bay Gazette* aptly covered Rugby football, undoubtedly in part due to the Glace Bay team's dominance, very few issues remain from this period 1901-1914.

²¹Elizabeth Beaton, "An African-American Community in Cape Breton, 1901-1904", *Acadiensis*, XXIV, 2 (Spring 1995) pp. 67.

²²*The Daily Record* 23 and 26 November 1901.

²³*The Daily Record* 27 October 1902.

²⁴*The Daily Record* 28 October 1902.

²⁵Martens, "Rugby, Class, Amateurism and Manliness: The Case of Rugby in Northern England, 1871-1895", p. 32.

“organized” while the players themselves were too “hostile”.²⁶ After 1903 the critique of American football, undoubtedly fuelled by the Alaska - Canada border dispute, oscillated from subtle to occasional belligerence.

In 1905 Dalhousie’s professor Woodman complained of a strangely stifling effect English rugby had on its players. He suggested it lacked “individual play” and thus hampered the game’s spontaneity.²⁷ Considering the structure of rugby this is probably more a reflection of prevailing liberalism than an accurate criticism of the game. A common rugby ‘scrum’ required the front three forwards to lock arms and meet, shoulder to shoulder, the front three forwards of the opposing team. Behind each front three existed two players and behind them three more. This was referred to as a 3 - 2 - 3 formation. The ball was placed between the opposing sides at which time players attempted to ‘heel’ the ball to one of seven ‘backs’. Rugby Union demanded a strategic, concerted effort and according to Robert Stebbons the game has “always de-emphasized exceptional individual play”.²⁸

Upper (Central) Canadian football too had been condemned on the basis of its overt roughness.²⁹ The issue however, quickly turned to a debate over amateurism versus professionalism. Between 1900-1904 university teams had refused to compete in the Canadian Rugby Union playoffs because some teams had recruited and implemented professionals or ‘ringers’. The use of professionals continued in the Central Canadian league thereafter.³⁰ This sparked intense criticism from Anglo-Montreal rugby players who lamented the loss of amateur players in the rest of Canada. The *Montreal Herald* expressed its concern with the downfall of Central Canadian football while simultaneously celebrating the purity of the Maritimes for remaining faithful to the

²⁶*Toronto Globe* 11 November 1903; *Sydney Daily Post* 14 November 1903.

²⁷*The Sydney Record* 20 November 1905.

²⁸Robert A. Stebbons *Canadian Football: A View From the Helmet* (London 1987).

²⁹*The Daily Record* 23 November 1901.

³⁰Robert Stebbons *Canadian Football* pp. 5-6.

British game. Purists feared that the loss of players would surely be accompanied by reduced fan support. And “so”, read the editorial, “one of the best amateur games is losing players and followers”.³¹ In an attempt to demean Central Canadian football an almost gruesome listing of the injuries suffered by the Ottawa Rough Rider line-up was published in 1907.³²

The debate concerning amateurism and professionalism, and the aspiration to polarize the two, veiled inherent class tensions. Professional athletes were discredited as prostitutes who sold their athletic skill (or perhaps as agents who sold their labour). Bourgeois reformers feared that the mixing of amateur and professional athletes might have an unfavourable or contagious impact on middle class players.³³ This debate affected hockey as well as baseball³⁴ which prompted *The Record* to advocate a new athletic association in which amateurs and professionals could compete. It was concluded that this would alleviate suspicion from players who were thought to have been paid anyway. By 1910 the Cape Breton press began to slowly accommodate itself to Canadian football. After professionalism had become more solidly rooted within the Central Canadian game, it was thus distanced further from amateur rugby which had found solid fan base in the Cape Breton colliery districts. It seemed increasingly to be a separate game. The *Record* thus claimed that Central Canadian football was not so bad after all.³⁵ It was reported that the game had some interesting qualities which included increased ball visibility and more gentlemanly play. Nevertheless, the game was clearly inferior to English rugby.³⁶

The incredible fan support in colliery districts was undoubtedly influenced by the early domination of the game by the Glace Bay Young Men’s Christian Association team

³¹ *The Daily Record* 25 October 1902.

³² *The Sydney Record* 24 October 1907.

³³ Howell *Northern Sundlotts* pp. 136-137.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *The Sydney Record* 4 November 1910.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

which later became the Glace Bay Amateur Athletic Association. The team captured the championship, called 'the Shield', 'Johnston Shield', or 'Alex Johnston trophy', from 1901 to 1906 until they were defeated in 1907 by a team from Reserve.³⁷ In fact the team did not lose a single game until 1906. One of the most important reasons was the larger player reservoir. Glace Bay had an average of almost twenty players per year to dress for each rugby game which required only fifteen thus Glace Bay had an average of almost five extra players to choose from compared to: Sydney 19.1; Reserve 17.5, and Caledonia 17.³⁸ Less talented players could sit out some games while injuries could be handled with greater ease by the Glace Bay team. Despite this information however, the Reserve team that won the championship 'Shield' in 1907 with only sixteen different recorded players while Glace Bay for that same year started over thirty.

The team backgrounds suggest, for the most part, that many of the players came from diverse occupations. Though referred to in the popular press as 'miner boys' the Glace Bay team had relatively few miners or mining-related players let alone working-class players of any sort. The Glace Bay team in 1902 was considerably bourgeois in nature, though very diverse. The roster included a physician, vice principal of schools, superintendent of transportation of collieries, stenographer, labourer, and two miners. In 1904 their new players included: manager of the Bank of Nova Scotia, barrister, clergy member, engineer at the Glace Bay Electrical Plant, bank teller, teamster, comptroller and two miners. In 1905 Glace Bay seemingly reflected a more egalitarian profile. New additions included: six miners, a machinist, and a clerk. Working class players did gain access to the athletic association, but were overall poorly represented. By 1910 Glace Bay's new players (and some who had changed

³⁷*The Sydney Record* 3 November 1909.

³⁸This information was gathered from the recorded line-ups which was subject to change slightly from game to game. All players started in the run of a season were added then divided by the number of seasons played. Other team line-ups with only one season recorded by local newspapers include: Louisbourg, 1902-20 players; Port Morien 1902-23 players.

occupations) included: a clerk, entrepreneur, manager (Alexandria rink), and a retail salesperson. While the team remained occupationally diverse they also continued to represent dominant cultural linkages.³⁹

Sydney's team also reflected the poor representation of working-class players. The 1902 team was made up of: four entrepreneurs, four clerks, two bankers, two doctors and one butcher. The team remained much the same in 1905 with the addition of: two Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation employees (no title given), two employed at local newspapers (Sydney Record and Sydney Post), one student, and one painter. Their 1913 team included the addition of a plumber and a carpenter, two clerks, a salesperson, the manager of the Bank of Montreal, and a member of the clergy. Given their inadequate representation within the two teams representing the largest communities in the industrial region, working class players from mining sub-communities, almost exclusively the colliery districts, founded their own teams.⁴⁰

One such team came from Reserve. A review of their players suggest they were predominately a working-class team throughout their years in the Cape Breton league. In addition the team remained fairly homogeneous in terms of occupational backgrounds with most of the players being miners. In a sample taken from their 1907 championship team over 86 per cent of the players were miners.⁴¹ This includes miners (William and Charles Reid) who had played for Glace Bay one year previous.⁴² Bruce Kidd has recently argued that "It would be wrong to assume that sports served as a ready unifier"

³⁹All names have been gathered by recording the per game line -ups for every available game of every available team from 1901-1914 (except 1908, 1911, 1914, from *The Sydney Record*). The names were then cross referenced with: McAlpine's Publishing Company Ltd., 1904; Sydney, North Sydney, Sydney Mines and Glace Bay Directory for 1905, J. A. McAlpine, The Telegraph Publishing Company, St. John N.B., 1905; *McAlpine's Directory 1907-8*, McAlpine's Publishing Company Limited, Halifax, Canada 1908; *McAlpine's Sydney City Directory Vol. V 1914*, Royal Print and Litho Limited, Halifax 1914. All of the above directories were found at the Beaton Institute of Cape Breton Studies, University College of Cape Breton. The directories will henceforth be referred to as *McAlpine's Directories*.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* It should also be noted that Louisbourg was almost exclusively a team made up of working class players but they folded after 1902.

⁴¹This number would be higher if mine related occupations were also included.

⁴²*Ibid.*

for working-class and immigrant men.⁴³ This is probably a relevant warning, but it is difficult to imagine, given the homogeneity of the Reserve team, that rugby did not at least extend the sense of masculine camaraderie that would have surely developed at their workplace.

The Caledonia team was another working-class club. The club competed in baseball, boxing, track and field, as well as rugby. Their 1906 entry in the Cape Breton intermediate rugby league consisted of miners and blacksmiths.⁴⁴ Again, two miners (Jim and Norman MacIntrye) who had previous to 1906 played with the Glace Bay team had settled in with a more occupationally homogenous, and presumably, like-minded working-class team. In fact these two players would have declined their spots on a senior level team to play for the intermediate team.⁴⁵ From the club's beginnings in 1906 until 1910 the Caledonia team played in the intermediate league which acted as a 'feeder-system' for the senior league. In 1911 they tied the Glace Bay Amateur Athletic Association for the senior championship which they won solely in 1912.⁴⁶ Clubs like Glace Bay and Sydney were not atypical sporting clubs in Canada up to the first World War. Access to such small town clubs, suggested Alan Metcalfe, required "wealth and social position alone" which ensured a concentration of local dominant figures.⁴⁷ Both Sydney and Glace Bay combined dominant class fragments from local political, economic, religious, and even educational arenas which suggest an overwhelming

⁴³Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* pp. 24-25.

⁴⁴Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club*. Though players came from diverse occupational backgrounds, Hooper incessantly refers to the members solely as "miners". *McAlpines Directories*.

⁴⁵I used the word 'declined' to show a sense of purpose because it is unlikely they were 'cut' from the team considering they played 1904-5 in the starting line-up for the Glace Bay and Caledonia starting from 1906 to at least 1911. Team line-ups for Caledonia were not available from 1911-1914.

⁴⁶Hooper *A History of the Caledonia Amateur Rugby Club* p. 15. There is no consensus as to who won in 1913. Ralph Davies in his index suggested Caledonia won, however the 23 November, 1913 edition of the Sydney Post suggested Dominion No. 6. This is perhaps the most likely scenario. Based on scores obtained from the Sydney Post 21, 27 October and 10 November 1913 - Dominion No. 6 and Glace Bay had 3 wins (W) 0 loss (L) 1 tie (T); Caledonia had 1 (W) 1 (L) 0 (T); Sydney 0 (W) 5 (L) 0 (T). The discrepancy in games played was probably due to lack of coverage.

⁴⁷Metcalfe *Canada Learns to Play* p. 45.

amount of concerted cultural power. The Caledonia club certainly defied the sporting club norms of this period. Their internal structure, responsible for the organization of sporting events, was also made up of working-class members such as John Burns-miner, Ewen Hillier-blacksmith, Johnny Weir-oiler, and Dave Burke-mason.⁴⁸ In addition the Caledonia club existed in one form or another until the 1950's when rugby already began to decline in Cape Breton.

Working-class clubs across the nation previous to 1914 were plagued by "a lack of permanence" due to "financial instability" yet continued to emerge.⁴⁹ The Sydney and Glace Bay teams were the most consistent in terms of representation, with Sydney competing in eleven of thirteen seasons previous to World War One and Glace Bay all thirteen. Both were comprised of a network of local social elites and therefore had easier access to the required power and resources needed to keep their clubs afloat. On the other hand working-class teams in the rugby league were sporadic, but certainly persistent. Louisbourg and Port Morien both competed in 1902-04; Reserve 1904-1908; Caledonia 1911-1913; Sydney Mines 1901 and 1905-1909; Dominion No. 3 1904 and 1908; Dominion No. 6 1908 and 1912-1913. These teams consisted mainly of miners, labourers, blacksmiths, steel workers (predominantly from Nova Scotia Steel and Coal Company in Sydney Mines), police officers, brakemen and fishermen. With access to less power and fewer resources for team equipment, travel, and such they fluctuated in terms of individual teams, but overall demonstrated remarkable consistency.⁵⁰ It would seem then that the dominance of Glace Bay in the early years was also due to a lack of stable competition. This was especially true for the seasons 1909 and 1910 when the

⁴⁸Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club*, p. 8; *McAlpine's Directories*; Danny Hardy and Jimmy Ferguson were also members of the organizational committee, but their occupations could not be located.

⁴⁹Metcalf *Canada Learns to Play* p. 26.

⁵⁰These teams were gathered from various publications of the *Sydney Record* and *Sydney Post* during the 1901-14 period.

league was comprised of only Sydney and Glace Bay. This period was marked by intensified class conflict in the colliery district.

Between 1901 and 1914 Cape Breton and Maritime workers in general fought the hastened advance of industrial capitalism and the changes it brought to the workplace under the progressive language of 'scientific management'. During this period 1 986 146 striker days were accumulated in the Maritimes as workers contested their depleting workplace control and in the collieries of Cape Breton fought for union recognition.⁵¹ Despite the accomplishments of the Provincial Workman's Association which included successful strikes, assistance in the passage of "useful" labour legislation, the support of a closed shop, mine workers had lost faith in their union after an unsuccessful strike by the Sydney steelworkers in 1903.⁵² Thus after the United Mine Workers of America began their organizing drive many mine workers left the P.W.A.. After Dominion Coal refused to recognize the United Mine Workers as the official bargaining agent of the mine workers a strike was called which began in July 1909.⁵³

The strike was particularly nasty. Dominion Coal officials ensured the building of houses within a fenced perimeter surrounding the mines for those who chose to continue working. Those who refused were evicted, along with their families, from company houses which were promptly dismantled by the company's construction crews. Mine workers responded, with the limited assistance of the U.M.W., by building temporary housing in the form of "canvas tents" in preparation for the oncoming winter.⁵⁴ D.N. Brodie, a former half-back for the Glace Bay team, advocated the overthrow of the existing government in favour of establishing a socialist order. He

⁵¹ Colin Howell, "The 1900's: Industry, Urbanization, and Reform" in *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* in E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (eds.) (Toronto 1993) p. 169; Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914", *Acadiensis*, Vol XIII, 1, (Autumn 1983) pp. 3-46..

⁵² Howell, "The 1900's".

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Howell, "The 1900's", p. 17; *The Sydney Record* 5 November 1909 and *The Sydney Record* 8 October 1909.

noted that workers have been failed by “every form of government tried to date”.⁵⁵ The strike lasted throughout the winter, but given the comparably unlimited resources and fierce tactics of Dominion Coal, which included the use of an unprecedented 3000 strike-breakers, the strike was officially called off April 28, 1910.⁵⁶

The strike’s effect on working-class rugby teams and rugby in general was immediate. With the mining towns involved in such class upheaval it is not surprising that worker representation was limited while middle-class teams relied considerably on off-island competition. Fan support on the other hand, did not seem to wane as four hundred fans braved a rainstorm to witness Glace Bay tie St. Francis Xavier 0-0 on Thanksgiving weekend in 1909.⁵⁷ In fact the only rugby football games to be played in industrial Cape Breton in 1909, with the exception of the lone Caledonia versus Glace Bay match, was a contrived championship series between Glace Bay and Sydney Mines which Glace Bay won. In 1910 Glace Bay played a Thanksgiving game against Dalhousie and one against the St. F.X. Junior team. They retained the championship in 1910 without a need to defend it.⁵⁸ Class conflict in the coal industry did not damage the game’s popularity among working class teams and fans in the colliery districts. Workers resumed play in 1911 with the championship ending in a tie between Glace Bay and Caledonia who won it solely in 1912.⁵⁹ The 1913 Dominion No. 6 emerged as the dominant team. Cape Breton rugby was not played during the first World War, but after its conclusion working class teams like Caledonia, Sydney Mines, Dominion No. 6, and Dominion No. 11 made up league play.⁶⁰ Thus the game was transformed from one

⁵⁵ *The Sydney Record* 16 November 1909.

⁵⁶ Joseph Steele *The Big Strike 1909-1910*. Masters Thesis (St F.X., Department of Graduate Studies and Research Development of Economics 1960); Ian McKay, “Strikes in the Maritimes”, pp. 25-27; Colin Howell, “The 1900s”, p.172.

⁵⁷ *The Sydney Record* 26 October 1909.

⁵⁸ *The Sydney Record* 2 November 1909; 1 November 1910; and 30 November 1910.

⁵⁹ Hooper *A History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 13.

⁶⁰ Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* p. 41.

dominated by elite anglo-Canadian players to a popular feature of working-class culture in the colliery districts of industrial Cape Breton.

There is no single defining quality of rugby that appealed to working class players from the collieries, but several combined which made the game more appealing than, say, association football (soccer). Neil Hooper has suggested that “the rough nature of the game may have appealed to the coal miner”.⁶¹ He suggests the perilous work of miners in often dangerous conditions complemented and contributed to their rugged play.⁶² This comment can be misleading for several reasons. Firstly while miners accounted for the majority of players the team backgrounds suggest that rugby was played by a heterogeneous workforce. In fact the Caledonia club, the subject of Hooper’s thesis, contained not only miners, but blacksmiths as well. Secondly a physical metaphor constructs an overly masculine image of the ‘rough and tumble’ coal miner which serves to reinforce the myth that working class males have a *natural* affinity for violence. This produces images of a coal mining rugby football player running headlong into the opposing team without the style, finesse and intelligence that mining teams became famous for. In fact, one of the legacies left by the Caledonia team during the interwar years was its players’ ability to run, pass and avoid being tackled.⁶³ Furthermore the style of the game may have been influenced by the material existence of working class players.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Hooper *A History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 13

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Interestingly the necessary contradiction to working class violence is of course, middle class benevolence. Within this mythic dichotomy resides the opportunity for bourgeois intervention and regulation of working class sport. For a discussion of this theme see: Colin Howell *Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (University of Toronto Press) forthcoming, especially chapters 1 and 2; Bill Parenteau, “Care, Control, and Supervision: Native People in the Canadian Atlantic Fishery 1867-1900” *The Canadian Historical Review* 79 (March 1998), pp. 1-35; Ian MacKay, “The Realm of Uncertainty: The Experience of Work in the Cumberland Coal Mines, 1893-1927”, *Acadiensis*, 16, 1 (Autumn 1986) pp. 3-57.

⁶⁴ Sport is a form of *intellection*. Based on Gramsci’s work, which is important in identifying the intellectual- cerebral and muscular- nervous intellectuals, it could be conceived that athletes are intellectuals (at least in the physical sense). In terms of labour Gramsci has suggested “in any physical work [which would extend to sport] even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical

The scheduling and structure of the game reflected the demarcation between work and leisure experienced by emergent working-class males. A typical game would be played on a Saturday starting between three and half past three in the afternoon depending on the arrival of the players after work. The game was played in two thirty-five minute intervals (halves) with teams switching ends during the mid game break.⁶⁵ There were no stoppages during each half which ensured a game could be played in less than two hours. Moreover the season was played in the fall from October and mid November, between baseball and hockey seasons, which meant that if a game lasted any longer than two hours it could be called off due to darkness.⁶⁶ It seemed that while rugby suited the industrial agenda well it also extended the already existing class and communal allegiance of the collieries.

According to David Frank "the industrial working-class in Cape Breton, especially in the mining towns, featured considerable social cohesion and ethnic homogeneity of the working people in the early decades of the twentieth century".⁶⁷ While most came from the farms of eastern Nova Scotia and fishery areas of Newfoundland many of these working people came from British coal towns⁶⁸ where rugby football was extremely popular at the turn of the century. Thus it can safely be assumed that rugby existed for some in the form of a residual culture that was accommodated into the emergent culture of the collieries' urban working-class. This has

qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity". Gramsci *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 8. From there one may consider athletes as intellectuals and sporting practices as forms and modes of intellection. In conjunction Gramsci has made the claim that "there is no human activity from which every form of intellectual participation can be excluded: *homo faber* [man the maker] can not be separated from *homo sapiens* [man the thinker]", p. 9.

⁶⁵ Since not all fields were manicured, the slope of the field could be a help or hindrance depending on which end a team possessed.

⁶⁶ This concept was based on a similar assessment of working people in terms of Maritime baseball. See Colin Howell's *Northern Sandlots* pp. 39-40.

⁶⁷ David Frank, "Tradition and Culture and the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century", in Ken Donovan (ed.) *Cape Breton at 200: Historical essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial, 1785-1985* (Sydney 1985) p. 204.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

been demonstrated through fan support and communal involvement within the game. Rugby football was continuously contested by working class players in terms of representation. They had gained access to a bourgeois game, founded their own teams, sustained some and lost others, but finally came to dominate the game. Issues of gender were also contested with varied results.

By the turn of the century notions of manliness were fostered within a burgeoning haze of British Imperialism and encouched in the language of liberal progressivism. Middle class reformers and business interests sought the creation of deference through their continued efforts to enforce temperance while the provincial government established technical schools for furthering working class males. Concerns about racial and physical degeneracy, the subversion of masculinity within the male populace, and social responsibility⁶⁹ created a conducive atmosphere for dominant bourgeois masculine attitudes of “rational recreation”.⁷⁰ Within the context of Cape Breton rugby the cultivation of masculinity was treated as an exercise in character-building.

Issues of respectable leisure dominated rugby throughout the 1901-1914 period. Rugby was continuously referred to as a “... good, clean sport”.⁷¹ Players were encouraged to develop ideals of amateurism which would ensure they not stray to less reputable forms of leisure such as gambling or visiting a tavern. A poem in the sports pages of the Sydney Record printed during the rugby football season of 1901 read “ Who misses or who wins to prize/ Go! lose or conquer as you can/ But if you fall, or if you rise/ Be each, pray God, a gentleman”.⁷² In addition to courage and discipline this poem advocated genteel respectability in the face of winning or losing a contest. After

⁶⁹Colin Howell *Northern Sandlots* pp. 103-106.

⁷⁰James W. Martens, “Rugby, Class, Amateurism and Manliness”. These included such key words as “fair play, team work, cooperation, dedication, enterprise, self-sacrifice, honesty, and of course pluck”, p.133.

⁷¹*The Daily Record* 13 October 1902.

⁷²*The Daily Post* 11 November 1901.

suffering a loss to Glace Bay the press remarked that Louisbourg knew “how to take a defeat as true sports do”.⁷³ Considering the continued efforts throughout the periods before and after the first World War by middle class reformers to contain drunkenness, issues of respectable leisure were most certainly resisted.

Notions of courage usually took the form of one key word ‘pluckiness’. Teams who were noticeably smaller than other teams, but managed to endure the game, win or lose, were considered ‘plucky’. After the Sydney team went through the entire 1913 season winless they were heralded for their “courage, pluck [and] keen sportsmanship”.⁷⁴ Dave Brown has argued that ‘pluckiness’ was just one symbol in an overarching construction of nineteenth century Canadian nationalism. It was “grounded in Christian ethics” and “highlighted the climate” of Canada to explain the distinctive character of the nation’s emerging sensibility.⁷⁵ This compelling myth/symbol analysis relates more to Central Canadian football than to rugby in Cape Breton, because it presupposes an omnipresent vision of nationalism that clearly did not exist in the discourse concerning eastern Canadian rugby. In fact it arguably did not exist, at least to the extent Brown would suggest, in the larger body politic until well into the twentieth century given that Wilfrid Laurier’s vision was the promotion of a ‘British’ Canada. The Imperial idea was intended to enhance unity and to reduce class, regional, ethnic, and racial divisions.⁷⁶ This pervasive concept was abundantly evident in the language of promoters of rugby in Cape Breton who disparaged the American and Central Canadian versions of the game. ‘Pluckiness’ as it pertained to rugby in the industrial region symbolized courage, strength and British imperialism, not Canadian nationalism.

⁷³ *The Daily Record* 17 October 1902.

⁷⁴ *The Sydney Record* 10 November 1913.

⁷⁵ Dave Brown, “Northern Character Theme and Sport in Nineteenth Century Canada”, *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, Vol. XX, 1, (May 1989).

⁷⁶ George Brown *Building the Canadian Nation: Volume II, 1850-1967* (MacFadden Book 1968) pp. 91-105.

The discourse that surrounded 'discipline' was certainly ideal in form, but was resisted by middle and working-class teams. Throughout the early years of Cape Breton organized rugby there was constant concern regarding the officiating of the games. There was, for an ideal game, one central referee who volunteered or was supplied by the league while two touch judges were furnished, one from each team. "Biased" touch judges were referred to as "fakes" who were partly responsible for the ruination of what was otherwise "healthy sport".⁷⁷ If a team disputed a call made by a league referee they were regarded as unsportsmanlike by the press. However considering the amount of disputed rulings one can ascertain that discipline on the field was not simply legislated, but constantly negotiated. In fact to treat these disputes as perpetual exercises in poor sportsmanship reduces their complex character. On one occasion Reserve left the field after their unhappiness with the referee. It was reported later that Reserve fans implemented their own version of "rough justice" as they jeered, threatened, and threw sticks and rocks at the referee.⁷⁸ Such incidents were not the norm, but they need not have happened much before succeeding referees took notice.⁷⁹ By 1909 even the press was compelled to note that the quality of referees was unsatisfactory.⁸⁰

The changing structure and idealization of family life contributed to the formation of masculine identity among working-class rugby players. Robert McIntosh has argued that working class families in the industrial region implemented a series of 'survival strategies' to avoid the onset of poverty. One of these was the reliance on boy labour in the mines. Boys would do odd jobs on the surface, like run errands, clean lamps, or

⁷⁷ *The Daily Record* 11 October 1902.

⁷⁸ *The Sydney Record* 14 November 1904.

⁷⁹ Bryan Palmer has recently defined 'rough justice' as "moments when producing classes [have] stepped outside the law to defy constituted authority by imposing their own alternatives to legalistic norms, measuring out a moral authority of their own". Bryan D. Palmer *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto 1992) p. 66.

⁸⁰ *The Sydney Record* 8 November 1909. It is interesting to note the particular occupational backgrounds of the referees. Of those found all were middle-class professional including: a member of parliament (Stewart McCawley); a member of the clergy (Reverend Draper); a doctor (Dr. Bissett); a lawyer (last name Routledge), *McAlpine's Directories*.

distribute picks. Other less pleasant jobs included sorting coal or working underground as a 'trapper' to ensure proper ventilation for the mine shafts. The 'crisis of legitimating' boy labour became ever difficult with "new social attitudes emerging over the Victorian age, which idealized childhood and the family".⁸¹ This ideal defined the head male of the household as the principal breadwinner which was intensified by the 'cult of domesticity'. Coupled with increasing intolerance of child labour and calls for universal schooling, argues McIntosh, this brought "legislative restrictions on the employment of children".⁸² Thus the burden fell more heavily on male heads of the household to provide financially for families since women never worked in Nova Scotian collieries. An injury, such as a broken arm or leg suffered in a rugby match, would be detrimental to an entire family. While it can not be denied that many working-class players enjoyed the physicality of the game, perhaps as a demonstration of 'their' own masculinity, it would be unwise to presume that all working-class players shared this belief. At the very least their sense of manliness would have existed in tension with a more restrained influence that would have accompanied the position as head of the household. A rugby injury, suffered from rough play, could compromise the family's economy as well as the respectable image of the primary breadwinner.

The roles of women in the production of rugby differed across class lines. Middle class women who had the time and means to participate were discouraged from play while working-class women secured the domestic domain. The field of medicine impacted greatly on the making of middle class femininity. Male physicians considered menstruation as a recurring ailment that required treatment which gave rise to "a remarkably elaborate set of explanations and accompanying prescriptions" to offset its recurring negative effects.⁸³ Women were warned that strenuous physical and even

⁸¹ Robert McIntosh, "The Boys in the Nova Scotia Coal Mines: 1873-1923, *Acadiensis*, Vol. XVI, 2, (Spring 1987), pp. 39-41.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Patricia Anne Vertinsky *The Eternally Wounded Woman: Women, Doctors and the Exercise in the Late*

intellectual exercise could have serious physiological effects which could be avoided through rest. It was exactly this rest which prohibited proper exercise, urged American Dr. George Comfort in 1874, that contributed to the ill health of women.⁸⁴ This created a paradox because menstruation was considered by most as a disability which required regular treatment and thus prevented women from participating in not only physical exercise, but also education and labourious work. However, according to 'racial degeneracy' theorists and others who generally promoted exercise for women, "physical strength and health was a necessary attribute of the robust productive mother".⁸⁵ Thus the provision of appropriate exercise became necessary to offset encroaching social ills by preparing women for the rigours of motherhood.⁸⁶ This discourse however, clearly precluded women involved in wage labour who, for the most part, could not afford such a lifestyle of relaxation and proper exercise.

"Modesty and moderation", suggests Michael Smith, was the theme with which middle class women's sporting culture was appropriated in Nova Scotia at the turn of the century.⁸⁷ Fearing the masculinizing of prospective middle-class mothers, reformers advocated various forms of exercise such as the 'Delsarte system' which combined "theatrical expression with movements, music and elocution".⁸⁸ Delsartism, which became very popular in Nova Scotia in 1890's, was designed specifically for women, who suffered extensively from nervous tension while male exercise, it was thought, increased this nervous tension.⁸⁹ Other forms of feminized exercise considered suitable for women included housework. In an article entitled "Housework not Homework"

Nineteenth Century, (Manchester 1990) p. 46.

⁸⁴Roberta Park, "Physiology and Anatomy are Destiny!? Brains, Bodies and Exercise in Nineteenth Century American Thought" *Journal of Sport History* 18, 1 (Spring 1991) p. 38.

⁸⁵Vertinsky *The Eternally Wounded Women* p. 54.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Michael Smith, "Graceful Athleticism or Robust Womanhood: The Sporting Culture of Women in Nova Scotia 1870-1914", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 23, 1&2 (Spring/ Summer 1988) p. 131.

⁸⁸Smith, "Graceful Athleticism", p. 125.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

working-class women in Cape Breton were encouraged to avoid becoming too “heavy [or] ungraceful” by combining chores with the proper kinetic methodology. For women without the time or means to take a class in physical culture “no exercise [is] better than properly mounting the stairs” and “when she scrubs the floor ... she can raise from her knees [in such] a way that the hip muscles get just what they need for [reducing]”.⁹⁰ These are just two examples of how a much broader task sporting cultural appropriation reinforced already existing gender divisions.

Women who engaged in overtly ‘manly’ sports and thus deviated from the prescribed norm were considered bizarre and had their achievements effectively undermined as a result. President Eliot of Harvard commented in 1903 that women who could compete in non-feminized sports were “strange and unnatural”.⁹¹ Despite these fears of emasculating women, by the late nineteenth century up to the 1914 Nova Scotia women engaged in those sports referred to as the “gentler arts”, such as swimming, skating, and golfing. They were also involved in bicycling, bowling, tennis, curling, rowing, even other more ‘manly’ sports like hockey and baseball.⁹² This suggests that women sometimes resisted popular discourses that emanated throughout the Nova Scotia sporting culture through the turn of the century, but their involvement in rugby was indeed informal, if not subordinate.

Women’s role in the making of rugby in industrial Cape Breton existed most visibly in the form of support. They were integral to post-game celebrations and acted as pacifying influences amongst spectators. Typically post-game celebrations were held at community centres such as the Orange Hall in Port Morien or the YMCA in Glace Bay. Middle class women’s groups prepared and distributed meals to the players who would

⁹⁰ *The Sydney Record* 6 November 1913; Helen Lenskyj, “Physical Activity for Canadian Women, 1890-1930”, pp. 210-215; James Mangan and Roberta J. Park (eds.) *From ‘Fair Sex to Feminism’: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras* (Great Britain 1987).

⁹¹ *The Sydney Record* 28 November 1903.

⁹² *The Sydney Record* 11 October 1907; Michael Smith, “Graceful Athleticism”, p. 131; Colin Howell, *Northern Sandlots* p. 93.

celebrate with songs and toasts.⁹³ Players reaffirmed their sense of masculinity by rehashing the day's events that occurred on and off the playing field in a congenial atmosphere of comradeship, after which women would partake in their own celebrations that also included dinner and songs. These post-game rituals reproduced and reinforced already existing gender divisions. Such festivities often ended with the British national anthem being sung, and contributed to the exclusion of women from the playing field as active participants to a supportive role. This was also evident in terms of game attendance. Women, according to press reports, attended rugby games regularly in Cape Breton. They were considered as positive influences on the game. Colin Howell has recently suggested "the idealized notion of the 'ladylike' spectator [was] a useful ideological construct" in the curbing of disreputable behaviour.⁹⁴ This would include acts such as spectators encroaching upon the playing field. This type of communal behaviour was considered by *The Sydney Record* as a "most reprehensible feature" of the game.⁹⁵

After the third season the league was dominated by working-class players and it is unlikely they possessed the means to continue elaborate post-game celebrations. Perhaps, as Bruce Kidd mentions, "class centred institutions" like a local tavern would be a more likely meeting place.⁹⁶ It is also during this time that press reports concerning women in attendance virtually stop. It is therefore clear that working-class women were involved in the informal production of the game in terms of material existence which included childbirth, child rearing, preparation of meals, cleaning and maintaining of clothes, and household finance.⁹⁷ Roles of women in the making of rugby football

⁹³For newsprint reports of post-game celebrations see *The Sydney Record* 3 November 1902; 6 November 1902.

⁹⁴Colin Howell *Northern Sandlots* p. 77

⁹⁵*The Daily Record* 6 November 1902.

⁹⁶Bruce Kidd *The Struggle for Canadian Sport* p. 148.

⁹⁷Keith McClelland, "Masculinity and the Representative Artisan in Britain, 1850-1880", in Michael Roper and John Tosh (eds.) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London and New York: Routledge 1991) p. 79.

extended well beyond the field of play and into the daily workings of the players domestic reality. The constitution and maintenance of women's roles within the home became necessary in relation to their male counterparts to offset less reputable forms of leisure such as a visit to the local tavern at the conclusion of a game. Working-class women were portrayed as civilizing forces and the house they kept as sanctuaries. In this environment, notes Keith McClelland, husbands could be "humanized after the burdens of labour".⁹⁸ In conjunction women were responsible for the maintenance of this haven while husbands left for the "re-creation of himself in the company of other men".⁹⁹ It is therefore clear that the maintenance of women as keepers of the domestic world was necessary for other working-class masculine ideologies concerned with work and leisure to continue.

Organized rugby, from its inception in Cape Breton in the late 1890's, was continually contested. It was fashioned within and because of a period of social dislocation brought on by rapid urbanization, economic consolidation, immigration, and out-migration all hastened by industrial capitalism. Class divisions became more evident, if not deepened, within the industrial region after the boom brought on by the development of Dominion Iron and Steel Corporation and the consolidation of the coal leases under Dominion Coal Company. In mining towns a typical resident by the 1920's was "likely to be Scottish and Catholic".¹⁰⁰ The social and ethnic homogeneity of the emergent urban working-class of the collieries provided the solid foundation on which rugby in Cape Breton was made. The game was transformed from one dominated by elite Canadian players to a popular feature of working-class culture in the colliery districts of industrial Cape Breton. However rugby was definitively a British white, male sport. During this time when women were making advances in the world of sporting

⁹⁸Keith McClelland, "Masculinity and the Representative Artisan in Britain, 1850-1880", p.86-87.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰David Frank, "Tradition and Culture", p. 204.

culture, they were ultimately constrained by widespread fears that prospective mothers would be masculinized, thereby threatening the stability of the family unit. As such they were excluded from the field of play and participated in the informal production of rugby in the industrial region of Cape Breton.

Chapter Three

Grid Iron and Coal

At a meeting in Truro in November, 1921 the Maritime Rugby Union was formed. It was pledged that members would continue to adhere to the fifteen player game known officially as 'English' rugby, or unofficially as rugby football, instead of the 'Canadian' code.¹ The Union emerged within an atmosphere of regionally charged politics. An emerging Maritime Rights Movement sought to combat the region's shrinking parliamentary representation and influence, chafed at outside economic control, and complained about Maritime de-industrialization. While Maritime Rights drew support from a broad cross-section of the population, professionals and businessmen from port cities and railway towns dominated the movement.² During the 1920's, suggests David Frank, the Dominion warily proceeded toward a recognition of its responsibilities for the uneven development of the Canadian economy. "In the short run" he suggests "the cause of Maritime Rights reinvigorated regional politics and provided the Maritimes with a powerful myth of regional grievances against Confederation".³ Within the unfolding project of nation-building, Maritime Rights represented a strategy appropriated by dominant groups within the region who felt imperilled by an eroding political and economic power base.⁴

¹Ralph Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* p. 46 Masters of Physical Education Thesis (Dalhousie University, 1979).

²Ernest Forbes, "The Origins of the Maritime Rights Movement", in Ernest Forbes (ed.) *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Acadiensis Press, New Brunswick 1989); See also John Reid, "The 1920's: Decade of Struggle" in Ian McKay (ed.) *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post Confederation Canada*. (McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited 1992), pp. 246-255; David Frank, "The 1920's: Class and Region, Resistance and Accommodation" in E. R. Forbes and D. A. Muise (eds.) *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (University of Toronto Press Inc. and Acadiensis Press: Fredericton, 1993) pp. 253-261.

³Frank, "The 1920's", p. 261.

⁴Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso 1991) p. 101. As a character of 'official nationalism' Anderson proposes that ruling classes or class

Similarly, the fifteen player game of rugby football was offered up as a Maritime alternative both to the game that emanated from central Canada and to England's thirteen-player game rugby league, each of which were thought to be corrupted by professionalism. By 1921 the Canadian Rugby Union had implemented several rule changes. These changes brought Canadian code football closer to the American game, and created the conditions upon which it might blend with the American-influenced Western Canadian Rugby Union made up of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.⁵ The main changes included: a reduction from fifteen to twelve men to a side, and instead of the scrum, a snap back (usually to the quarterback) which was now referred to as a scrimmage. As the game moved farther away from rugby union football it tended to resemble something of a hybrid American/English rugby league game. At the same time there was an increasing trend toward professionalism. "Although Canadian football was still amateur in 1925," Frank Cosentino has observed, "it was more so in spirit than in actual practice"⁶ The forward pass did not come about until the late 1920's. For many Maritimers, informal professionalism and an ever encroaching American influence was not progress, but rather an expression of moral deterioration. The continued adherence to the English code of rugby union football in Cape Breton was meant to address this trend towards cultural 'barbarism'.

The maintenance of rugby football as the 'natural' alternative to the Americanization of Canadian sport, resulted in a sustained and rigorous ideological

fragments implement anticipatory strategies when "threatened by marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationality - imagined community"

⁵Frank Cosentino, "Football" in Don Morrow and Mary Keyes (eds.) *A Concise History of Sport in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1989) pp. 150-2; Robert Stebbons *Canadian Football: A View From the Helmet* (University of Western Ontario 1987) p. 6.

⁶Frank Cosentino *Canadian Football: The Grey Cup Years* (Toronto 1969) p. 60. Interestingly enough, since the game was something of a chimera it could never be reduced, at least not during the interwar years, to either the American or English games. This provided tremendous weight to the distinction of 'Canadian' football. Instead of a slick process of 'middling' negotiation between the two powerful nations, 'Canadian' football appeared to spontaneously burst from its northern character. It was also during this time the Maritime press ceased to refer to it as the *Upper Canadian* game, now it was simply Canadian. Which furthers shows an attempted national extrapolation and heightened regional response.

response from other Maritimers advocating the Canadian code. During the formative meeting in Truro of the Maritime Rugby Union (MRU) representatives from Saint John, influenced by the avowedly nationalist Maritime Provinces Branch Amateur Athletic Association, president A.W. Covey⁷ and representatives from Dalhousie University voted in favor of abolishing the rugby union. They suggested that the Canadian Code was faster, more open, and allowed for the development of teamwork and systematic 'football machines', whereas Rugby union football was too contemplative and individualistic. The promotion of the Canadian code as an exercise in progressive nation-building, implied that the continuing commitment to rugby union contributed to a divisive sectionalism. In Sydney, Judge A. D. "Hump" Campbell suggested that the adoption of the Canadian code would "bring the Maritime Provinces in closer relationship with athletics in Upper Canada".⁸ Campbell believed there was enough talent within the region to compete with athletes in Toronto and Montreal and that to train Maritime football players in an antiquated game would do them a disservice.⁹

The counter arguments were certainly complex and many sided. According to Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, the Maritimes was reconceptualized after the World War One; a process that involved "naturalizing a notion of Maritime traditionalism and unfurling the dazzling flag of Maritime Rights".¹⁰ Rugby union football was welded to this sense of Maritime identity, one that understood custom and venerated the 'old boys' game. Historically, the old boys were in fact white, middle and upper class young men of England who attended Victorian public schools. As products of austere training it was thought, the boys most proficient at rugby football would be the pillars of the empire.¹¹

⁷A soapy biographical sketch of Covey also known as 'the Czar' appears in *The Sydney Post*, 24 November 1924. It suggests "at all times he had the delegates [of the *MPBAAU of C*] under control and by the nod of his head silenced them".

⁸*The Sydney Record* 19 November 1921.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "Expanding the Circle of Resistance" in Craig Heron (ed.) *The Workers Revolt in Canada 1917-1925* (Toronto 1998) p. 45.

¹¹John Nauright and Timothy Chandler "Introduction: Rugby, Manhood and Identity" in Timothy Chandler

For the Maritime region, rugby union provided a link to an immemorial past, even before the advent of Canadian rugby. It was spoken of in terms of innocence, plurality, and equity while carrying with it the weight of something imaginatively communal.¹²

Perhaps the most vocal supporter of the Maritime Rugby Union in the 1920's was the Halifax Wanderers Club. The club drew its membership from the elite of Halifax and abroad. By 1922 some of their players had gone on to positions of power and influence, including the offices of lieutenant governor, supreme court justice, members of Parliament and Provincial Legislature, and president of the Bank of Montreal. One was knighted. The club executive existed of former members who were overwhelmingly very wealthy men.¹³ Nancy Kimber MacDonald has determined that only five of the four hundred six executives from 1882-1925 could be considered working-class while about half were middle class professionals. With such extensive resources at the club's disposal it is small wonder that the Wanderers shopped at Edinburgh's Merchiston College, Cambridge and Harvard for some of the top-notch British trained rugby football players.¹⁴

The Wanderers' team exemplified the ambiguities and contradictions of Maritime rugby football in the 1920's. They steadfastly refused to recognize the significance of the supra-regional MacTier cup which was awarded annually for the Eastern Canadian Rugby Football Championship.¹⁵ The trophy, donated by vice president of the Canadian Pacific Railway A. D. MacTier, was intended to encourage rugby football in Montreal,

and John Nauright (eds.) *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*. (London 1996) p.1-2.

¹²David Andrews makes a somewhat similar argument concerning rugby and Welsh nationalism. He suggests that "by the advent of the 1890's a maturing male dominated, Welsh industrial middle class sought to create a united, harmonious and liveable present through the creation of a unifying Welsh national identity which was relevant to modern industrial experience." One could suggest then that the predominately Haligonian bourgeoisie attempted to create a unifying Maritime identity through rugby in response to the modern 'de-industrial' experience. For the Welsh experience see David Andrews' "Welsh, Rugby, Culture and Society, 1890-1914", in Timothy Chandler and John Nauright (eds.) *Making Men* p. 53.

¹³Nancy Kimber MacDonald *The Wanderers' Amateur Athletic Club of Halifax 1882-1925: It's Contribution to Amateur Sport*, Masters of Science Thesis (Dalhousie 1974) pp. 13-15.

¹⁴MacDonald *The Wanderers* p. 27.

¹⁵*The Sydney Record* 16 November 1925 and *Halifax Herald* 29 October 1927.

although clubs outside the metropolis, in the Maritimes and to a lesser extent in southern Ontario, would issue yearly challenges. The Wanderers, however, believed that the McCurdy cup held greater regional importance. It was donated in 1923 by radical regionalist F. B McCurdy “a wealthy financier and disillusioned former Conservative cabinet minister, [who] came to believe in a kind of sovereignty-association for the Maritimes in relation to continental Canada, an arrangement that would allow the region independence in commercial policy”.¹⁶ The middle class Wanderers in the early 1920’s played and promoted rugby football as a regional game. They refused to recognize the Eastern Canadian Championship, but were willing to participate in the national dissemination of the English rugby code over the new Canadian code.¹⁷

The MRU, dominated by Wanderers representatives, chose to be affiliated with Great Britain’s Rugby Union.¹⁸ This is not surprising considering the long-time presence of the British garrison in Halifax, an education system controlled by British ideals, and imperialist legacies devoted to the Great War in the form of memorials and monuments. “All of these” suggests Ian McKay, “gave credence to the visitors’ frequent perception of the city and province as very British in tone”.¹⁹ Even the language that the MRU employed in association with the game was suggestive of a lingering imperialism. At their annual general meeting in 1922 the MRU adopted terminology popular in England’s rugby union to cleanse its emergent Canadian code rhetoric. It was decided that quarters be changed to halves and halves to three-quarters.

From its inception the MRU was dominated solely by Nova Scotian representatives, three from Halifax, two from Cape Breton, and one from Saint Francis Xavier University in Antigonish.²⁰ It appears that stretching ‘the skin’ of regionalism

¹⁶ *The Sydney Post* 6 November 1923. David Frank, “The 1920’s”, p. 254.

¹⁷ *Halifax Herald* 17 November 1926.

¹⁸ *The Sydney Record* November 18 1921.

¹⁹ Ian McKay *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (McGill-Queens’ University Press 1994) p. 18.

²⁰ *The Sydney Record* 30 November 1922; Ralph Davies *A History of Rugby in Nova Scotia* p. 46.

over the entirety of the Maritimes became an increasingly difficult task.²¹ The decision to adhere to the English rugby union code was more than a reaction to the perceived American influence encroaching upon the Canadian Rugby Union and the professionalism associated with it. It was also a populist offensive directed at reforming or at least renegotiating the power relations of rugby football in Canada, albeit with limited results.²² The Maritimes' decision to remain with the fifteen-player rugby union reflected and reinforced inter-war ideologies designed to depoliticize sport and provide equity through class consolidation. The MRU was aided in its task by the Maritime Provinces Branch of the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (MPBAAU) which defeated successive resolutions throughout the 1920's which were to provide compensation for the loss of working pay during athletic activities.²³ Ideally this denial of what is known as 'broken-time payments' was to level the playing field by exorcising amateur sport of its professional elements.²⁴ This notion constructed in large part by the Haligonian bourgeoisie was to strictly delineate work time and leisure thereby eliminating the forces of capitalist modernity²⁵ as it pertained to sport. Ian McKay has suggested a similar conservative ideology which was integral to the construction of the Nova Scotia folk who:

²¹ *The Sydney Record* 27 October, 18 November 1921. The MRU representatives: 5 from peninsular Nova Scotia, 2 from Industrial Cape Breton, 1 from Moncton, and 1 from Charlottetown, P.E.I. It is interesting to note the absence of representatives from the University of New Brunswick, Saint Mary's (both of which advocated for an adoption of the Canadian code), Acadia, Mount Allison, and King's College.

²² *The Sydney Record* 9 October 1926 suggests that rugby union continues to thrive in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto and other cities where "it has been overshadowed by the game evolved by Canadians". Note the interesting cleavage the author creates between himself as a 'Maritimer' as opposed to 'Canadian'. This would infer a strong sense of regionalism, but also residual imperialism.

²³ *The Sydney Record* 21 October 1922; *The Sydney Post* 26 October 1923.

²⁴ Similarly Colin Howell has gleaned of baseball that "In the postwar Maritimes...a rising regional consciousness manifested itself in the valorization of the regional amateur championship and the connection of baseball to notions of civic identity and pride". Colin D. Howell *Northern Sandlots* p. 229.

²⁵ Rugby football was to be played "casually as a means of recreation and no effort is made at specialization, as in the game which has now adopted uniform rules for the Dominion". Again there is a recurring theme of Maritime 'distinctness' as something that is situated outside, yet always beside the nation. *The Sydney Record* 9 October 1926.

lived generally, in fishing and farming communities, supposedly far removed from capitalist social relations and the stresses of modernity. The folk did not work in factories, coal mines, lobster canneries, or domestic service: they were rooted in the soil and to the rockbound coast, and lived lives of self sufficiency close to nature²⁶

The difference was that the folk was manufactured as a conceptual 'other' while the interwar rugby football player was a construction of and for the 'self'. This made for a harmoniously structured juxtaposition when one considers the rural fisher - folk as living at one with nature in Nova Scotia's unspoiled hamlets²⁷ while the urban gentry of Halifax transcend the rigors of daily finance with a rousing bit of rugby on the Summer Street grounds. It is hardly surprising that this escapist and therapeutic identity would from time to time come to rub uncomfortably against the self imaginings of working class rugby football players in industrial Cape Breton.

In the colliery districts prior to world war one rugby football established itself as the most popular fall sport. Working class teams from Reserve, Sydney Mines, Caledonia, No. 6, and No. 3 shared in five of the six Cape Breton championships prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. The war interrupted rugby football in Cape Breton. Some thought this a temporary situation; others thought it permanent. Six ex-captains and twenty eight players from the Glace Bay club and all of the Caledonia squad went overseas, except for two players who suffered leg injuries during play.²⁸ The Caledonia club lost captains Norman Murray, Jack Martin, Walter McLean, and half back John Willie Wilson.²⁹ Upon resumption of rugby football in Cape Breton from 1919-1926 the league operated sporadically. The league expanded to include mainland competition from the new-born MRU. However, due to increased class conflict in the coal industry

²⁶Ian McKay *Quest of the Folk* p. 26.

²⁷Ian McKay *Quest of the Folk* p. 35.

²⁸This was written in a letter by former football player Stuart McCawley of Glace Bay to the *Acadian Recorder* 10 August 1915; Colin Howell *Northern Sandlots* p.151.

²⁹Neil Albert Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia* Masters of Physical Education Thesis (University of New Brunswick 1988) p.15.

competition among collieries teams was infrequent. The reciprocal relationship that existed between cultural and material production was quite evident in the mining communities, but a brief outline of the material background is necessary to begin.

In 1920 Roy Mitchell Wolvin, a Montreal financier, assumed control of Dominion Steel and by 1921 created the British Empire Steel Corporation (BESCO), a holding company which merged the Nova Scotia steel and coal industry. The corporation was constructed on 'watered down' stocks, bonds, and its ability to promote them to potential shareholders. This posturing was soon tested by the over production of coal in the United States combined with the Dominion's lack of a national fuel policy which could have protected the domestic market for Canadian suppliers. The logical step, or so it would seem to BESCO, was to cut workers' wages.³⁰ The miners' resistance led to fifty eight individual strikes in the Sydney coal fields with issues that went beyond wages to workplace control. Matters such as union affiliation, the functioning of pit committees, fines and suspensions and work assignments also became contentious.³¹

In 1920 Roy Wolvin donated a trophy for the resurrected Cape Breton Country Rugby League Championship.³² In the same year the coal miners extracted from their

³⁰David Frank, "The 1920's", p. 244. For a detailed analysis of the economic construction of BESCO see David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation", *Acadiensis* VIII (Autumn 1977) pp. 3-34.

³¹David Frank, "The 1920's", p. 246. For extensive treatments of the class struggle during this period in Industrial Cape Breton see Don MacGillivray *Industrial Unrest in Cape Breton, 1919-1925* (M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick 1971); David Frank, "Coal Masters and Coal Miners: The 1922 Strike and the Roots of Class Conflict in the Cape Breton Coal Industry" (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University 1974); David Frank, "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry: Cape Breton 1922", in G. S. Kealey and P. Warrian (eds.) *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto 1976); David Frank, *The Cape Breton Coal Miners 1919-1925*, Ph.D. Thesis (Dalhousie 1979). For a thorough discussion of the use and frequency of the state militia during the 1920's see Don MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920's", *Acadiensis* III, 2 (Spring 1974) pp. 45-64.

For a gender/class revision/synthesis see Stephen Penfold "Have You No Manhood in You?": Gender and class in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1920-1926", *Acadiensis*, XXIII, 2 (Spring 1994) pp. 21-49.

³²Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 17. Given Wolvin's historic exploits, which were often brutal, it would be short sighted to consider this as an act of individual selflessness. It was probably an act of something akin to paternalism. Joan Sangster provides a satisfactory definition of this concept. "Paternalism was intended to avoid labour unrest, to preserve managerial authority, and to satisfy a patrician sense of philanthropy. While often cloaked in a rationale of obligation, duty or honour, paternalism essentially justified, extended, or at most modified existing power relationships." Joan Sangster, "The

reluctant boss a signed agreement for a considerable wage increase³³ and with the renewed contract and collective sense of accomplishment the collieries engaged in relatively active season of rugby football in comparison to other years between 1919-1926.³⁴ In a Thanksgiving match that year attended by three thousand people from the colliery districts, Dalhousie and Caledonia played to a scoreless draw on the South Street grounds in Glace Bay. It was considered a 'moral victory' for the mining club because they had forced the powerful college team to touch for safety three times. Celebrations took place in Caledonia and lasted throughout the night.³⁵

In the late summer of 1922 Wolvin called for a one-third wage reduction of mine workers. In the battle that ensued, union executive J. B. McLachlan ordered a restriction of output, a tactic he had learned from Scottish coal miners. With one quarter of the Dominion's army already in Cape Breton in defense of BESCO and two of its destroyers the 'Patriot' and the 'Patrician' (later ordered to return) headed for Sydney harbour the situation received national attention. In the House of Commons a long debate took place, but the highlight was when the Minister of Labour condemned the coal miners as being "un-British, un-Canadian and cowardly".³⁶ State intervention in the form of 'military might' was not entirely unusual even while 1500 returned soldiers at a local meeting and Great War Veterans associations in both Sydney Mines and Glace Bay considered the show of force somewhat provocative.³⁷ Before the strike's end in late

Softball Solution: Female Workers, Male Managers and the Operation of Paternalism at Westclox, 1923-1960," *Labour Le Travail*, 32 (Fall 1993) p.169. See its lengthy accompanying footnote and also Ronald Melcher's, "Sports in the Workplace" Jean Harvey and Hart Cantelon (eds.) *Not Just A Game: Essays in Canadian Sport Sociology* (University of Ottawa Press 1988) pp. 51-67.

³³ Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry", p.27.

³⁴ For a brief outline of the games in 1920 see *The Sydney Record* 4,11, 19 October 12, 25 November 1920.

³⁵ *The Sydney Record* 19 October 1920.

³⁶ David Frank, "1920's", p. 246; "The Cape Breton Coal Industry", p. 27; David Frank, "Class Conflict in the Coal Industry: Cape Breton 1922" in Ian McKay (ed) *The Challenge of Modernity: A Reader on Post Confederation Canada* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1992) pp. 258-269; Don MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power", p. 52.

³⁷ Don MacGillivray, "Military Aid to the Civil Power", p. 51. MacGillivray also suggests that on four separate occasions (1876, 1882, 1904, 1909) this type of state intervention was implemented, p. 49.

summer the miners called for the overthrow of the capitalist system and appealed to unite the working class of Canada.³⁸ The strike was finally settled and instead of the original one-third resolution in wages requested by BESCO they settled for half this amount.³⁹ This was considered a moral victory for the colliery districts who furnished just two teams to compete for the Wolvin cup, the last championship with his name attached. Caledonia continued its championship reign as it defeated Dominion Number 6 in mid October of that year.⁴⁰

In 1923 Teams like Dominion No. 3, No. 6 and Glace Bay War Veteran's club were active, but not in the quest of the Wolvin Cup, instead they developed their own exhibition league. At the end of the season the Glace Bay War Veteran's club were barred from the Nova Scotia playdowns for the McCurdy Cup because they and other Cape Breton teams did not contest the 'official' Cape Breton league championship.⁴¹ This was strongly protested until a loosely strewn together Caledonia team was finally defeated by Dalhousie.⁴² For the next three seasons Cape Breton rugby was not in full operation. In 1924 after a small wage gain three teams participated including the Glace Bay War Veterans, Caledonia, and Sydney Mines. Caledonia defeated Sydney Mines 5-3 that year for the 'unnamed' championship of Cape Breton.⁴³ The McCurdy Cup was not contested in 1924. In 1925 the league was cancelled once more due to work stoppages and material privation. Caledonia managed a couple of exhibition matches with Nova

³⁸David Frank, "1920's", p. 246. For a fuller reading of this remarkable and inspiring document, and its ideological underpinnings, even with its gendered language see Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance" in Craig Heron, (ed.) *The Workers' Revolt in Canada 1917-1925* (University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1998) pp. 69-70.

³⁹David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry", p. 27.

⁴⁰*The Sydney Post* 16 October 1922.

⁴¹*The Sydney Post* 17 November 1923.

⁴²*The Sydney Post* 20, 21, 27, 29 November 1923. *The Morning Chronicle* 19 November 1923; *The Fredericton Gleaner* 17 November 1923.

⁴³*The Sydney Post* 5 November 1924.

Scotia universities in Antigonish and Halifax⁴⁴, but it was the most barren year to date for rugby.

That year BESCO sought a second twenty per cent wage reduction. District 26 responded by calling for the fourth one hundred per cent strike in four years. The result was brutal. “In essence”, write McKay and Morton, “it was a small civil war, in which whole communities were placed on the front lines of state and corporate violence”.⁴⁵ BESCO closed company stores upon which many families depended on for necessities, while workers’ ingeniously seized the power plants and manipulated them to run hospitals but not the mine pumps. This caused flooding of the mines and negated the use of outside workers. On 11 June 1925 miner William Davies was killed during a battle with Company police over the control of the power plant. In the accompanying two weeks the wash-houses in New Waterford were attacked, and there was some looting and burning of BESCO stores in Caledonia, New Aberdeen, Reserve, Dominion No. 11, No. 6 and Sydney Mines. The strike lasted five months and ended in defeat for the miners as UMW District 26 voted to remove the 1924 wage gains. The strike again attracted national attention as impoverished mining families relied heavily on appeals for relief.⁴⁶ Because of the suffering that accompanied the strike the collieries chose not to furnish teams in 1925 and 1926 except for the much celebrated and informally BESCO-assisted Caledonia team, the lone representative in the Cape Breton league in 1925 and 1926.⁴⁷

⁴⁴Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 17.

⁴⁵Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, “The Maritimes”, pp. 74-5.

⁴⁶David Frank, “1920’s”, pp. 247-248; Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, “The Maritimes”, pp. 74-75.

⁴⁷This last point is bound for contention, especially by those who remember the mighty Caledonians in a romantic fashion. Caledonia was the only team to be represented every year from 1919 to 1941. Dominion No. 11 was a distant second with at least nine seasons represented and they don’t begin to play until 1927. Caledonia received privileges from BESCO that allowed their continued representation such as: the donation of the Caledonia mine office as a club house, scheduling of shifts to accommodate games, cheap lumber at the company stores, but as Neil Hooper explicitly states, “The coal company did not make any direct financial contributions to offset the expenses of the club” see Neil Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 7. The press however, suggests that while in Halifax to play the Wanderers on 12 November 1922 Caledonia stayed at a posh hotel paid for by D.H. MacDougall Vice President of BESCO. *The Sydney Record* 13 November 1922. Daniel Samson suggests that just after the turn of the century Dominion Coal sponsored many sports in Inverness. “As in most mining towns, the company recruited

Rugby football was in shambles in Cape Breton as players could barely feed themselves. At the same time the game was thriving in New Brunswick and peninsular Nova Scotia.

In 1926 a group of prominent Montreal sportsmen met in New Brunswick with the intention of establishing rugby union football throughout the central provinces. The goal was a Canada-wide organization devoted to the replacement of the Canadian code of football. By the next year the MRU was re-organized to overcome the alienation of some teams, however representatives from Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton were absent. On the agenda was the proposed construction of a governing body similar to the Maritime Amateur Hockey Association to oversee virtually all Maritime rugby "from the cradle" to senior levels.⁴⁸ In promoting this 'united front' the MRU sought to extend the game nationally. *The Halifax Herald* was delighted, arguing that rugby provided an opportunity to attract acceptable immigrants to the province. British, or more specifically English, immigrants, it hoped, would be enticed to sojourn to the Maritimes if a crack rugby squad from Nova Scotia toured the 'old country'.⁴⁹ Fear of non Anglo-Saxon immigrants was widespread in the Maritimes and Canada in general throughout the 1930's and 1940's. In Nova Scotia this anglophilism was replaced by a celebratory Scottish tartanism in the interwar years, but it too was lacking in ethnic tolerance.⁵⁰

athletes from all over the province. These recruits would be given 'cushy' jobs around the mines, usually on the railway". Daniel Samson, "Dependency and Rural Industry: Inverness, Nova Scotia, 1899-1910" in Daniel Samson (ed.) *Contested Countryside: Rural Workers and Modern Society in Atlantic Canada 1800-1950* (Acadiensis Press 1994) p. 131. It is not surprising that BESCO would attempt to 'bolt' itself to the positive public inertia of the most successful colliery team, even after needing to secure a fifty million dollar loan nine days earlier. See *The Sydney Record* 4 November 1922; For BESCO's financial downturn see David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry", pp. 27-30. The point is not to simply brand Caledonia as a 'company team', it is to explicate their negotiated positions within paternalist spaces and to warn against romantic readings of history.

⁴⁸ *Halifax Herald* 12 April 1927.

⁴⁹ *Halifax Herald* 23 November 1926. In fact the newspaper was so enamoured with the idea it was willing to sponsor one person for the trip.

⁵⁰ Ian McKay, "Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954", *Acadiensis*, XXI, 2 (Spring 1992) pp. 5-47; E.R. Forbes, "The 1930's: Depression and Retrenchment", in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise (eds.) (University of Toronto and Acadiensis Press, Fredericton 1993) p. 283.

It was just before world war two that the first black rugby player, Charlie Phillips, made his debut as a wing three quarter for Caledonia. The continuous references to Phillips in the media presented him as someone other than the archetypal Nova Scotian rugby player. Rugby players were generally considered British athletes, but throughout the interwar years this identity was narrowed to Scottish. By virtue of its very name 'Caledonia', instead of its colliery number No. 4, it represented the Scottish sporting identity of the province.⁵¹ The "Scottish" team was often celebrated for tourism and other benefits.⁵² Absorbed under this Scottish identity were Scottish, English, Polish, Italian, and Acadian players, but Phillips was continuously designated as someone 'other'. Rather than being referred to as a winged three quarter like his teammates Johnnie Vey and Fess Anderson, Charlie Phillips was the invariably the "coloured" wing three quarter, discursively positioning him outside the Scottish identity.⁵³

The revival of the MRU amounted to something more than a romantic longing for a traditional game. Nostalgic references to "old time combats" provided a cultural standard against which the slick new central Canadian code could be measured⁵⁴, and helped fend off the continued attacks upon the rugby union code from within the region. Rugby was celebrated for its reliance on players who exercised poise and manly self restraint, and for its commitment to amateurism. Amateurism, in the interwar Maritimes was driven by what Ian McKay has termed "Innocence", a belief that Nova Scotia and by implication its rugby football players were "essentially innocent of the complications and

⁵¹ Consider "the old battle cry" of the Caledonia football team "Caledonia, Caledonia/Four, three, two/Glace Bay, Glace Bay/ Ciamar a tha sibh an diugh [or - "How are you today" in Gaelic].

⁵² The 1935 MacTier Cup match versus the Bank of Montreal team was considered "virtually the English rugby championship of Canada [that] would be a great advertising stunt for the town of Glace Bay and for the province of Nova Scotia as it would attract a tremendous crowd of people here," *The Sydney Post - Record* 29 October 1935; At a sumptuous dinner in 1929 that sported an orchestra and pipers, toastmaster J. R. Dinn, manager of the Caledonia colliery, spoke of the continent wide "fine publicity" and "clean sport" the Caledonia team has given Glace Bay. *The Halifax Herald* 7 January 1929.

⁵³ *The Sydney Post - Record* 10 October 1938.

⁵⁴ *The Halifax Herald* 29 September 1927.

anxieties of twentieth century modernity".⁵⁵ Rugby football was controlled ostensibly by middle class cultural ⁵⁶producers from Halifax who considered it an exemplary bourgeois sport. Unlike other popular sports in the Maritimes such as ice hockey, baseball, and Canadian code rugby football, it had not experimented with professionalism and hence was unsullied.

Amateur sporting organizations such as the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAU of C), and its Maritime provinces branch (MPBAAU), took a hard-line position against professionalism and continued to refuse broken-time payments for athletes who missed work. Amateurism was thought to promote equality of opportunity, eliminating the possibility of buying victory. Amateur officials argued that if athletes descended into the realm of professionalism, sport would become too purposeful and 'play for the sake of play' and the 'spirit'⁵⁷ of the game would suffer. It would seem that promoters of amateurism strove to instill a sense of spirituality within sport. This sentiment was not confined to sport, to Nova Scotia, or to the Maritimes in general. "Practically everywhere in the interwar world, it seems", writes Ian McKay, "we find great refusals of capitalism's 'disenchantment of the world', and an intellectual search for something more real, natural, authentic, and essential".⁵⁸

There was something naïve about the middle class assumption that by removing the profit motive from sport that class differences would dissolve in the face of good-natured recreation. However well intentioned, by refusing broken-time payments for athletes this escapist aspiration served more to reinforce pre-existing class relations. The attempt to drive a wedge between the material and sporting worlds often meant an unaffordable proposition for worker athletes. Even at its most basic level sport was not

⁵⁵McKay *Quest of the Folk* p.30.

⁵⁶*The Halifax Herald* 3 December 1927.

⁵⁷*The Sydney Post Record* 14 November 1939. In a McCurdy Cup match in Halifax referee Sub-Lieutenant Davidson, a native of England, suggested the game was an exercise in "Bad rugby" in which the players did not adhere to the "spirit of the game".

⁵⁸ Ian McKay *Quest of the Folk* p. 37.

without cost. For working class athletes during the interwar years of regional deindustrialization and depression, involvement in sport carried a price. A rugby union football player would need to pay his portion of club dues owed to parental sporting bodies such as the MPBAAU, his uniform, equipment, shoes, travel, accommodation, and lost wages, all of which was to be offset by 'broken-time' payments. By not addressing the material reality of sport, the proponents of amateurism, in their quest for equality among athletes, actually reconstructed unequal societal relations. Within the colliery districts of Cape Breton strict amateurism served to fragment an already fractious working class.

Before World War One the Cape Breton press advocated an intermingling of professional and amateur athletes, but by 1920 a new consensus was being constructed by two major regional sporting bodies: the regionalist/neo-nationalist MRU in Halifax, and the nationalist MPBAAU in Saint John. After several disputes concerning the status of athletes the MPBAAU under direction of A.W. Covey declared in 1922 that Cape Breton athletes had been "outlawed".⁵⁹ In a heated exchange judge A. D. Campbell of Sydney, honorary Vice President of the MPBAAU., was accused by A. W. Covey of issuing amateur cards to professional boxers at a "simon-pure" tournament.⁶⁰ Campbell, a noteworthy sport intellectual, responded to Covey in a cleverly satirical letter in which he took proponents of amateurism to task for their Aristotelian gaze into the heavens rather than addressing the material concerns of athletes.⁶¹ Judge Campbell would remain throughout the interwar years to chafe the underpinnings of amateurism as a referee and coach of the Dominion No. 11 rugby football club. He was at once an advocate of the centralizing Canadian football and an activist for reforming amateur/professional

⁵⁹*The Sydney Record* 17 October 1922.

⁶⁰*The Sydney Record* 17 October 1925, 15 October 1926. Note the biblical reference to amateur athletes as essentially pure as opposed to essentially wicked professionals who were not, by the way, lost causes. After sufficient cathartic punishment athletes could become 'simon-pure' again. See *The Sydney Post* 4 November 1924.

⁶¹ For a complete reading of this text see *The Sydney Record* 26 October 1926.

relations in sport. As such he was an ally to some working class players who used sport as both a means of leisure and survival strategy.

After the vicious class struggle of the early 1920s workers of Industrial Cape Breton resumed playing rugby football with a renewed sense of vigour. With the departure of Roy Wolvin, the Cape Breton championship was entitled the McAulay Shield.⁶² Throughout the next ten years teams from Caledonia, No. 11, New Waterford, Sydney Mines (Port Morien), Glace Bay, and occasionally Sydney competed. Caledonia, which had established itself as a rugby power in the last pre-war championship continued to exercise its dominance over other teams. After obtaining former Wanderers 'paid' coach John McCarthy, Caledonia began to dominate all off-island competition as well.⁶³ After defeating the powerful Montreal Amateur Athletic Association in 1929 for the MacTier cup of Eastern Canada, they lost it only once before competition was ceased during World War Two. In November 1935 in front of three thousand fans the Caledonia mine workers defeated a stacked team representing the Bank of Montreal that included Maritime, central Canadian, and players formerly from England.⁶⁴ After finally defeating the Wanderers for the McCurdy Cup in 1932 they did not relinquish it until 1941 to Saint Francis Xavier.

The Caledonia team was the most celebrated rugby football team in Industrial Cape Breton. Subsequent to their victory over the Bank of Montreal squad *The Sydney Post-Record* enunciated "It was a wonderful win for the Glace Bay coal miners, Canada's

⁶²This trophy was donated by the MacAulay brothers who were popular Cape Breton rugby football players before WWI. See *The Halifax Herald* 7 Jan. 1929. Four of the brothers dressed for the Port Morien team just after the turn of the century. See *The Sydney Post Record* 20 October 1902.

⁶³*The Sydney Post* 24, 29 October 1928. While it is unclear exactly who 'paid' this head coach it is unlikely that a working class club could have afforded him as the Wanderers did. For years in Cape Breton he was probably employed by the coal company in some capacity to assist his coaching.

⁶⁴The Montreal team was assigned to reclaim the Mac Tier cup from the Maritimes which had been won successfully since 1925. Jackson Dodds, who assembled the team, also served as a trustee for the Mac Tier Cup which was the committee who decided whom would challenge for the cup. *The Sydney Post-Record* 29, 30, 31 October, 2, 12 November 1935.

greatest one hundred percent amateur team".⁶⁵ As local communal representatives they were often portrayed as virtuous yet always designated as 'miner boys' and not middle class 'old boys'. The use of 'miner boys', which was used to represent all colliery teams and not just Caledonia, became a way of uncomplicating the workers of the industrial districts known for their occasional 'bolshevism'. By reducing the complexity of the miners to mere working class boys they thus became more palatable and innocent. Even game violence was considered by the print media as natural and fights during games were trivialized as something playful. The sporting discourse previous to World War One associated violence with central Canadian and American football styles. It was thought that because the styles were too 'purposeful' due to professionalism that violence resulted and consequently the Maritime game was held in virtue. During the interwar years however, game violence was less consequential and even celebrated in a hypermasculine language that focused on civic pride and duty.⁶⁶ Within a liberal order Caledonia was represented as an archetypal team. Their loyalty resided with their local community and employer and they were rewarded with celebration in leisure and consideration at work.⁶⁷ It is impossible to measure whether or not, or to what extent, the ideology of amateurism was internalized as an overarching identity for the player/miner, but one can say it was more contentious during the interwar years. It was as if the miners contained within them a multiplicity of identities that varied according to time and place. David Frank has observed that the Caledonia team, when competing for the regional championship against college teams and the Wanderers of Halifax, defended both local and class loyalties. In 1929 against the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association they donned a regional identity and became Maritime heroes.⁶⁸ However against fellow

⁶⁵*The Sydney Post-Record* 12 November 1935.

⁶⁶*The Sydney Post-Record* 7 October 1936.

⁶⁷In addition to other benefits the coal company offered "their boys" a chance to do light work on the surface during game days rather than going underground for strenuous labour. See Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p.31.

⁶⁸Frank, "The 1920's", p. 269.

working class teams colliery loyalty superceded class and region. It is here where one can find evidence of accommodation and resistance to amateurism.

In 1928 the Caledonia team refused to play because the opposing club from No. 11 had a professional athlete in their line-up. The player Maurice 'Blue' Mac Donald was actually a professional boxer and not a professional rugby football player. Bobby Jackson, also a former professional boxer and Caledonia player in 1929, suggested professional boxing was a survival strategy during tough economic times. Caledonia protested the play of Mac Donald and New Waterford's Pal Clarke, another professional boxer. The media suggested the "purely amateur" league was in doubt.⁶⁹ In 1936 Caledonia once again left the field in protest of professional boxers who played for No. 11. This time objections were directed at half back Ritchie Vermish and former Caledonian three-quarter Bobby Jackson. After an investigation it was revealed that Caledonia had played three professional athletes.⁷⁰

These incidents are revealing in that Caledonia manipulated the amateur code on several occasions to obtain an advantage on the field but refused to allow others to do the same. This suggests that amateurism was not simply a prescriptive, but a contingent ideology to be implemented when considered necessary. In addition some professional players were falsifying names in order to obtain amateur cards such as Caledonia forward and professional boxer John William Boutilier who was suspended from the amateur ranks under his acquired name 'Toots'. He circumvented the problem by obtaining a new amateur card under his given name John William. This resistance prompted secretary of the MPBAAU Sheriff C.D. Shipley to launch an investigation into the "camouflaging" of players' names in Cape Breton.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *The Sydney Post* 1, 8 October 1928; Bobby Jackson appears in the Caledonia line-up from 1929-32; Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 22.

⁷⁰ The three athletes were George Nicholson, Charlie Phillips, and Melvin Sheppard. For the controversy see: *The Sydney Post-Record* 26, 28, 29, 30, 31 October 1936.

⁷¹ *The Sydney Post-Record* 26 October 1936; See Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* pp. 47-50 for a differing opinion of the controversy concerning amateurism. Also the importance and

Certainly the Caledonia club had a vested interest in appearing under the rubric of the amateur code in these cases as Dominion No. 11 offered the only sustained competition the Caledonians had, especially after defeating the Wanderers in 1932. In their first season in 1927, No. 11 held Caledonia to a scoreless tie. This was a particularly fine achievement considering the Caledonia club went undefeated that season against colliery teams, outscoring them 145 to 0.⁷² The rugby matches sparked intense colliery rivalry and offered a vent for intraclass conflict. No. 11, under the capable coaching of A.D. Campbell and Dr. Fabian Bates, was quickly established as the second most dominant team in the collieries. In the 1928 final of the Cape Breton Championship Caledonia's Neilly Nicholson drop kicked a spectacular field goal in the last two minutes for a 4-3 win. Two thousand people attended the final and fellow miners bet hundreds of dollars on the outcome of the game.⁷³ Rugby continued to capture the imagination of fans in the collieries as thousands turned out for matches with No. 11, Caledonia, Sydney Mines, New Waterford, and the Legion Guards.⁷⁴

As the 1930's wore on the main rivalry featuring No. 11 and Caledonia clearly drew the most fans. On 2 October 1932, No. 11 handed Caledonia their first defeat in Cape Breton in twelve years.⁷⁵ The rematch three weeks later was again hotly contested

function attributed to nicknames in the colliery districts is addressed in David Frank, "Tradition Culture in the Cape Breton Mining Community in the Early Twentieth Century", in Ken Donovan, (ed.) *Cape Breton at 200: Historical Essays in Honour of the Island's Bicentennial 1785-1985* (University College of Cape Breton 1985).

⁷²*The Sydney Record* 31 October November 1927.

⁷³*The Sydney Post* 5 November 1928; *The Halifax Herald* 5 November 1928. Interestingly the press regarded the workers' gambling with a sense of ambivalence. Given the 'communal spirit' and 'healthy recreation' generated by the furor that encompassed the game even a little gambling could be tolerated by the 'moral majority'.

⁷⁴See *The Sydney Record* 7 October 1929 for a No. 11 and Caledonia match that attracted two thousand people and *The Sydney Record* 6 October 1930 for a game featuring Sydney Mines and New Waterford in Sydney Mines in which two thousand attended. In 1929 more than five thousand turned out to greet Caledonia at the Sydney Railway Station after winning the MacTier Cup. A procession over a mile in length paraded through the rain from Sydney to the awaiting reception in Glace Bay. *The Sydney Post* 5 November 1929; *The Halifax Herald* 5 November 1929.

⁷⁵*The Sydney Post* 3 October 1932. The focus is mainly on rugby football in Cape Breton which attracted the most sustained interest because of the colliery rivalry. The occasional team from off the island punctuated the seasons, but it was clear by the 1930's that the best teams in eastern Canada came from the

as over three thousand people showed up to see Caledonia eke out a 3-0 win.⁷⁶ At the local level fans revelled in the action as the collieries produced players that were second to none in eastern Canada.⁷⁷ These rivalries, often very heated, over time became quite violent. The explosive matches were never without a physician waiting on the sidelines to address the injuries that ranged from broken ankles to more serious ones like Glace Bay's Benny Cipin who suffered a spinal cord injury in a match against New Waterford.⁷⁸ It was very rare in the 1930s to have an entire game played without at least a fistfight, dislocated digit, blackened eye, scalp wound, or knockout resulting in a concussion. On many occasions these fights would turn into brawls and more often than not fans were also involved.⁷⁹

The inclusion of fans in the making of rugby in Cape Breton reveals an interesting struggle over rugby football's authoritative resources. At stake was the spatial and temporal organization of the game.⁸⁰ It must be remembered that fans in the colliery districts did not feel a sense of disconnectedness that contemporary fans might experience. Unlike today, the fields were not always enclosed to designate athletic space. The media continuously lobbied for a roped off (structured) field fearing the

collieries.

⁷⁶*The Sydney Post* 24 October 1932. Considering both collieries are from the same town (Glace Bay) it would appear great interest was taken in the rivalry.

⁷⁷Colliery teams never played clubs beyond Quebec due to the enormous expense. British Columbia produced talented teams, but an east-west meeting between them never materialized. Dalhousie played several games against a top-notch team from Vancouver and had one loss and two ties. See *The Halifax Herald* 15, 27 December 1927; 2 January 1928.

⁷⁸*The Sydney Post* 3 October 1932. He recovered quickly and played in the declining years before World War Two.

⁷⁹For a sample of some of these team brawls see: *The Sydney Post-Record* 2, 30 October 1933; 1, 5 October 1934; The 1937 MacTier Cup final featuring No. 11 and Caledonia was never officially finished. The press play-by-play suggests it "ended in a good old fashioned battle royal with players and spectators and one of the linesmen engaged in a free swinging contest that left a trail of bloody noses and discoloured optics ... while the game could not be called the best even seen here, it was without question one of the most exciting ever seen here." Apparently some fans laid odds after the kick-off that it would end up in a fight. *The Sydney Post-Record* 5 November 1937.

⁸⁰For a brilliant discussion of the concept of spatial and temporal organization that does not descend into the realm of postmodernism see: Anthony Giddens *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism* (MacMillan-London 1995).

irrationality of working class mobocracy and the loss of the football in the crowd which accounted for the loss of precious seconds. However the fans were hardly irrational in terms of game involvement considering the entrenchment of rugby in working class culture in the collieries. Leagues existed from the time a *boy* could attend school up to the senior level adult league providing a sophisticated, knowledgeable and powerful fan base. It is likely that footballs were momentarily kicked into the crowd around the ends of the field where fans would gather. Instead of a rigid rectangle shape the rooters would gather in the shape of an ellipse thus maintaining the integral length and width of the field while allowing for maximum game perception. Within this fluid, locally defined space the crowd might feel much like producers of the game. On some occasions the loss of a football could be equated with a heightened sense of control over the tempo of the game by the fans. At this time home teams could be given time to rest and or establish strategic plan. However should home teams be close to victory, a lost football could be returned with stealth.

The sport/fan space however was characterized by an overarching sense of hyper-masculinity. Within it men gathered and took part in ritualistic and creative expression that was hardly passive or sanctioned senseless violence. During matches fans continually involved themselves in the play. This was particularly evident during moments of controversy when opposing teams left the field in protest. In such cases whether it was the use of professional players or open, unmarked playing fields opposing teams rarely left unscathed. Fans called into question the very 'manliness' of the players who chose to follow the strict guidelines of the amateur code rather than playing the game regardless of circumstances. To an extent the fans were the arbiters of gender, as well as space and time boundaries. Leaving the field before a match was considered weak and effeminate. When Caledonia left the field to protest their former teammate

Bobby Jackson playing with No. 11, they did so "amid catcalls, cries of 'yellow', 'you can't take it', from the spectators".⁸¹ Under the guise of sporting amateurism and spurred on by fan involvement, reformers continued the pre-war campaign to properly line and rope off the fields to create a consistent playing ground.⁸² In addition a smaller bordered athletic space would be created in the form of a 'regulation' sized field and a peripheral space for fans with admission gates to collect funds leading to it.⁸³

By the mid 1930's the authoritarian importance of the field enclosures gained a materialist dimension. Working class clubs, motivated by large attendance figures, decided to experiment with the idea of standard gate collections.⁸⁴ In the midst of the Depression with club funds extremely low and sport growing more expensive, the logic of capitalism began to appear attractive. The idea was to charge a regular admission of twenty five cents for all rugby football matches and according to the *Sydney Post-Record* "surely no one with sporting instinct in him ... will dodge paying the twenty-five cents"⁸⁵ The results were somewhat predictable. In New Waterford, for example, proceeds dropped from a high of one hundred dollars to just four. The press accused the "unconservative" sport fans from the collieries of being cheap.⁸⁶ Similarly rugby football enthusiasts considered the price of admission as the sole determining factor for the lean attendances. This is a partial explanation at best, considering the local ties to rugby football that endured throughout BESCO wage-cuts in the early 1920's and pre-war years. It was not so much the fans' rage against the logic of capitalism, but the overall

⁸¹ *The Sydney Post-Record* 26 October 1936; See also *The Sydney Record* 10 October 1929; *The Sydney Post* 14 October 1932. This masculine theme of 'finishing the game' continued throughout rugby [and many other sports] and was not particular to Cape Breton or working class men. Magonet Tantom, a Dalhousie forward was heralded by the local press because he received a complete fracture between the elbow and wrist and "gamely played until half-time". See *The Sydney Post-Record* 14 November 1932, 10 October 1933.

⁸² *The Sydney Record* 10 October 1929.

⁸³ *The Sydney Post-Record* 3 November 1934.

⁸⁴ *The Sydney Record* 10, 11 October 1929; *The Sydney Post-Record* 1 October 1934.

⁸⁵ *The Sydney Post-Record* 3 November 1934.

⁸⁶ *The Sydney Post-Record* 29 October 1935.

communities' contestation of the spatial order. In the short term the construction of separate players' and fan spaces appeared to sever the local communities' immediate connection to the familiar players and accelerated their transition from producers of the game to consumers. Historically, proceeds were higher when rugby football was played on an open field with no price of admission.⁸⁷ Funds that were accumulated were given freely in the form of donation and this was usually parted with easier with the knowledge it was going to a relative, co-worker, or friend and not a 'removed' athlete.

The involvement of the mining communities in the making and unmaking of rugby football should not be understated. With junior, intermediate, senior, high school, junior high school, and grade school leagues in operation in the collieries, players literally grew up playing local rugby.⁸⁸ It is mainly for this reason that the collieries remained unchallenged in terms of rugby superiority. The sophisticated feeder - system impacted in two serious ways. Firstly, it developed superior players over time and, secondly, it acted as a fairly structured series of masculine rites of passage, the pinnacle of which was achieved when one had a chance to play with Caledonia. According to former Caledonian Melvin Sheppard "It was the ambition of every young man".⁸⁹ The popularity given Caledonia by the company, the union, and the media tended to overshadow other teams and contributed to disinterest among other mining communities. The wane in regular attendance which began with regular admission did level off in the last years before and during World War Two and stood approximately at about three to five hundred down from about one thousand fans. Occasionally the forces of the community were marshalled to take on the 'other', but the colliery fans saw little interest in seeing their home teams lose continuously to Caledonia. Since Caledonia emerged not only as Glace Bay rugby football representatives, but Cape Breton sport emissaries it

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸*The Sydney Post-Record* 3 October 1935.

⁸⁹Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 19.

would take a team from 'away' to garner interest in a match. One year after the teams experimented with lining the fields and charging regular twenty-five cent admission over three thousand people paid the one dollar charge (an extra quarter bought a seat in the grandstand and an omniscient gaze earthward) to see Caledonia shut out the Bank of Montreal team. After the MacTier Cup brawl of 1937 the Dominion No. 11 club did not return until after the war. With the removal of the only team that provided any sustained competition to the Caledonia club other colliery clubs all but stopped competing.

Another threat to rugby football in the collieries and the Maritimes in general came not from the Canadian code of rugby football, but from hockey and baseball. After the Winnipeg Falcons' gold medal performance at the Olympics in 1920 the nationalist sentiment attached to hockey grew and was consequently reaffirmed with every other successive Olympic victory. During the interwar years the first indoor rinks were built in the Maritimes to house Canada's game. As a result hockey seasons were starting earlier every year. Where once they had begun when the ice froze in late December by the 1940's the hockey season began almost on par with rugby football.⁹⁰ As an anticipatory strategy rugby football was played in the spring of 1929, but failed miserably because baseball was infinitely more popular.⁹¹ The season resumed in the fall of 1929 and hockey continued to draw more fans. It would seem the national identity provided by hockey proved more attractive than regional rugby football by the 1940s. Carman Miller has argued that "the absence of a strong sense of regional identity proved a serious

⁹⁰ *Sydney Post-Record* 7 November 1939. Hockey season opened at the Miners' Forum with an attendance of 3600 far surpassing any rugby football turnout. *Sydney Post-Record* 8 October 1941. The Cape Breton Hockey League was to open at the Sydney Forum on November 3.

⁹¹ *Halifax Herald* 29 May 1929. As Colin Howell has suggested baseball "was unquestionably the most popular summer sport in Canada by the third quarter of the 19th century, and in our own time it is challenged only by softball and youth soccer". See Colin D. Howell, "Two Outs: Or, Yogi Berra Sport and Maritime Historiography", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, (Autumn 1999) p. 113. Even today the popularity of major League baseball is not considered in relation to the troubled Canadian Football League of which it overlaps and draws away fans. Most comparisons are made with American Football as if choices did not exist between watching a Blue Jay or Argonaut game.

liability during the 1940s” and this is correct, but one cannot help wonder to what extent this loss of regionalism affected or was the result of sport.⁹²

Between 1938-41 the senior league attempted to reconstruct a sense of local community. Ritchie McCoy ‘the mighty atom’, one of the greatest rugby players to come from Cape Breton, returned after a distinguished career with the Wanderers and the Montreal Amateur Association to coach Sydney’s latest attempt at a rugby football team. With New Waterford as the only other colliery team which offered sporadic competition it was hoped a Sydney - Glace Bay rivalry would fill the void left by other colliery teams. A closer relationship developed with university teams as well, but none offered a serious challenge to Caledonia. This lack of competition prompted *The Sydney Post-Record* to proclaim that the club was “Glace Bay’s internationally famous English rugby team” even though it had never competed internationally.⁹³

With the outbreak of World War Two rugby football continued at a slow and often controversial pace. Shortly after the Dominion’s declaration of war the rugby season began. To some the participation in sport and sport related activities was entirely too fanciful, if not unpatriotic, while a crucial struggle was being waged in Europe. Even while Caledonia and university teams played for large numbers of uniformed service men the press expressed their disapproval.⁹⁴ The effects of the war continued as Remembrance Day in 1939 was designated to be the first C. B. C. radio broadcast of an English rugby football match in Canada which featured Caledonia and Dalhousie. The game was recorded with a militaristic language.⁹⁵ After the 1940 season ended with

⁹²Carman Miller, “The 1940’s: War and Rehabilitation”, in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, eds., *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto 1993) p. 306.

⁹³*The Sydney Post - Record* 12 November 1938.

⁹⁴During a game which Caledonia trounced Mount Allison 32-3 in front of 800 servicemen a picture was taken of Mount Allison’s Gordon Logan and Caledonia’s Bob Murrant in action. The caption above it on the sports page read “Ignoring call to Arms” see *The Sydney Post Record* 10 October 1939.

⁹⁵D. H. McFarlane wrote after Caledonia’s 3 - 0 victory “‘They shall not pass’ - said the Caledonians and never did a band of battle - scarred rugby players hold their line as did the Caledonian’s yesterday”, *The Sydney Post - Record* 13 November 1939.

Caledonia retaining both the McCurdy Cup since 1932 and the MacTier Cup since 1929, with the exception of 1933, Caledonia did not defend them in 1941. The club then disbanded because there was no league in operation.

On the other hand the success and subsequent visibility of Caledonia overshadowed other successful colliery teams from Glace Bay like No. 11 and contributed to fan and player disinterest. With the Depression came rigid structuration, spatial contestation, and regular admission which further drove away fans. As the mines slowed and relief lines got longer the lure of professional boxing increased. For those requiring much needed cash and occasional excitement the ring provided a valued opportunity. Considering the rigidity of interwar amateurism and resourcefulness of boxers, their return to the rugby field always caused excitement.

By the 1930s the regional consciousness which was so integral to the Maritime resistance to Canadian code football had narrowed in support of provincial identities. After Caledonia's successive defeats of the Halifax Wanderers the rugby football power base shifted from the metropolis to industrial Cape Breton. Within the collieries players and fans challenged the nostalgically driven rigid amateurism. Colliery fans and teams modified this sporting ideology to suit their game and material circumstance rather than accepting in full the inequality that proponents of 'pure' amateurism provided. Within these processes of negotiation, however, the emphasis on amateurism was what remained during the post world war two decades.

In an attempt to reinvigorate rugby football in Nova Scotia and stave off the Canadian and American codes, the game was switched to the thirteen player game of rugby league. After years of lobbying, the talented Irish-born coach, John McCarthy's dream became a reality. Ironically Caledonia, now a powerful representative, resisted the change because it believed the 'old' game to be superior, just as their arch rivals the

Wanderers had done some twenty years earlier. They eventually came on side and the reinvented Maritime Rugby League began in 1946⁹⁶ and operated for about ten years. Perhaps not surprisingly Caledonia went on to dominate the new league, which had a very limited fan base. No. 11 returned to offer Caledonia competition, but they consistently lost close games which became attributed to 'the Caledonia Jinx'. Collegiate matches began to eclipse local Halifax and colliery games, but they also served to re-ignite intraprovincial rivalries.

⁹⁶*The Sydney Post Record* 15 October 1946.

Chapter Four

Cape Breton and the Regional Reinvention of Rugby Football

After the close of the World War II rugby football got underway once more in the Maritimes. It began on an invigorated note especially after news of its continued popularity on the west coast. In British Columbia rugby union had long been the most popular autumn sport. With a pleasant fall climate and traditional fan base it seemed all was in order, but only after measures were taken to “offset the biggest threat to the popularity of the game of English rugby in this city [Victoria] - Canadian rugby football”.¹ Officials from the Victoria Rugby Union endorsed several rule changes such as the use of two substitutions to take the place of injured players in the first three quarters of playing time. The new rules were designed to ‘accelerate’ play therefore increasing its entertainment value and enhancing its ability to resist Canadian rugby football.² By attempting to re-invent its languished image rugby officials in Victoria, as in the Maritimes, clearly did not wait to be overtaken by Canadian rugby football. Instead they addressed and rectified what they considered to be the most problematic aspect of rugby union - its lethargic appearance. On the west coast football officials modified their existing game while in Atlantic Canada rugby union was discarded in favour of the faster-paced rugby league game which was also adjusted to accommodate an increasingly wayward audience. As in the interwar years working class players from Cape Breton emerged to dominate the game.

In the industrial region of Cape Breton the 1945 season showed the effects brought on by World War II. There was no senior league that year due to depleted

¹*The Post Record* 3 November 1945.

²*Ibid.*

line-ups, but there were several exciting exhibition matches featuring rivals Caledonia and No. 11. The prestigious Caledonians had little trouble filling their roster while No. 11 recruited several “hefty” sailors from the Point Edward naval base just to field a team. Like so many times before Caledonia defeated the No. 11 team 3 to 0 on a try by Connie Mac Neil. Mac Neil, a teenager though a seasoned veteran, was a product of Cape Breton’s sophisticated feeder-system. He complemented established veterans like Melvin Sheppard who led Caledonia to a 3-0 win over St. Francis Xavier University on Remembrance Day. Rugby teams paid homage to war veterans on November 11 because many of those who served in the armed forces were rugby players themselves. Traditionally, Remembrance Day matches drew large crowds in Cape Breton and this year was no exception as more than one thousand people turned out to see Caledonia and the large number of Cape Bretoners on the university team.³

By the 1946 season the ‘spectre’ of Canadian football appeared menacing for the Maritime region while in central Canada, American football threatened. The Canadian Rugby Union (CRU) modified its resident rule which stated that a player must live in the community they played for from a certain date. To further relieve pressure from those committed to the American game the CRU decided to allow five U.S. born players per team.⁴ For the short term this concession worked in favour of the CRU because the Toronto Argonauts won the Grey Cup in 1945, 1946, and 1947.⁵ This is noteworthy because Toronto chose not to hire American players and were subsequently heroized for their all- Canadian line-up.⁶ The all - Canadian Argonauts did much to legitimate the Canadian code as the Dominion’s one and only football standard. This celebration was met by Maritime football players and enthusiasts who were determined to contest the building of a once-and-for-all national code. Some wanted rugby league because of its

³*The Post Record* 5, 12 November 1945.

⁴Frank Cosentino, “Football”, pp. 156-7.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*The Post-Record* 30 September 1946.

British lineage while others looked to secure national recognition for Maritime football. At the heart of both lay the determination to renegotiate football and regional power relations.

The Maritime Rugby Union (MRU) swiftly responded in a meeting by adopting the speedier thirteen player game known as rugby league. Rugby league in England regularly drew thousands of spectators and it was hoped to arouse similar spectator interest in the Maritimes. The new rugby league fell under the auspices of the MRU which adopted the British Rugby League as its parent body. Reverend Leo J. MacKenna of Saint Francis Xavier University was elected president and Waldo McCormack of Mount Allison was named secretary. It was decided that the Halifax Senior league winner would play the Cape Breton Senior League for a birth in the final against the intercollegiate victor for the McCurdy Cup. Representatives at the meeting included the University of New Brunswick, Mount Allison, Saint Francis Xavier, Dalhousie, Saint Mary's, Wanderers, Halifax Navy, Caledonia and No. 11.⁷ The formation of this regional bloc knitted together working and middle class players, as well as university, state and civic players. After some initial challenges to the new rules by the Caledonia squad, the MRU appeared poised to resist the emerging national code.

With rugby league came a faster game, greater ball visibility for fans with the reduction of the scrum, and the potential for building a large regional fan base. In order to build consent for rugby league, Maritime players, enthusiasts and especially intellectuals needed to enlighten the sporting populace on the weaknesses of the Canadian code. From time to time rugby intellectuals would appear in the sport pages heaping praise upon rugby league and scorn upon any others. Among them were Fred G. Kelly the coach of Acadia's rugby football team. "I can't see how we can play Canadian Rugby" he suggested, "You can't teach it to boys off the farm in forty minutes a day I

⁷*The Post-Record* 8, 15, 16, October, 2 November 1946.

have with the players. And then the equipment is a little expensive”.⁸ Kelley makes a common sensical argument about the lack of practice time and the complexity of Canadian code, and emphasized that rugby league required little gear. Rugby league was hence a more affordable and available game, especially for working class people.

The premier rugby intellectual for decades in the Maritimes was honorary MRU president John McCarthy. McCarthy had pushed for the adoption of rugby league rules in the region since the 1920’s. The aesthetics of the game received much attention from him as he considered it to be a game of perpetual motion. The old rugby union game contained too many heavyweights lumbering about the field while rugby league required speed, agility and lighter players. As for the Canadian code McCarthy considered it to be a poor reproduction of American football. He suggested that the “line backs and blocking are like a bunch of goats butting, and huddling after each play slows up the game”.⁹ Increased attention from better educated media, players and referees would do much for the dissemination of the game. He chastised sports writers for using accurate terminology when reporting upon baseball and hockey, but then interspersing Canadian and American code terminology in their accounts of rugby league. The issue of affordability was also important for McCarthy. He suggested that “practically an entire rugby football team can be outfitted for the amount it costs to outfit one Canadian football player”.¹⁰ Equipment expense would be an enormous hurdle for college players and working class people if the Canadian code triumphed. McCarthy was so confident he predicted a long life for rugby league in the Maritimes, and even though he was retired from coaching he never failed to attract a media audience when he spoke. His concern for and knowledge of the game was astounding. McCarthy spoke of aesthetics, economics, regionalism, the influence of the mass media, and even noted the power of

⁸*The Post-Record* 8 November 1946.

⁹*The Post Record* 28 October 1948.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

specific vocabularies operating within sporting discourses. The power of McCarthy lies in his ability to transmit his ideas widely. He was respected within the universities where he coached, and with city teams like the Halifax Wanderers. McCarthy was also something of a legend within the colliery districts of Cape Breton where he coached Caledonia during the late 1920's and early 1930's.

Caledonia initially challenged the adoption of rugby league, but soon realized they could still be a dominant football force playing league rules. No. 11 was the only other team in the Cape Breton Senior League. Even without the bulky sailors of the previous year they provided good competition for the Caledonia squad. After Caledonia defeated No. 11 for the senior title it became clear that their intercolliery rivalry was not as important to local fans as it once was. Instead people were turning out to see the visiting college teams like Acadia, Mount Allison and Saint Francis Xavier. That year Caledonia went on to play in the McCurdy cup final which was to be held on the same day as the provincial interscholastic championship featuring another Glace Bay team. One thousand fans turned to the South Street grounds to see both Glace Bay representatives win their respective titles. Another fifteen hundred came out to see Caledonia defeat Acadia in a Remembrance Day match.¹¹

The 1946 season was the high point for senior rugby football in Cape Breton during the post World War II years. During the next few seasons attendance continually declined despite the fact that players from Glace Bay enjoyed much success. In 1947 there was no senior league in operation. With a shortage of players Caledonia and No. 11 officially merged to form the Glace Bay Sports Club. They continued to play university teams and remained quite successful. Declining numbers of spectators occurred in Halifax as well. Some attended the newly formed Nova Scotia Canadian

¹¹ *The Post-Record* 7, 11, 25 November 1946; David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football League in Nova Scotia 1946-1956* p. 67.

Football league which consisted of teams from Dalhousie University, Wanderers (who also played rugby football), and naval Bases Stadacona and Shearwater.¹² Again the MRU modified its game to enhance the numbers of spectators. The next steps in its 'revival program' were considered, if only more flagrantly, to be improvements from a "spectator point of view".¹³ It was decided that a system of referee signals were to be devised to relay information to those in attendance. Game stoppages due to penalties and injuries were very confusing to fans who complained about being in the dark for much of the game. In addition the idea of a public address system complete with a running commentary was put forward.¹⁴

The proposed innovations appeared to stir some initial support. In the Cape Breton Senior League the Glace Bay Sports Club was joined by a newly formed team representing New Waterford. After two close victories against New Waterford and Dalhousie, Glace Bay gained a birth in the final for the McCurdy Cup against Saint Francis Xavier. The university team defeated Prince Edward Island representatives St. Dunstons to advance. It would be an exciting final in which Saint Francis Xavier defeated Glace Bay 2 - 0, but it will probably be better remembered in Cape Breton as the game Pat Cadegan lost. The star punter had several opportunities to tie the game on a kicked goal, but missed every time.¹⁵

The success of the 1948 season was carried even further in 1949. Rugby promoters decided to revive competition for the MacTier cup which had waned and finally died during World War II. It had been mining teams from Cape Breton that had won the trophy every year from 1927 and Caledonia won every title except for 1933 which was won by No. 11. Those contending for the trophy for 1949 were Westmount,

¹²Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football*.

¹³*The Post-Record* 30 October 1948.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*The Post-Record* 22 November 1948; *Halifax Herald* 22 November 1948; David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football* pp. 67-69.

McGill, MacDonald College, Dawson College, Saint Francis Xavier, University of New Brunswick, Toronto Varsity and the Toronto Wanderers.¹⁶ After a series of semi final matches Saint Francis Xavier handily defeated a McGill squad consisting of international players from England and Australia 15 to 3.¹⁷ Saint Francis Xavier, however, lost their McCurdy cup bid in the intercollegiate finals against Acadia. Led by star football player Neil Mac Vicar, son of famed Caledonia coach Charlie MacVicar, Acadia defeated the consolidated Cape Breton team known this year as the No. 11 Legionnaires.¹⁸

The 1950 season was a banner year for Cape Breton as Sydney Academy High School won their fourth straight provincial title and Glace Bay's No. 11 Legionnaires took home the McCurdy Cup in an exciting comeback win against the strong Acadia Axemen. After being behind by six points at half time No. 11 came back to win thirteen to eight. The winning try was scored by veteran player Jim O'Dell on a seventy yard interception run back. After the victory on the South Street grounds players jumped in their cars and trucks and raced through the streets in celebration with the McCurdy Cup. Despite such an exciting final which was prefaced by an equally exciting semi final 3 to 2 win over the Charlottetown Abbies, fan support in Cape Breton had not been so low. Only 200 fans turned out to see the final.¹⁹ Despite the best efforts of rugby football promoters in the Maritimes the fan base did not recover, especially in Cape Breton.

With the lack of competition at the senior level in Cape Breton no teams from the industrial area suited up for the 1951 season. On Remembrance Day over 4000 people turned out to see the Glace Bay Miners hockey team defeat the Sydney Millionaires. What had once been the most significant date for rugby football matches in Cape Breton was now being eclipsed by semi-professional hockey.²⁰ Hockey seasons were beginning

¹⁶*The Post-Record* 14 October 1949.

¹⁷*The Post-Record* 2 November 1949.

¹⁸*The Post-Record* 14, 15, 21 November 1949; 22 November 1950.

¹⁹*The Post-Record* 26 October, 3, 6, 13, 20, 27 November 1950.

²⁰*The Post-Record* 12 November 1951.

earlier almost every year with indoor rinks and larger season schedules. By the 1950's hockey seasons began on par with rugby football and claimed more of the sporting public's attention. In 1952 the Maritime Major Hockey League began a seventy-six game schedule during the first week of October while only one rugby football team, known this year as the Glace Bay Caledonians, began its season on the second week of November.²¹ It would prove to be a crucial and controversial year for regional rugby football.

By the late 1940's the Maritime bloc was showing weaknesses. It seemed that every year required a rethinking, if not always a reconstruction, to stay ahead of the popularity of the emergent Canadian code. Even from the outset it became difficult to craft a 'Maritime' football identity when representation of the Maritime league was dominated by mainland Nova Scotia. With only UNB from New Brunswick and usually one consolidated team from Cape Breton and one representative from Prince Edward Island the maintenance of this regional identity became impossible. As high profile teams like Dalhousie and the University of New Brunswick began to switch to the Canadian code Maritime rugby officials looked elsewhere to fill the gap. In 1952 the existing collegiate teams were joined by Saint Dunstan's University and city teams like the Charlottetown Abbies, the Yarmouth Gateways, and the Saint John mariners. The new teams required a re-imagining of what a Maritime rugby football player was since these were not college students, but workers playing during their leisure time paying with scarce wages. These issues were always present but they became central to the making or unmaking of the Maritime football league.

After being idle in 1951 the Glace Bay Caledonians began the next season being immediately thrust into the McCurdy Cup playoff. Following their initial trouncing of the newly formed Yarmouth Gateways 20 - 0 they were confident they could make yet

²¹ *The Post-Record* 3 October, 10 November 1952.

another appearance in the McCurdy finals.²² In order to do this they would have to defeat their arch rivals the Wanderers. The winner would go on to face the winner of the Saint John Mariners- Charlottetown Abbies game. The Caledonians were instructed by the MRU to travel to Halifax to play the Wanderers, but this was impossible to pay for after their excursion to Truro to play the Gateways. With their jobs at stake the Caledonians felt they could not leave, especially during mid-week and requested a few days extension. In a telephone phone vote the MRU decided the Caledonians would have to forfeit the match and advanced the Wanderers on to the final.²³ In response to the ruling Donald MacInnis, the team's player and coach decided he would take custody of the McCurdy cup until the decision was overturned.²⁴

MacInnis was not only player and manager of the Glace Bay team, but he was also a trustee of the McCurdy Cup which afforded him the privilege of accessing the cup in protest. Since this years' club from Cape Breton was without sponsorship and expenses were paid for by themselves, Col. R. D. King, president of the Dartmouth Arrows intervened in the dispute to try and force a resolution. He offered the Arrows stadium with a seating capacity of 5200 free of charge for a final between Glace Bay and St. Dunstan's university. While the support was appreciated MacInnis suggested the estimated 600 dollar expense for travel and accommodation would have been too much for the players to afford.²⁵ Moreover the largest attendance for a rugby football match in the Halifax metropolitan area in 1952 was a mere twenty-five people, well below the necessary number for compensating the players.²⁶ The dispute was never settled adequately enough for Donald MacInnis who never returned the cup (he placed it in the

²²*The Post-Record* 10 November 1952.

²³*The Post-Record* 11 November 1952.

²⁴*The Post-Record* 20 November 1952; David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby League Football* pp. 71-73; Neil Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* pp. 79-88.

²⁵*The Post-Record* 15 November 1952.

²⁶*Ibid.*

Cape Breton Miners' Museum and it was destroyed in a fire in 1982) or Cape Breton fans who continued to harbour resentment toward the MRU.

There has been several authors who have addressed this issue. Neil Hooper, based on an interview with Donald MacInnis suggests that the MRU demands were simply too much for the Glace Bay team. If they had followed through on their request of playing the Wanderers just after Yarmouth followed by the championship, it would have equalled three games in eight days.²⁷ For a team of miners playing football it would have been extremely demanding for them physically, not to mention financially. David Brown has suggested the "saga of the Wandering Cup" was detrimental to Maritime rugby football. He suggests that "the entire affair was an embarrassment for the MRU, especially at a time when English Rugby was struggling to overcome the challenge of Canadian Football".²⁸ David Brown is absolutely correct. In terms of image- making the incident probably hurried the passing of rugby league football in the Maritimes. However, Brown does not read the popular press 'against the grain' and hence avoids any analysis of underlying power struggles surrounding this incident. No matter how grandiose, impractical or individualistic MacInnis' protest 'might' have been, it still addressed issues of working class materialism and ideology. "In the 1950's", suggests former Caledonia rugby football player Robert Wadman, "the men were always looking for more shifts. Everything centred around work".²⁹ As the decade wore on mineworkers came to grips with the growing obsolescence of their trade. Decreasing demands for coal, new sources of energy and poor management exacerbated the situation.³⁰ Surely it could not have been easy giving up the chance to meet their middle class rivals the Wanderers in an Armistice Day match? Since David Brown is correct in

²⁷Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 80.

²⁸David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby League Football in Nova Scotia* p. 72.

²⁹Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 74.

³⁰Margaret Conrad *The 1950's: The Decade of Development* p. 390.

his analysis that the incident was embarrassing, one must wonder about a sport organization that could neither tolerate or accommodate working class protest.

The controversy carried over into the 1953 season as industrial Cape Breton managed to put together two teams to challenge for the Maritime title: the Glace Bay team referred to still as Caledonians³¹ and a squad from New Waterford known as the Waterford Miners. The Waterford Miners suffered from inexperience at the senior level with most of the players just out of high school. Glace Bay relied on a mixture of veterans like the wily Syd Adshade and ex-university stars like Saint Francis Xavier's Geno Scattalone to continue its supremacy in Cape Breton.³² With the playoffs set, Glace Bay was scheduled to face the Wanderers in a two game total point series. The winner was to have advanced to the final, but the game never materialised due to another dispute after Glace Bay defeated the Wanderers 12-0 in Halifax.³³ After the Halifax match the following telegram was received by Glace Bay Manager Donald MacInnis

Wonders (sic) gives series to Glace Bay. Last Saturday's farce demolished any hope of a return game. You want to win at any price. And you have by destroying English Rugby in Halifax. Wonders Rugby Club.³⁴

Considering the telegram was not signed by any individual Wanderers member and the incorrect spelling of "Wanderers" the Glace Bay team doubted its authenticity and lined-up for the second game in vain.³⁵

This event was interpreted by David Brown like this:

³¹ Interestingly during the 1952 controversy Charlie MacVicar, Caledonia's coach during its phenomenal interwar run, suggested Caledonia did not exist anymore. MacVicar or "Mr. Football" was a staunch defender of the purity of amateurism and looked to distance himself from the controversial team which was made up of mostly former Caledonia players. See the *Post-Record* 28 November 1952.

³² *The Post-Record* 13 October 1953.

³³ *The Post-Record* 2 November 1953; *Halifax Herald* 2 November 1953. It should be noted that both Neil Hooper and David Brown both have the final score as 11-0 for Glace Bay. Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p. 80; David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football League in Nova Scotia 1946- 1956* p. 73.

³⁴ *Halifax Herald* 2 November 1953; *The Post-Record* 10 November 1953.

³⁵ *The Post-Record* 10 November 1953.

Glace Bay defeated the Wanderers 11-0 in the first of a two-leg semi-final; the game was marred by incidents which suggested that the Cape Breton side were willing to employ any methods that would bring the McCurdy Cup home...It was a rather shallow victory, but it appears as though they wanted victory at any cost. They had appeared in every cup final from 1920 through to 1949 and now seemed to express a *divine right* to the trophy.³⁶

He goes on to suggest that while the event appears amusing now, “at the time it succeeded only in bringing about a premature decline in the English Rugby game in Nova Scotia”.³⁷ Based on scant evidence such as the inaccurately reproduced telegram, Brown constructs a distorted view of football players in Cape Breton. On the other hand Neil Hooper suggests:

The controversies of 1952 and 1953 served as perfect examples of conflicts between Cape Breton and the Mainland. The executive of the Maritime Rugby Union was usually dominated by mainlanders. Therefore, most of the decisions made by the union went in favour of the mainland teams, i.e. Union refusing to give Caledonia rest between games. The actions of the Wanderers in 1953 showed that a mainland team would not go out of its way to please or accommodate a Cape Breton team.³⁸

Hooper inverts Brown’s argument and once more attributes the incident to mainland machinations. A fuller and yet less formal reading of the media text reveals an interesting incident. The post-game press recorded the final score at 12-0. All of Glace Bay’s points were scored by Alf Kubek, Geno Scattalone and Gordie MacCoy. The score did not reflect the full story of the game as the Wanderers held the edge in play. For most of the match the Wanderers out-heeled Glace Bay in the scrums by a margin of three to one. According to the *Halifax Herald* the only incident that “marred the game” was slight concussion suffered by Glace Bay veteran Sid Adshade who was taken to the

³⁶ Author’s italics. See David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football League in Nova Scotia 1946-1956* p.73.

³⁷ David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby Football League in Nova Scotia 1946-1956* p.74.

³⁸ Neil Hooper *The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club* p.81.

Victoria General Hospital for treatment.³⁹ It was not until the next week that a controversy became apparent.

The second game of the two game total-point series was scheduled for Saturday 7 November at the South Street grounds in Glace Bay. The press dramatized the match as a clash of “long-time arch rivals” which enhanced ticket sales in Cape Breton.⁴⁰ Despite the publicity surrounding the match the Wanderers failed to show up in Glace Bay leaving the Glace Bay team and ticket holders upset. It was then that the Glace Bay team realized the telegram from the *Wonders* was authentic. A spokesperson for the Wanderers club suggested the team was unsatisfied with the referee from the first game and protested the use of the same official for the second game to MRU president Bill Grant. Grant ruled that the same referee would officiate for the second game. Consequently and apparently on advice from the MRU president the Wanderers refused to play in Cape Breton.⁴¹

According to Donald MacInnis when the teams arrived at Dalhousie’s Studley Field in Halifax it became apparent that the Wanderers failed to provide a referee as was the rule for home teams. Neil MacVicar, a skilled football player from Glace Bay and son of former Caledonia coach Charlie MacVicar, acted as player, manager and negotiator for the Wanderers team. He and MacInnis debated for a while until they finally settled on a choice for referee. In the end Bob Wadman was selected to officiate since he had travelled from Cape Breton to cheer on the Glace Bay squad. As a long time player for Caledonia during the interwar period, Wadman was quite abreast of the rules and was well acquainted with both MacInnis and MacVicar.⁴²

It is unclear exactly what upset the Wanderers about Bob Wadman’s officiating since the post-game reports expressed no such dissatisfaction. The issue of refereeing

³⁹*Halifax Herald* 2 November 1953; See also *The Post-Record* 2 November 1953.

⁴⁰*Halifax Herald* 7 November 1953.

⁴¹*Halifax Herald* 9 November 1953; *The Post-Record* 9 November 1953.

⁴²*The Post-Record* 10 November 1953.

had been contentious since football began in the Maritimes. Properly trained officials were scarce which led to disputes between teams and prompted an unyielding media critique. In 1921 an irked reporter from *The Sydney Record* suggested that some referees chosen to officiate football games “have nothing more than a college distinction cap and the breath to blow a whistle, to warrant their presence on a football field as an arbiter”.⁴³ Regardless of the concerted historic protest properly trained referees remained uncommon. Consequently it became quite common to choose the game’s official from the fans on hand. At least in the Glace Bay-Wanderers game the referee was an experienced player who was agreed upon by both teams for the game that was played. Furthermore, had there been any flagrant violations of the rules or biased officiating it likely would not have been missed by both the Halifax and Sydney press. In fact no evidence exists at all that suggests any wrongdoing on the part of Cape Breton players with the exception of a vague telegram accusing the players of several serious and yet, unnamed, transgressions.

After the Wanderers failed to show up for the game Glace Bay fans, their team and particularly Donald MacInnis was incensed. During the pre-series negotiations both Neil MacVicar and MacInnis came to terms on how they were going to split the gate receipts. League rules provided a guarantee of one dollar per mile travelled for the visiting team while the home team would receive what, if any, was left over. MacVicar suggested instead that each team keep their home gate in its entirety and since it was a home and home series it seemed fair. MacInnis agreed hoping that a large turnout in Cape Breton would help their cash-strapped club. In the end Glace Bay was left on the South Street field without opposition and an undetermined amount of fans who had bought tickets in advance. Not only did Glace Bay now have to refund the tickets, but expenses from their trip to Halifax for the first game was not reimbursed. The club sent

⁴³ *The Sydney Record* 18 November 1921.

the following telegram to the secretary of the MRU Dave Wilson “Caledonia club expects definite and immediate action regarding Wanderers’ and Neil MacVicar’s conduct”.⁴⁴ Donald MacInnis decided to press for the suspension of the Wanderers from the football league if Glace Bay was not reimbursed for their trip to Halifax. He thought the agreement of the home team collecting the gate receipts hinged upon the second game being played. Since it was not played, MacInnis argued that the former agreement was nullified and that league rules should take precedent. The one dollar per mile travelled would have ensured Glace Bay three hundred dollars to offset their six hundred dollar expense for travelling to Halifax.⁴⁵

It is unlikely that Glace Bay recovered any of its lost funds, but they continued to play and advanced to McCurdy Cup finals after defeating the Charlottetown Abbies 5-0 in Antigonish. They were scheduled to play intercollegiate champions Mount Allison in the final and hoped to recover some of their financial losses by staging the Cup final at the South Street grounds. However, Mount Allison decided not to play because the game was too late in the season and it would interfere with their studies. By season’s end Glace Bay was awarded the McCurdy Cup by default, but fell into financial ruin. As a working class club made up of Cape Breton mineworkers in the 1950s they did not have far to fall.⁴⁶ In the words of David Brown “It was a rather shallow victory, but it appeared as though they wanted victory at any cost”.⁴⁷ While Brown’s interpretation is absolutely fanciful, the victory was indeed *shallow* and *cost* them a great deal. Glace Bay never fielded a team for Maritime rugby football again.

Brown’s condemnation of Cape Breton football players seems mean spirited, and does not hold up against even the most meagre reading of the historical record beyond the “Wonders” telegram. It remains a mystery exactly what the Glace Bay team, or Bob

⁴⁴*The Post-Record* 10 November 1953.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶*The Post-Record* 16, 18, 20 November 1953.

⁴⁷David Brown *The Rise and Fall of Rugby League in Nova Scotia 1946-1956* p.76.

Wadman was accused of doing. What is even more perplexing is their pronouncement of guilt by the Wanderers team and historian David Brown. Neil Hooper's mainland conspiracy theory may cautiously be applied in the 1952 incident, but not in 1953 considering that the two player/ managers at the heart of the dispute were both from Cape Breton. As for the MRU, it ruled against the Wanderers challenge to have a new referee for game two and instead let home team Glace Bay provide their own as league rules suggest. It will probably remain a mystery or at best speculation why the Wanderers failed to show up for game two. Clearly a twelve point deficit would have been almost insurmountable and since the home team received the gate receipts they would have to spend several hundred dollars for travel and accommodation which would have cut their profits from game one. Whatever the explanation might be, the events of the 1953 season financially crippled the Glace Bay team.

The events of 1952 and 1953 speak more to the fragmentation of the Maritimes as a region capable of sustaining its own distinct brand of football. It was the culmination of local victories and defeats, class divisions and material circumstances which destroyed the possibility of a Maritime football bloc. In its absence the lure of national integration offered by the Canadian code became increasingly legitimised and helped produced the ever-present feeling "that in the not too distant future the Maritimes may have a challenger for the Grey Cup".⁴⁸ The attraction of national celebrity beckoned as sixty-four radio stations across the country broadcast the 1952 Grey Cup and an estimated seventy stations were set to relay it in 1953 with a potential audience estimated at 5, 500, 000. From Sydney, Nova Scotia to Nanaimo, British Columbia fans could listen to professional football and be swept away by "Grey Cup hysteria".⁴⁹ Locally Nova Scotia and New Brunswick Canadian Football Leagues were already in operation

⁴⁸*The Post-Record* 13 November 1953.

⁴⁹*The Post-Record* 25, 28 November, 1 December 1953.

and gaining a steady fan base. The elaborate uniforms, quarterbacking intrigue, and half-time exhibitions offered a potent theatrical experience for Canadian football fans.⁵⁰ However, the rejection of the amateur game came at a price. Guided by the logic of capitalism which ensured its confinement to large metropolitan markets, the Canadian Football League never seriously contemplated expansion into the Maritimes.⁵¹ At the amateur level in the region Canadian football was restricted mainly to universities who looked southward for their players. Since Canadian football has been a clone of the American game this would stand to reason. When Saint Francis Xavier switched to the Canadian code in 1953 it did so with a team composed of six American players and then eight in 1954. All came from Maine and Massachusetts. The rest were made up of central Canadian players and a limited few from the Maritimes.⁵²

The national game never caught on to the extent of rugby league and rugby union in Cape Breton. This was due primarily to material circumstances which left existing rugby players to make the transition at the college level or choose another sport. Some young football players from the Island made the transition successfully, but for the most part the vast pool of talented players that supplied Acadia, Mount Allison and Saint Francis Xavier dried up. By the late 1950's no football league of any sort from Cape Breton made the sports pages of the media. Instead hockey, darts, bowling, curling, harness racing, boxing, filled the local sports pages. Cape Breton working class men found and created other sports to fill the void. Major events like the World Series received their usually large share of the press and so did the Grey Cup complete with the imagery and measurements of "Miss Grey Cup".⁵³

⁵⁰ Saint Francis Xavier used an acrobatic clown performance and the school band during their inaugural half-time show. *Halifax Herald* 6 November 1953.

⁵¹ *The Post-Record* 27 October 1955.

⁵² *Halifax Herald* 6 November 1953; *The Post-Record* 1 October 1954.

⁵³ *The Post-Record* 20 October 1955; 15 October 1956.

The legacy of rugby football in Cape Breton should not be remembered as that of communities clinging helplessly and backwardly to their traditional game. Those who celebrate the achievements of the nation and look on Canadian football with great pride will probably see the 1950s as the decade Cape Breton 'got onboard', or better yet 'got with the program'. With the 1940s a 'new federalism' and emergent free market ideology assisted and complemented the arrival of the Canadian code. The trend toward centralization extended to sport as well as politics. According to Margaret Conrad, by the 1950s 'television ... brought mainstream North American culture to everybody's living room, defining values, goals and even speech patterns'.⁵⁴ The effects of this in the 1950's are undeniable. Since the turn of the century the region had been exposed to North American football⁵⁵ through print and rather than visual media. The collective response, however, was continual critique and resistance. Therein lies the legacy of the region and Cape Breton. Nowhere else in the country has there been a more sustained and lively debate about football over such a lengthy period. People from M.J. Dryden to A.D. Campbell to Donald MacInnis have been central to the years of examination and commentary and as such deserve a mention for their role in the production of football in Canada. There are many reasons to lament the loss of rugby football in Cape Breton. Among them are the adoption of a game that never flourished, and which led to serious decline of Cape Breton rugby players competing at regional universities. Moreover the adoption of the national code reduced the urgency for a critical regional voice and Cape Breton's contribution to it.

1953 was the last time a team from Cape Breton challenged for the McCurdy Cup. When universities like Saint Francis Xavier switched to the Canadian code in 1954 followed by Mount Allison in 1955 and Acadia in 1957 interest in rugby league at the

⁵⁴Margaret Conrad, "The 1950's", p. 396.

⁵⁵Here both Canadian and American football are combined because they are virtually identical in relation to the *other* non-North American codes.

high school level in Cape Breton faded which crippled the sophisticated feeder system. These were the most popular institutions for Cape Breton high school students and it was once again thought that training them in an antiquated game would be a disservice. In 1921 Judge A.D. 'Hump' Campbell, the long time coach of No. 11, suggested the adoption of the Canadian code would "bring the Maritimes into a closer relationship with Upper Canada".⁵⁶ It is interesting is that the region had always been in a close relationship with sport in central Canada. Maritimers became acutely aware of the happenings within the Canadian Rugby Union in order to resist it as a parent body and the code it advanced. The MRU was never operated in an isolationist manner, instead it shadowed the CRU in an attempt to offer an alternative. In fact proponents made a brief bid to reinstall rugby as Canada's national football game instead of directly attempting to re-shape the Canadian code. This was a mistake because, in its attempt to avoid stagnation, each successive accommodation caused rugby league to dovetail in the direction of the Canadian code. As a counter hegemonic force the MRU was unable to construct a distinctive collective identity from which the game could be defended. Its inability to fully accommodate working class men, let alone women, allowed the Canadian code to take hold.

⁵⁶*The Post-Record* 9 November 1921.

Conclusion

It can safely be said, although with some caution, that Canadian code football and various forms of rugby can co-exist today. For the first fifty years of the twentieth century they could not. Based on a confrontation of totalities grounded in the language of imperialism, nationalism, and regionalism it was thought that only one or the other could survive in Canada, not both. When one mixes in the class warfare as well as gender and ethnic constructions the story became ever more complicated, as it should. This is good only because no matter what histories we confront, reality is intricate and complicated.

My idea of placing both codes on an equal footing, side by side, was necessary for a fairly accurate rendering of this historical problem. Hopefully, what I offer here will be subject to debate. Briefly, I argued that working class players gained control of an affordable game. During times of class conflict the game was naturally halted. After each period of dislocation such as the bitter and extended strikes of 1909-1910 and 1920-1925, working class men returned to the game with a vengeance and emerged as elite athletes. But, ultimately the myriad of forms of sport and leisure consumption that emerged after world war two, and the promise of national integration into Canadian football, diverted for a time the talents that came from working class rugby football players.

In this thesis I have also explored discourses about the game found in the press. To do so required 'reading against the grain' to decipher what I thought were the messages that were actually being transmitted to the public. For instance, in pre-war days *Upper* Canadian and American football were defamed for their rough play. Yet during the interwar years fan and player violence were treated as a sense of civic masculinity. In the post war years these images were far less frequent.

There are problems with this thesis I admit, and many more questions need to be resolved, but I have chosen two issues that are close to my heart and in focusing upon them I make no apology. The first is the issue of *regionalism*. I have tried to understand the role the region played in the construction of rugby football in Canada. The second issue involves the nature of *class* formation and class consciousness in Cape Breton, because I grew up and will forever remain a working class person. The reason I focused on the class question was to suggest that the working class people of Cape Breton helped to in many ways to define regional identities, and one of those ways was through their involvement in rugby football. On the sporting field workers brought their voice, if not always directly, to a national audience, and in the process demonstrated that they were actively involved in the production of cultural life. This is and has been replicated in many important ways: take *east coast music* for example. What started as a few *celtic*, and I use the term loosely, groups from Cape Breton (The Rankins, Bruce Gouthro, The Barra MacNeils, Ashley MacIsaac, etc.) has turned into something celebrated nationally as *east coast* music, and which includes the former Irish Descendants, and currently Damnhait Doyle, and Great Big Sea from Newfoundland. From Prince Edward Island has come Lenny Gallant and Richard Wood, from New Brunswick the Acadian group Barrachois, not to mention Roch Voisine. In Peninsular Nova Scotia there is a thriving *alternative* scene with Sloan and Dartmouth's *rap* contribution from Jamie Sparks.

My point is that many, not most or even all, of those who have been active in the construction of regional cultural life and identity, are working class people whose lives have contributed to a rethinking of the Atlantic Coast. For the unthinking, the judgement will perhaps be 'my what a musical people', a subtle slight similar to those directed at the 'black entertainer' or jazz musician. For the more reflective, it will perhaps lead to a recognition that workers continue to re-think and re-present the region in often dynamic ways to the rest of Canada. This, in turn, contributes to a more enriched vision of the

nation. Like it or not, I hope you've enjoyed the thesis, for as a wise person once told me "things will not always be this way".

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