

Two Cases of Hockey Homicide: The Crisis of a Moral Ideal

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This paper deals with two trials for manslaughter held in Cornwall, Ontario which arose from deaths in hockey games. In March 1905, Allan Loney was tried following the death of Alcide Laurin in a local exhibition game between the villages of Maxville and Alexandria. In April 1907, Charles Masson was tried following the death of Owen McCourt in a game in the Federal Amateur Hockey League between Cornwall and the Ottawa Victorias. Using newspaper accounts, archival sources and judicial records, the paper narrates the circumstances of the deaths, reconstructs the legal proceedings and analyzes contemporary comments on hockey violence. The paper includes photographs and illustrations and an appendix giving extracts from the newspaper *La Presse*.

Alcide Laurin died instantly on the ice from a stick blow to the head received in a clash with Allan Loney. Loney was arrested for murder and spent a month in custody before the opening of the assizes, at which time the charge was reduced to manslaughter. On March 29, 1905, after four hours of deliberation and in spite of a hostile summing-up from the judge, the jury acquitted Loney after apparently accepting the explanation of defence witnesses that the blow was either instinctive or in self-defence. Owen McCourt died in hospital the day after a game in which he was struck on the head by Charles Masson while struggling with another player. Masson was charged with manslaughter but released on bail before his trial. On April 11, 1907 the jury took little time to acquit Masson, probably being uncertain how McCourt had received injuries to the skull.

The significance of the cases lies in the record of attitudes and prejudices that flavoured reactions to the deaths. These graphic instances of sports violence occurred just as professionalism and commercialism entered hockey. Commentators perceived a social and moral crisis as the game ceased to be a diversion of the middle class elite and assumed the character of mass entertainment. Dominant opinion, expressed through letters, editorials and sermons, construed hockey violence as a threat to the sensibilities of the better classes, the modesty of women and the moral superiority of empire-building Anglo-Saxons. The commentary duly recommended necessary practical remedies to deal with the problem.

Violence was attributed to the growing failure in individual responsibility and moderation, and money was invariably identified as the corrupting force which led to the excesses. The evil lay not just in the physical injuries caused, but in the damage to the moral reputation of Canadians. To control the misconduct, commentators called for a range of disciplinary measures, including tightening the amateur code, stricter playing rules, new powers in referees, and the enforcement of the criminal law against players and club officers. The old, honourable sporting order was seen to be threatened by the forces of greed and ruffianism.

While both cases reflected conflict over essentially British sporting attitudes, the prosecution of Allan Loney in 1905 brought out a thoroughly Canadian theme in the different interpretations of events that appeared in the English and French press. The death was given quite inflammatory coverage by *La Presse* of Montreal which presented Laurin as a martyr to the brutal style of English play. The English newspapers, meanwhile, chose to ignore any sectarian significance in the case.

These early examples of the interaction between sports and the courts provide insight into the

33society in which hockey was played and serve as interesting antecedents to the modern debate over sports violence.