

Young, Scott. *War on Ice: Canada in International Hockey*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Ltd., 1976. Pp. 250. \$5.95.

Scott Young is a Toronto Sportswriter whose interests over a long career have focused mainly on hockey. Among his previous works are *Hockey is a Battle: Punch Imlach's Own Story* and *The Leafs I Knew*. In addition to his daily columns, which graced first the now-defunct *Toronto Telegram* and then the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, he also served for some time as a regular interviewer for the *Hockey Night in Canada* telecasts of hockey games. Because he dared to be critical of the quality of a game on one occasion, he was fired from that position, adding to his growing reputation. He does bring an impressive list of credentials to this particular book.

Young's book is somewhat narrower in focus than the title suggests. He is only concerned with the period from 1954 to 1976, and his research is based on the Canadian/Russian rivalry in hockey. He starts with the loss, in 1954,

by Canada's hockey representatives, the East York Lyndhursts, to the Russian National team. The first chapter is devoted completely to that event, which so much affected Canadian attitudes towards International hockey. Prior to 1954, Canada was content to send a makeshift Senior Amateur club to Europe and wait for it to return home with the Championship. The loss to Russia, coming, as it did, at the height of the Cold War, brought a new seriousness to the International tournaments that reached a peak in the eight-game Canada/Russia series of 1972. Through hockey, Canada fought the Cold War, hence the appropriateness of Young's title.

This is an entertaining book meant to appeal to the general hockey fan. Young does not waste our time with footnotes. His highly readable writing style carries us along. He does a good job at outlining the broader issues, while looking critically at Canada's efforts to mount high calibre hockey teams for International play.

He has no sympathy for the officials of the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association. They seemed incredibly inept when it came to correcting the weaknesses in the system of choosing Canada's International hockey representatives. Every year, the Senior Amateur champions of Canada went to World or Olympic competition. They may have always had good playing skills, but it meant that Canada's teams were always short on International experience. Commenting on Canada's loss to Russia at Cortina, in 1956, Young writes:

"For the first time, Canada had come squarely against a fact of life that never had seemed important before: in International hockey we had no continuity. Can you imagine another sport in which you win a gold medal and then tell the winner to get lost, you'll find somebody else to have a try next year?"

It was not until 1963, seven years later, than an effort was made to create a National team.

Young also recounts how the coaches and players of Canada's teams kept coming home and telling people how good the Russians were. "Knowledgeable" hockey men refused to believe them. Critical of the efforts of the amateurs, most believed that the National Hockey League's professionals could easily handle the Soviets. It was probably this attitude which hurt Father David Bauer's experiment to establish a National team of young all-stars who were still attending college. Young calls the National team effort, which started in 1964 and ended in 1969, "The Dream that Deserved to Come True." Father Bauer met considerable resistance to his efforts. Hockey officials, however, with the support of most sportswriters, instead of trying to

make the National team a success, seemed more preoccupied with making the “pros” eligible for International play. Canadians wanted to see the N.H.L. chase the Russians back to Siberia. That dream was shattered in 1972.

The strength of this book comes from Young’s ability to put flesh and blood on the people in it. The book contains many amusing anecdotes to entertain the reader. Yet, the book gets weaker as it goes on. The highlight of the book should have been Young’s analysis of the 1972 Canada/Russia series. Yet, this is the weakest chapter in *War on Ice*. Young clearly has constructed it from his notes taken during an interview, or series of interviews, with Alan Eagleson, the chief honcho of the Canadian team during that series. Eagleson would be a most partisan observer. Despite his great importance, one is left with the wish that Young had also provided the assessment of other observers who fulfilled important roles during the series, particularly Douglas Fisher, the head of Hockey Canada at that time, and Lou Lefave, the most active Federal Civil Servant involved with the series.

The book ends with the World Hockey Association/Russia series of 1974. The reader is left hanging with no conclusion. The book appears to be unfinished. Certainly, no one should rely entirely on *War on Ice* for observations on Canada in International hockey. Bruce Kidd’s *The Death of Hockey* is more analytical and tries to propose a solution. Brian Conacher’s *Hockey, The Way It Is!* is also helpful. Conacher played for the National team and his reminiscences are particularly poignant.

War on Ice could have been a better book. Young is capable of giving us a better book. It is too bad that he concentrated, instead, on producing a quick seller to capitalize on the interest created by the Canada Cup hockey series of 1976.

Canada’s Sports Hall of Fame

J. Thomas West