

Russ Conway, *Game Misconduct: Alan Eagleson and the Corruption of Hockey*. Macfarlane, Walter and Ross, Toronto, 1995. Illus., index. pp. xvi + 286. \$C29.95.

In 1990 Russ Conway, a sporting journalist with the Eagle-Tribune of Lawrence, Massachusetts, attended a reunion of the 1970 Boston Bruins Stanley Cup championship team. Conway was the sort of journalist who mainly reported on what happened on the ice, writing about great games, players and teams. He was not one who usually concerned himself with issues, and the politics, of (ice-) hockey off the rink. During the general bonhomie of former stars reminiscing about great deeds they had performed on the ice, Conway was somewhat surprised to hear a continuing stream of complaints from the former players concerning their (former) union, the National Hockey League Players Association, and, particularly its executive director Alan Eagleson.

His interest aroused, Conway decided to conduct investigations into various concerns raised by these (and other) old-time, and current, players involving Alan Eagleson and his stewardship of the National Hockey League Players Association. In the latter part of 1991 Conway began publishing a series of articles under the title 'Cracking the Ice' in the Eagle-Tribune, exposing what appeared to be 'wrongdoings' performed by Eagleson. These articles won many media awards, with Conway being the runner-up for a Pulitzer Prize. *Game Misconduct* is based on these articles. (For an earlier work criticising Eagleson and the National Hockey League Players Association see David Cruise and Alison Griffiths, *Net Worth: Exploding the Myths of Pro Hockey*, Viking, Toronto, 1991; reviewed in *Sporting Traditions*, May 1993).

Eagleson was the Executive Director of the National Hockey League Players Association from its formation in 1967 until his ousting in 1992. During this period he also acted as an agent for a large number of players including some high-profile ones. In the mid-1970 the United States of America's National Labor Relations Board ruled that union officials could not represent players as agents in the same professional sport in which they acted as union officials (p.160). Despite the majority of clubs, and players, being based in the US, Eagleson, who was located in Toronto, took no notice of this ruling. Eagleson also controlled and organised Canada Cup games — contests between national teams. He persuaded stars to play in such games, on the basis of the honour of representing their country and that profits would be used to top up players pension

funds. In addition, Eagleson had a wide range of other business, mainly real estate, interests.

Conway has two major criticisms of Eagleson. The first was that the wearing of various hats involved him in various conflicts of interest — conflicts where he abrogated his fiduciary and moral responsibilities to the players he represented as Executive Director of the National Hockey League Players Association. Second, and more damning, Conway claimed that Eagleson was involved in illegal and fraudulent behaviour where he embezzled monies and received kickbacks for his part in various deals. *Game Misconduct* provides exhaustive details on Eagleson's various 'financial' and associated activities. Conway conducted hundreds of interviews with various persons checking out (and invariably contradicting) various claims made by Eagleson concerning past events.

In *Game Misconduct* Conway demonstrates that Eagleson had a cosy relationship with the National Hockey League and owners. The main implication of this was that he ran dead on major issues of concern to players; such as the traditional one of freedom of movement between clubs — an issue vigorously pursued by player associations in other North American professional team sports. Conway also claims that Eagleson did not consult with players (especially elected players representatives) and/or provided them with incorrect information concerning both his affairs and those of the National Hockey League Players Association. Eagleson's acquiescence at the bargaining table is explained by the understanding he had with the league concerning Canada Cup games.

With respect to such games Eagleson channelled much of the revenue raised from various sources into his own pockets rather than for the welfare of players — a ubiquitous Swiss bank account was used for 'signage' rights. Moreover, 'profits' from such games directed to players' pension funds were utilised to reduce the contributions paid by clubs. Furthermore, surpluses earned from pension funds were not added to player entitlements. They were used to again reduce club contributions. Eagleson negotiated 'poor' pension and accident indemnity/insurance schemes on behalf of players (managing to secure a generous one for himself). In his capacity as head of the National Hockey League Players Association he would not pursue accident/insurance entitlements of players, particularly those for whom he did not, or had not, acted as an agent, unless they agreed to pay his fees and expenses. Eagleson's attitude

to such players — many destitute and looking forward to futures of constant medical care for themselves and/or their children — is most damning.

Eagleson also charged high rental fees to the National Hockey League Players Association for the use of premises he owned; and loaned out, at generous terms, National Hockey League Players Association funds to friends and business associates. Conway provides details on Eagleson's creativity with expense accounts — of how he charged the various accounts for which he had responsibility millions of dollars for travel, cars, meals, gifts, entertainment, membership of clubs, clothes and so on. He used his 'hockey' connections to pursue his business and other related interests.

Game Misconduct provides compelling reading concerning corruption in a major professional team sport. Together with various allegations concerning wrongdoings associated with the transfer of soccer players we might find that future writing on sports will focus on corruption issues. Conway has produced a masterful work which casts a sad light on a union official who abandoned his position of trust and responsibility for others in pursuit of his own interests.

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