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## Indigenous Coaches and the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Anthropology

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC), an annual hockey tournament held in Canada where Indigenous youth compete in provincial/territorial teams. Research focused especially on the insights that coaches, organizers, and other tournament officials can provide into this tournament that aims to both highlight the skills of Indigenous players and also to provide cultural activities and enhance pride. Drawing on interviews at the NAHC at the 2019 tournament in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada, this thesis aims to understand the impact the tournament has on those involved, as well as outside influences that constrain and impact the event. The major topics presented are history of the championships, experiences with coaching, and the role Indigenous identity plays. The influence of settler colonialism connects the different topics studied, and continues to impact Indigenous sport, in this case Indigenous hockey and its coaches, from systemic racism to skepticism about identity.

## Keywords

Indigenous, Coaching, Hockey, Tournaments, National Aboriginal Hockey Championships, Settler Colonialism, Race Shifting

## Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis approaches the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships primarily through the lens of coaches alongside other team and NAHC officials. This is a productive lens for research because many coaches at the championships have participated since the inaugural event in 2002 and they have insights given that coaches take on multiple roles at the championships from managing their athletes on and off the ice to administrative complexities that may seem outside the sport entirely. It is from this perspective that I have been able to delve into the history of the championships, the experiences and complexities that underly coaching for such an event, and identity which is influenced via outside entities in very explicit ways, for example through the Indian Act.

Chapter two delves into the history of the tournament first by examining policies beginning in the 1970s into the 1990s. This chapter uses a chronological approach to contextualize the tournament from difficulties and triumphs the championships have seen over its almost twenty-year history along with historical factors that led to the NAHC's formation. The third chapter focuses on coaching credentialing, recruitment, and coaching in practice through their approach to mentorship off the ice and coaching on it. Credentialing of coaches, which is required to become a head coach or assistant coach at the NAHC, is not a simple task, as many regions are isolated and coaches must travel considerable distances to receive training. Coaches also approach coaching in a variety of ways, however mentoring was something especially pertinent to many coach participants, going beyond focusing on the athlete on the ice and bringing into focus the growth of the athlete as a person. The fourth and final core chapter focuses on identity. First, it looks at the importance of Indigenous identity and the identification process at the championships, highlighting the impact of how outsiders define Indigeneity, such as the Canadian state defining First Nations through the

Indian Act. Finally, the chapter also looks at the implications of settlers 'becoming' Indigenous through race shifting and the impact that has on Indigenous sport.

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## Chapter 1

### 1 « Introduction »

The National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC) is an annual weeklong hockey tournament held in late April or early May. The event brings together male and female Indigenous athletes ranging in age from 13 to 18 to represent their provincial and territorial regions. The inaugural event occurred in 2002, and since then, it has been held in a wide variety of locations in Canada, chosen using a bidding process for cities and regions interested in hosting the tournament. The event is unique among hockey tournaments as it combines a competitive hockey environment on the ice and a supportive environment for Indigenous athletes off the ice.

The NAHC is the result of decades of work by Indigenous sport activists. Similar to other national hockey tournaments, organizers need to secure locations and sponsors, and deal with myriad other logistical problems. Unlike mainstream hockey tournaments, the NAHC organizers must also think beyond the typical problems that arise in hosting a national hockey event. Organizers and teams must consider the added complexities that come with Canadian settler colonial structure, most notably the issue of how to define who is Indigenous and, therefore, eligible to participate.

As an anthropologist, fieldwork allowed me to establish an intimate interaction with the NAHC, with people who are passionately involved in the championships and gave me the opportunity to participate in deeper discussions about problems faced by coaches, organizers, and teams. In recent years, there has been a rise in settlers self-identifying as Indigenous across Canada (see Leroux 2019; Leroux and Gaudry 2017); when a phenomenon like this happens, there is potential to spill over into Indigenous

sport as well. Observation and interviews allowed me to understand the difficulties coaches, organizers, and managers have with settler colonial structures encroaching into their tournament. The NAHC, and other events like the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), are a response to settler colonialism, which is an ongoing problem for Indigenous sport. As my research shows, settler colonial categories continue to mark the tournament.

The introduction to each chapter will provide snapshots of the 2019 NAHC tournament in Whitehorse, Yukon and stories shared with me by coaches and organizers. The snapshots will help situate the reader within the tournament and emphasize that the championships are not just about hockey. It is crucial to display the stories and imagery because, for many of the athletes and coaches involved, it will be the stories that surround the tournament, not the games themselves, that will be most impactful over the long term.

It was a cool May morning when the preliminary round of the 2019 NAHC began in Whitehorse, Yukon. Stepping into Takhini Arena, a familiar smell of plastic flooring, fresh coffee, and a hint of old deep fryer grease brought back memories of morning hockey practices. To the left of the entrance was a caricatured fur trader with a hockey stick and puck, representing what I presumed was a local team. Further investigation found that the fur trader's origins were vague — maybe the fur trader was an old team logo, maybe somebody's strange joke — but this enigmatic cartoon would be a bizarre companion for the rest of my time at the tournament. The colonial fur trader plays as an excellent backdrop to the history of hockey “[a]s hockey becomes reified as a natural by-product of the Canadian land-scape, purveyors of the game promote senses of ‘Native Canadian’ identity among those who play it, in the process erasing—or denying—

differential senses of belonging among First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who may or may not self-identify as ‘Canadian’” (McKegney and Philips 2018, 99). A stated goal of the NAHC organizers is precisely to provide recognition to Indigenous athletes who do not receive attention from mainstream hockey institutions.

The first game of the tournament began at 8:00 am between Team Atlantic Female and Team Eastern Door and North Female (Team EDN, from the Quebec area), followed by the second game between Team North Female and Team British Columbia Female. What caught my eye before the second game was a player from Team North skating around the rink with a Spirit Stick gifted to the team and the championships by a local Kwanlin Dün First Nation elder, William Carlick. What the Spirit Stick meant was different for each athlete, but a common refrain was that it was there to protect the athletes and to drive away negativity for both teams involved in the game. This pre-game ceremony occurred every time Team North Male or Female took the ice, and there did not seem to be a formal way of choosing which athlete would carry the Spirit Stick onto the ice. Instead, the athlete chosen was whoever felt comfortable at the time to do so, which meant different players would have the opportunity to skate with it.

There was also a more personal significance of the Spirit Stick, which would be different for each athlete involved. For some, the Spirit Stick helped them feel grounded, special, and recognized at an event where they were not favourites to win the gold or even place in the top three. The team's focus was not to bring home a medal but to have their athletes reflect on experiences for years to come. For one player on Team North, the Spirit Stick helped bring together the team quickly, “we bring it everywhere ... it really helps, I think. . . . I’ve never experienced anything like this before” (Maratos 2019). This

statement sums up a lot about the championships in general: it is a unique event, and for many of the athletes and coaches involved, it will be the highlight of their minor hockey career.

The Spirit Stick can also be a helpful metaphor when it comes to an understanding of the NAHC. The championships are an event where many athletes, coaches, and others connect to their Indigenous heritage, whether it is something that has always been there in their lives or something with which they are just coming into contact. The NAHC is a competitive event, and teams do take pride in winning. Still, it is also an event that focuses on positive experiences and long-term memories, rather than short-term victory.

It is the long-term impact on the lives of athletes and coaches that I hope shines through in this thesis. The NAHC is complex, and no individual story is exactly the same; however, something that becomes ever-present in this analysis is the impact of settler colonial structures at the NAHC for participants of the tournament. It is an environment wherein external factors, like the Indian Act, shape circumstances and impact Indigenous peoples' lives at an event made by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. Colonialism is part of that reality and as a result, this event is constrained in implicit and explicit ways by colonial structures.

## 1.1 « Hockey in Canada »

In mainstream depictions of Canada, hockey plays an essential role in defining what and who 'is' Canadian. Many elements of popular culture in Canada focus on hockey, like the \$5 Canadian banknote circulated between 2002 and 2013 with imagery of children playing pond hockey and an excerpt from Roch Carrier's children's book, *The Hockey Sweater* (1984). In 2002, Minister of Finance and future Prime Minister Paul Martin stated that "[t]he new \$5 note pays homage to children as Canada's future, and

play as a healthy part of their physical, social, and cultural development. . . . It is also a celebration of Canada's northern climate where our winter pastimes—in particular the game of hockey—reflect our sporting heritage" ("The Bank of Canada Launches a New \$5 Bank Note" 2002). In another example, former Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper penned a book titled *A Great Game* (2013), examining early professionalization of hockey in Canada, while still in office. In these and numerous other depictions of hockey, Indigenous people are notably absent from the early history of the sport.

Indigenous experiences with hockey have just begun to come to the attention of the broader Canadian public. This is in part due to the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as well as literary endeavours like Richard Wagamese's (2012) *Indian Horse*. Contemporarily, Indigenous hockey usually only seems to find its way into the popular consciousness when Indigenous teams and players are on the receiving end of racist taunts (Bell et al. 2018) or removal from provincial leagues (McKegney et al. 2019; Provost 2019), for example. These highly publicized stories have come to envelop a lot of the discussion in mainstream media on Indigenous hockey.

Much of the media discussion on Indigenous hockey ties to forms of tragedy: Indigenous peoples' connection to hockey is generally portrayed through stories of abuse, racism, and exclusion. Those stories are important and accurate for discussions about Indigenous experiences in hockey and larger Canadian society, but what is not found in these stories is the binding together of Indigenous communities to participate in a sport they enjoy. Rarely will one find positive stories about Indigenous hockey tournaments played throughout Canada every year, such as those in Robidoux's (2012) *Stickhandling through the Margins*, or the successful Indigenous hockey programs like Beardy's

Blackhawks in Saskatchewan, the only AAA First Nations hockey program in Canada. Even the case of the Beardy's Blackhawks became a story of exclusion with the Saskatchewan Hockey Association removing them from the league and replacing them with a team in a larger, non-Indigenous locality following the end of the 2019-2020 season (Provost 2019). While problems undoubtedly exist for Indigenous athletes within the sport, this thesis will attempt to tell a different story, as Indigenous sport leaders through the NAHC aim to create positive experiences and a safe space for Indigenous athletes. That does not mean ignoring problems at the NAHC or negative experiences for Indigenous athletes outside of the championships, but rather providing alternative narratives about Indigenous hockey that shed light on their agency while providing insight into the challenges they face.

Hockey has a long and complicated history within Indigenous communities. Robidoux (2012), in *Stickhandling through the Margins*, brings into focus the importance of hockey for many Indigenous people and specifically the role Indigenous hockey tournaments play in some communities. These Indigenous hockey tournaments, like the NAHC, bring communities together and can be a space of healing (Robidoux 2012). For many coaches and others who spoke to me, this was similar to their experiences within the NAHC.

## 1.2 « Overview of the Thesis »

My thesis research focuses on Indigenous hockey, coaching, identity, and broader problems tied to colonialism, as seen through the lens of the NAHC. The connecting thread of this thesis is settler colonial structures and the impact they have on Indigenous hockey in both very open and more subtle ways. Coulthard (2014) presents “[a] settler-colonial relationship [as] one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it

is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority” (Coulthard 2014, 6-7). What becomes important to emphasize is how settler colonial structures permeate Indigenous sport and specifically Indigenous hockey. Using a multifaceted approach, I will present settler colonialism as an ongoing historical and contemporary process that influenced the creation of the NAHC as a response to encroaching forms of assimilation. I will also examine the coaching requirements that determine who can coach at the event and how settler colonial structures are expressed through that credentialing. Finally, I will look at the tensions fermented through the identification process in the context of the Indian Act and other colonial processes. Through fieldwork, interviews, and subsequent online media research, three major research topics emerged, which inform the three core chapters of this thesis.

Chapter two documents the history of the championships, bringing together scattered information to develop a year-to-year account of the tournament. It will also examine the historical conditions both within Indigenous communities and within federal policy, in the 1980s and 1990s, that made the championships feasible and desirable. Following that is a discussion of the origins of the NAHC as a high-performance hockey camp in the late 1990s, and its transformation to a full-fledged national event by 2002. Finally, the chapter closes by examining early struggles by organizers to get the event off the ground, financial and administrative struggles in the early 2010s that risked scuttling the event entirely, and the growth the championships have seen in recent years.



This chapter includes a general focus on how Indigenous sport policy has transformed from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century into what culminated as the NAHC. While descriptive, this chapter plays a pivotal role in understanding the following two chapters on the NAHC. In this second chapter I aim to understand the transformation of rules, which initially included allowing much older athletes into the championships, and how that became unnecessary as the event grew and more Indigenous athletes became involved in hockey.

The third chapter focuses on the experiences of coaches themselves, their approach to participating at the NAHC, and the bureaucratic hurdles coaches and teams face to receive proper Hockey Canada and National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) certification to coach at the event. For several regions of Canada, it is not possible to achieve the required Development 1 Certified status to be a head coach at the NAHC. For many teams, this means using workarounds, for example, bringing in a coach with proper credentials who is listed as 'head coach' but having assistant coaches do the duties of the head coach. Another approach, for particularly small regions, is the use of non-Indigenous coaches, which can be necessary due to the lack of properly credentialed coaches or because there are no Indigenous coaches available.

Chapter three also examines the importance of team recruitment and regional differences in recruitment, the approach coaches take to coaching, and also their experiences with the tournament. Here, the focus is recruitment, in-game strategy, as well as their personal experiences with the championships and their athletes. Experiences for coaches at the NAHC are varied, from individuals who have only had limited experience with Indigenous traditions, so that the tournament itself constituted their first such

experiences, to others who have always had those traditions in their lives. The NAHC is both a moment where coaches can participate in a purely Indigenous event and impart their knowledge to Indigenous youth and a moment for them to learn from elders.

The choice to use coaches' experiences and perspectives as a lens to understand the NAHC responds to both a practical consideration and a conceptual one. On the practical side, some coaches at the NAHC have had many years of experience at the event, which provides an in-depth perspective rivalled only by the organizers of the championships themselves. This is particularly evident with coaches who have been involved in the NAHC since its inception. While other coaches could provide less historical context about the NAHC, since they had shallower experience at the championships, they had other important insights into how this tournament differed from mainstream hockey. On the more conceptual side, I found that coaches – much more so than players – deal quite directly with navigating the colonial structures and the colonial categories that I discuss throughout my thesis. They are the ones who have to manage the certification and other technical requirements that relate to the oversight that national organizations like Sport Canada have over amateur sports. They also must navigate the Indigenous identification processes that determine the eligibility of their players to participate in the tournament, which arise directly out of the colonial relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous people. In all of these senses, coaches were strategically positioned to understand and share with me insights into some of the most important questions guiding my anthropological research.

Chapter four examines Indigenous identification at the championships. It draws on Circe Sturm's (2011) work on race shifting settlers and the complexities of Cherokee

identity in the United States and Darryl Leroux's (2019) research which expands on Sturm's concept of race shifting to examine the newly emerging Eastern Métis organizations in Canada, as an essential feature that impacts Indigenous lives. Even within an Indigenous event, run by Indigenous people for Indigenous people, it is evident that settler colonial structures influence how the championships operate. For example, some athletes can participate in the championships because they have access to a Status Card and appear in government registries established under the Indian Act. Others, equally affected by colonial processes but in different ways, may have never had their ancestry tracked because their parents were removed from their families during the "Sixties Scoop" when many Indigenous children were placed with Euro-Canadian families through the 1960s to the 1980s. While they may have the same degree of Indigenous background and heritage, they may not be able to participate in the championships due to their lack of access to official identification as Indigenous.

This chapter explores a variety of concerns surrounding who can participate in the tournament and how this can lead to frustration. It also aims to examine the parameters used to define who is Indigenous and how the NAHC's organizers define Indigeneity. To participate in the championships, an athlete needs a valid Indian Status Card, Inuit Identification Card, or a Provincial Métis Card. If an athlete does not have one of those pieces of identification, then they are considered to be non-status and must complete a declaration and ancestral chart which has a "detailed and official/verifiable account of your ancestry" ("Technical Package (Final Version)" 2019, 18).

### 1.3 « Research Process »

Before I began my interviews, where much of my understanding of the championships developed, I gleaned information through brief discussions with people

and observations at the event. These were not formalized interviews but pointed me in the direction of topics of interest. Observations were vital as they were part of what developed my research questions and helped explicitly in understanding the importance identity plays at the tournament.

At the championships, my main goal was interviewing coaches and others involved in the event and observing the day-to-day events throughout the weeklong tournament. Before the tournament began, I was informed by the NAHC organizers that there would be a large meeting that all coaching staff and managers were required to attend where I would be allowed to give a recruitment speech. This meeting would be the perfect moment to announce my intentions and explain how their interviews could help in my project and provide useful information for NAHC organizers. Following my initial announcement, where I described my desire to interview coaches and other tournament officials to learn about their history and experience with the tournament, I was approached by several coaches who were interested in being interviewed. I also approached coaches with varying responses of enthusiasm and, on rare occasion, some concern. Concern was understandable since I was entering an Indigenous space as a settler to do research, which holds a variety of justifiable negative connotations. Smith (2012) discusses a common concern where anthropologists appear to be takers who exploit Indigenous people and their kindness. It was this concern that made it imperative that the research be helpful for the organizers, coaches, and others involved.

Interviewing was vital to research, and I am grateful for my participants' willingness to share their experiences and perspectives with me. I have chosen not to name my participants in the thesis, to protect their privacy, but instead to provide some

descriptive material that helps to situate and contextualize their words. Among my participants were thirteen coaches and team officials from both male and female teams from several different provinces and territories, as well as one tournament organizer, and one parent. The process of interviewing transformed in a variety of ways over time. For the initial interviews, I followed a semi-structured approach where I had a list of questions in mind but would let the interviewee guide where the discussion went. As I gathered more information through interviews and observations, I modified my question guide based on what I had heard and observed. At the same time, I continued to allow interviewees the space to discuss areas where they had an interest. This adjustment was vital because it allowed me to start focusing interviews on issues that had been brought to my attention multiple times, such as identity and experiences of coaching.

Along with my fieldwork and interviews, I worked with a research group, itself embedded in a larger research team called the Indigenous Hockey Research Network (IHRN). The IHRN is funded by a five-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant; the study is entitled ‘Decolonizing Sport: Indigeneity, Hockey, and Canadian Nationhood’. The sub-group, led by Dr. Janice Forsyth, includes students and faculty from Western University. My contribution to Western’s team focused on survey work to collect athletes’ demographic data. In this role, I helped administer surveys and explain the importance of these surveys to coaches and other team leaders. The overall purpose of the survey is to help Indigenous hockey and the NAHC receive more funding in the future by showing how the NAHC is different from mainstream hockey, with these differences necessitating changes to funding to support Indigenous ways of understanding and playing hockey.

As a token of goodwill to the organizers and teams, our research team volunteered to collect in-game statistics for the tournament. As a research team, we were qualified to track in-game statistics due to our long-term experience as participants of the sport. In previous years there had been some individuals collecting in-game statistics, but we wanted to give back to the tournament by providing in-game data for the athletes for all the opening round of games. This in-game statistics collection made our research team popular among coaches who were eager to see the results. This made my job easier as coaches became interested in interviews in part because they had been interested in our statistics collection. Coaches were also interested in our research, broadly speaking because many saw it as a means to improve Indigenous hockey and allow their athletes more recognition and the possible opportunity to play higher-level hockey in the future.

Following initial on-site interviews and having left the tournament, I began to seek documentary sources to develop a history of the NAHC. Most of the sources found were from online newspapers between the years of 2000 to 2019. These sources raised further questions, and when I began to do telephone interviews post-championships, those became more focused. While I still took the approach of allowing interviewees to take the lead if they wanted to, I began to take a more structured approach to the interviews. This was important as I aimed to narrow in on various topics, such as specific years at the championships or how coaches are recruited.

#### **1.4 « Current Academic Literature on Hockey »**

Much of the scholarly literature on Canadian hockey has focused on hockey's significance in Canadian national identity (e.g., Robidoux 2002; Adams 2006; Kalman-Lamb 2018). Mary Louise Adams (2006), who interrogates gender ideologies in Canadian nationalism, argues that hockey "helps to homogenize discourses about an

increasingly heterogeneous population” (71). The diversity of experiences with hockey are erased through this homogenization, and the experiences of oppressed groups are marginalized. Adams focused on a broad discussion of hockey in relation to Canadian identity, but tournaments like the NAHC, and Indigenous hockey more generally, have the potential to complicate homogenizing narratives. In this light, Indigenous hockey provides a productive contrast to mainstream hockey and offers insight into the contradictions created by homogenizing discourses that ignore Indigenous experiences.

Historically, Indigenous hockey was used by colonial authorities as a “tool of assimilation” (Robidoux 2012, 49). It is impossible to discuss Indigenous hockey – and Indigenous sport in Canada more generally – without recognizing this colonial legacy. *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015) includes sections that mention sport as a tool for colonization in the residential school system and how some students used sport as a creative way to survive this system. The report focuses almost exclusively on male sporting experiences, since that is where much of the literature was focused prior to 2015. Experiences of sport in this colonial context were contradictory: it simultaneously functioned as a recreational activity and as a “disciplining framework” (2012, 25-6), which attempted to create a particular Canadian identity through hockey. While a youth hockey tournament is a mainstream Canadian institution, my research builds on the recognition of the complex nature of Indigenous sport by examining the use of this format for social objectives, like creating a more equitable access to sport for Indigenous athletes.

Contemporarily, hockey holds onto these colonial narratives and continues to be an arena in which racism and exclusion are the norm. However, these norms are often

overlooked as hockey discourse tends to work around what Gruneau and Whitson (1993) argue “represents an organic connection with the Canadian landscape or national psyche” (25) and thus does not fall within the regular bounds of history or social structure.

Hockey has not been free of criticism; however, the narrative of an organic creation has insulated the sport from deeper criticism in Canada.

The NAHC is one way in which colonial narratives are upended, and hockey is used to unify Indigenous people from various parts of Canada. The NAHC does not focus solely on hockey but brings in a variety of cultural events for the athletes, coaches, and others interested. The championship is not without its flaws; as I found, colonialism has forced organizers to approach the processes of identifying athletes and separating teams based on colonial structures.

During fieldwork and subsequent research, a significant gap came to my attention. I began to realize that much of the research around hockey discussed Canadian colonialism but did not bring in the role colonialism has on Indigenous hockey specifically. What I hope is gleaned through reading this thesis is an understanding of the problems Indigenous sport continues to face. Even within a setting where Indigenous people can dictate changes, the Canadian state continues both directly and indirectly to impact Indigenous sport in negative ways.

Coming from mainstream Canadian hockey, the championships transformed how I think about hockey as a Canadian institution and its impact on Indigenous coaches and athletes. I understood settler colonial structures would have an influence over Indigenous hockey, but I did not expect it to be so ever-present within an Indigenous tournament. Settler colonialism was imbued into the NAHC long before the championships began due



to both historical measures, like the Indian Act, and also contemporary systemic racism that makes access to the sport difficult. Furthermore, while initially I narrowly believed funding would solve systemic problems within Indigenous sport, money alone does not solve the number of problems examined in this thesis. Self-determination for Indigenous organizations is also vital. Many of these solutions require wholesale change with an understanding that racism is systemic to Canadian sport access.

## Chapter 2

### 2 « Indigenous Federal Sport Policy and the History of the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships »

Arriving in Whitehorse, there was a fair amount of local buzz surrounding the championships. The talk could be heard on local radio and read in front-page articles in both local newspapers *The Whitehorse Star* and *Yukon News*. Speaking to locals about a sporting event in their region was not new to most, as Whitehorse prides itself on its ability to host these types of events. For example, one of the two rinks used for the tournament had been built for the Canada Games, which Whitehorse hosted in 2007. Whitehorse also has experience hosting Indigenous hockey tournaments as they host the annual Yukon Native Hockey Tournament that brings together hockey players of various ages and skill ranges each March.

Before the start of the championships, there was a river walk which followed the Yukon River from the *S.S. Klondike*, a riverboat turned tourist attraction south of downtown Whitehorse. Before the commencement of the walk, Kwanlin Dün First Nation elder William Carlick had all the athletes, coaches, and onlookers gather in a large circle. The elder gave a speech and finished with a prayer, and then the river walk began. The walk made its way north to the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, a stunning wood-framed building named after the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. When athletes arrived at the Cultural Centre, they participated in a circle dance beside the river. A mixture of provincial, territorial, and Indigenous flags could be seen. One participant from Kahnawake told me that the circle dance went the opposite way that they were accustomed to and that even these small differences become a strength of the tournament because it brings together so many different traditions and customs.

## 2.1 « Federal Sport Policy and the Formation of the Aboriginal Sport Circle »

The story of the NAHC has not been documented in any formalized way. Year-to-year hosts may have information on the championships, but the information is not passed on to future hosts, the NAHC Working Group who organize the event, or the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC). Part of my goal with this chapter is to delve into the story of the championships through interviews, online media searches, and fieldwork, which have been the main sources for creating an image of the championships that has not been put to paper previously.

This chapter explores the historical context out of which the NAHC emerged by examining Canadian federal sport policy that led to the creation of the ASC and the development of high-performance sports camps for Indigenous youth in the mid-1990s, and then to the inaugural NAHC in 2002. To cap off this chapter, I will look at the 2019 event in Whitehorse, Yukon. This chapter was written in part with the intention to give back to the championship organizers, coaches, and others who volunteered their time with me as well as aiming to inspire future research into this event.

In 1981, the Native Sport and Recreation Program (NSRP), a nine-year experiment intended to integrate Indigenous youth into mainstream Euro-Canadian sports, was terminated (Hurl 2017). Hurl states that the NSRP “reflected the failure of integrationist policies in the face of a growing movement for Indigenous self-determination through the 1970s” (737). The formation of the NSRP in 1972 was “intended to formalize funding relationships across Indigenous communities, reterritorializing Aboriginal sport and recreation under the sovereign jurisdiction of the settler-colonial state” (Hurl 2017, 736). In the context of previous history, the 1970s were

considered a “golden age” for Indigenous sport as it was the first time the federal government had concentrated funding directly towards Indigenous sport with Indigenous people in positions of leadership (Paraschak 1995). However, even as a “golden age” of Indigenous sport which gave Indigenous leaders authority in the matter of sport, it was still under the purview of the settler colonial state.

Before the NSRP, federal funding was ad-hoc. For example, in 1969, Harold Cardinal requested funding for an All-Indigenous hockey team and received \$60,000 (Paraschak 1995). As more Indigenous organizers and associations began requesting funding from Fitness and Amateur Sport (the federal organization created in 1962 through Bill C-131 to fund amateur sport in Canada [Green and Houlihan 2005]), the NSRP was formed in 1972 to streamline the process (Paraschak 1995). During this period, there was a focus on Euro-Canadian sports, like hockey and boxing, which were seen by federal authorities as “legitimate” sports, whereas traditional Indigenous sports were not viewed the same way. Fitness and Amateur Sport had the desire of “raising the level of performance to the point where native athletes [would] be able to participate in broader competitive events with other Canadians” (Paraschak 1995, 5). So, while federal authorities were willing to tolerate inter-Indigenous competition, the goal was integration into the broader Canadian sporting environment and to focus specifically on elite sport.

An important question is why the federal government felt the implementation of the NSRP in 1972 was important in the first place? The federal government’s 1969 *White Paper*, which had aimed to eliminate the treaties and effectively remove Indigenous rights, had been successfully blocked by Indigenous activists (Miller 2000). However, the

Canadian government continued to promote assimilationist policies towards Indigenous people, and one avenue could be sport.

Historically, for the federal government, sport for Indigenous athletes was an explicit tool of assimilation, as stated by Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport Iona Campagnolo in 1978 (Te Hiwi 2014). During a 1978 meeting with Indigenous leaders to establish an Indigenous governing body for Indigenous sport, Campagnolo opened by stating:

If you think that what I am trying to do is assimilate you, you are right, because with sport there is no other way . . . except to compete with other people. It does not mean cultural assimilation of the Indian people. It simply means that you get into the mainstream and compete like everyone else (Paraschak 1995, 7).

There had been an assumption among Fitness and Amateur Sport officials that Indigenous people in Canada were a uniform group, with interests to assimilate into Euro-Canadian sport (Paraschak 1995). In reality, Indigenous leaders at the meeting were not interested in an assimilationist approach at all. They stated:

Politically, economically and socially we are alienated from power, but we still like to decide our own destiny despite the fact that we have no power. . . .  
[Assimilation] wip[es] out any idea that Indians may have of being Indians, wip[es] out our reserves, and our status (Paraschak 1995, 7).

Following nine years of funding, Indigenous sport leaders attempted to meet government objectives of focus on elite sport, but with their distinctive take on it. Questions about what was considered “legitimate” sport were brought up repeatedly during that period, and “[i]n the end, Native efforts were actively suppressed by

government through the termination of the [NSRP] in 1981. Government officials revealed the ethnocentric basis of their decision when they justified the cancellation of this program” (Paraschak 1995, 12). Fitness and Amateur Sport admitted their program, “lack[ed] the special expertise needed to deal effectively with the unique social and cultural characteristics of native communities” (Paraschak 1995, 12). Indigenous leaders were willing and even interested in working within elite sport but wanted to do it on their terms with representation with their teams at events. Indigenous people wanted control of their sporting programs, and, in the end, the federal government’s assimilationist hand was shown.

Throughout the 1980s, there was no unified program for Indigenous sport, but the 1990s represented the first time Indigenous sport policy, with Indigenous people at the forefront, became central to sport policy creation in Canada. Canadian sport policy in the 1970s and 1980s, including Indigenous sport, focused on elite athletes and Olympic success, which had the effect of ignoring Indigenous sport and broader inclusive sport delivery (Te Hiwi 2014). Following the 1988 Olympics, Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson’s positive test for performance-enhancing drugs brought into focus the impact such a focus on elite sport could create (Green and Houlihan 2005). What followed were “inquiries into the values and belief systems underpinning Canadian sport, in general, and Canadian high performance sport in particular” (Green and Houlihan 2005, 2). Examples of these policies included the *Durbin Inquiry* in 1990 as well as several other policies that lessened the focus on elite sport in Canada (Green and Houlihan 2005). Through this policy shift, Indigenous leaders were involved with the larger Canadian sport community in creating national sport policy, such as the 1992 *Sport: The Way Ahead* and the 1998

*Sport: Everybody's Business*, both of which shaped the development of Indigenous sport in Canada (Te Hiwi 2014). For a time, these policies redirected the federal government's focus and resources away from elite sport development to making sport more inclusive for marginalized populations (Te Hiwi 2014). It was in part due to a shift in policies that events like the NAIG and groups like the ASC were created (Te Hiwi 2014).

The ASC was founded in 1995 as Indigenous sport leaders lobbied Sport Canada, a branch of the federal government, to receive financial support specifically for Indigenous sport. Leaders identified obstacles preventing the inclusion of both Indigenous athletes and coaches in the Canadian mainstream system (King 2015). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), published in 1996, examined the living conditions of Indigenous people in Canada both on and off-reserve. The study found that Indigenous people did not just participate in sport for fun or competition, "rather, [sport was] central to individual and collective well-being, especially for youth" (Forsyth 2020, 118).

While federal sport policy moved away from a focus on elite sport, Willie Littlechild, one of the visionaries behind NAIG, believed that "elite-level sport competitions provided Aboriginal people with a unique opportunity to demonstrate, in a positive way, their social, cultural and political distinctiveness from Canadian society" (Forsyth and Wamsley 2006, 309). What is important to emphasize here is that elite sport would be on Indigenous terms, rather than Euro-Canadian terms. As we will see, this started to shift in some ways with the formation of the NAHC, which pursues elite sport on Indigenous terms. Still, organizers also see it as a bridge for their athletes to be recognized within the broader hockey community.

Alex Nelson, a founding member of the ASC, suggested the metaphor of the double helix to describe the policy relationship between Indigenous and mainstream sport in Canada (Forsyth and Paraschak 2013). Structurally, the framework of the double helix was used by Nelson to describe the “broader goals for self-determination” (269-70) through sport and with those connections between the two sport systems. With the formation of the ASC came the Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies (P/TASBs) within each province and territory, which would guide the ASC, thus giving the organization a grassroots localized approach (Forsyth 2020).

The TRC, whose recommendations were presented in 2015, exposes the use of sport as a method of assimilation at residential schools by the Canadian state (Forsyth 2020). Forsyth and Wamsley state, “during the period extending from the late 1880s to 1950s the Indian Act prohibited Native Canadian peoples from participating in their Indigenous physical cultural practices, including ceremonial dances and traditional gatherings” (2006, 297). An event like the NAHC counters this program of assimilationist sport policy that attempts to push Indigenous athletes into the mainstream. Countering is done in two direct ways: first, the organizers limit who can participate in the championships to those who can prove Indigeneity; and second, as will be discussed in chapter three, the event focuses not purely on competition but also on creating positive experiences and the desire for athletes to take pride in their Indigenous heritage.

## **2.2 « ASC/Sport Canada, NAHC/Hockey Canada »**

The NAHC is an event that requires multiple organizational bodies to come together for its success. To start, it brings together Sport Canada, the federal body responsible for national sport development, and the ASC, which helps to develop national sport policy and oversees select programming, such as the NAHC, for Indigenous people



in Canada. The relationship between ASC and Sport Canada aims to be one of equal partnership between mainstream and Indigenous sport in Canada; however, historically, this relationship has not been equal. For example, Sport Canada has, in the past, withheld funding from the ASC (Davis 2012). In addition, the NAHC requires cooperation between ASC and the P/TASBs, thus bringing together a national approach with those tailor-made for specific territories and provinces of Canada. Delving specifically into the NAHC provides one way to compare the ASC's approach and the P/TASBs' approach to sport. The final organization with which the NAHC must work is Hockey Canada, which sanctions the event but, beyond that, has not provided funding or guidance until more recent years.

In this context, one central question is what it means to have all these different sport bodies interacting with one another and how have those relationships transformed over time? These are not especially easy questions to answer when, in some cases, a lot of the information is dispersed or has disappeared completely. The approach I took to this analysis was both historical and comparative. It is historical insofar as I approach this chapter first through a chronological account to understand the precursors to the NAHC and how the NAHC has transformed into what it is today. Then I develop a comparative lens by examining how specific regional P/TASBs have approached recruitment and the issues on which they focus.

### **2.3 « History of the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships »**

The NAHC, since inception, has emphasized a hockey component on the ice and a cultural learning component off the ice. The organizers' goal is to expose Indigenous athletes to higher levels of hockey and provide them with an opportunity to be recognized

by junior and college level hockey scouts. As one team official stated in an interview, the aim is to “not to let hockey use you, but for you to use hockey.” Off the ice, athletes and coaches are exposed to cultural activities that they may or may not have experienced previously. While the championships aim to be a prestigious hockey event, unlike other hockey tournaments, the NAHC also aims to have a cultural impact on the athletes’ and coaches’ lives long after the championships finish. And indeed, both interviews and news articles on athletes involved in the event indicate the impact the tournament has had on their lives. For some athletes and coaches, this was their first overt experience being in an all-Indigenous environment that emphasized Indigenous cultures and heritage, which led them to reflect consciously about their history and background, especially as it related to sport.

The championships’ story of progression from inception in Akwesasne and Cornwall in 2002 to the most recent iteration in Whitehorse 2019 can be described as a story of perseverance from all involved, from team managers and coaches to tournament organizers. At a surface level, the championships follow an ebb and flow of finances: the championships struggle when finances are in a bad state and succeed when funding is available. But this is also a story of an event that succeeds even in times of financial difficulty thanks to dedicated organizers, and teams, who sacrifice their time to keep the NAHC afloat. It is a story of an event that should survive on its own merits, being a high-level Hockey Canada sanctioned event. Still, it has not received the same support as other age equivalent non-Indigenous championships, like the Under-18 national club tournaments, the Telus Cup or Esso Cup. My goal is to delve into not only the financial

side but also chronicle the history of the NAHC and how organizers have dealt with moments of instability.

With the founding of the ASC in 1995, there was a growing interest in creating high-performance athletic programs for Indigenous athletes and coaches. They created the National Aboriginal High-Performance Training Camp, which early on, focused on basketball in 1999 and 2000 and volleyball in 2001 (King 2015). Organizers found there was a substantial discrepancy in talent between provinces and territories, which meant either leaving many regions underrepresented, not represented, or not having a high-performance program. Interested in a sport with more national parity, organizers began discussions in 1999 about creating a high-performance program focused on hockey. By 2001 the first high-performance program was created. Their guiding notion was that hockey was the most well-represented by high-performing Indigenous athletes in Canada.

With ASC's interest in a high-performance hockey program, Ojibwe of Garden River First Nation NHL head coach Ted Nolan approached the ASC in 2000 to identify the best male First Nations, Métis, and Inuit hockey players. Nolan's goal was to form Team Indigenous that would travel to Finland and participate in the Under-20 Universal Players Tournament in Tampere, Finland. Nolan's desire in creating Team Indigenous was to "help improve morale among Aboriginal youth who . . . face high suicide rates and other social problems in their communities" (Barnsley 2000). Ted Nolan signed a memorandum of understanding with the ASC to scout athletes for Team Indigenous through the incipient NAHC (Barnsley 2002a). One organizer described Team Indigenous as perfect timing since the cohort of Indigenous hockey players was significant from a skill standpoint and had "fallen into our lap" and provided role models

for many Indigenous athletes to follow. Team Indigenous ended up being a one-off team. Still, it did have the likes of future Cree NHL leading goal scorer, Jonathan Cheechoo, as well as other notable athletes like Inuit player Terence Tootoo, the older brother of Jordin Tootoo (who would become the first Inuit NHL player). Following the 2000 Team Indigenous, there have been periodic discussions of forming additional teams, but other than a one-off Bantam AAA team sent to participate in a tournament in Switzerland in 2013, there has not been any other Team Indigenous on an international level for hockey. A significant barrier for Team Indigenous is the cost. While there have been discussions with the ASC about sending a Team Indigenous to events more regularly, it is difficult to secure funding to enter such events.

There was an obvious oversight with Ted Nolan's Team Indigenous as it was focused on male hockey. Something that became apparent as the championships evolved was the importance of equal opportunity for both the male and female teams, but during these early iterations, there was a clear focus on the male side of hockey. This was not just a problem for Indigenous hockey, but hockey more generally has had a definite gender imbalance that, still, to this day has yet to be truly solved. However, as will be seen, the championships have made great strides to improve on what is a definite flaw within hockey nationally.

Part of the desire to create Team Indigenous came with interest in entering the Canada Games. Canada Games are a biennial multi-sport event that brings together provincial and territorial regions, like the Olympics but on a national rather than international scale. Organizers of the high-performance programs saw a means to enter the Canada Games and give many Indigenous athletes in regions where Indigenous youth

are underrepresented a chance to compete. However, a number of provinces and territories where Indigenous athletes make up a sizeable portion of their team refused to release their Indigenous athletes to participate on Team Indigenous, thus making it impossible to form Team Indigenous. As one organizer described, for other regions, they may have one Indigenous athlete, but for the most part, Indigenous athletes were not well represented at the Canada Games.

Ted Nolan's Team Indigenous also became the impetus in the creation of the yearly NAHC all-star teams, which existed within the championships between 2002 and 2009. These all-star teams selected the best 17 male and 17 female athletes at the end of the championships to participate in a high-level summer hockey camp hosted by Ted Nolan (Abrams 2002).

Although the ASC had planned to host the inaugural NAHC in Akwesasne, the location of the ASC offices at the time, there was outside interest to host. By 2001, several individuals had voiced interest in hosting the NAHC, so ASC organizers created a bidding package whereby regions could apply to host the inaugural 2002 championships. At this point, P/TASBs were not tied to the bidding process, though P/TASB involvement became a requirement in later years, and in many cases, it came down to individuals interested in hosting the event. The bid package, a mixture of the Canada Games and Arctic Games bidding paperwork, was faxed to individuals in regions the ASC thought might be interested; however, no region submitted a bid to host. To bid for the NAHC today requires P/TASB support, but during the early period of the championships it was predominantly individuals gathering up the local community members to host. Thus, the ASC, as had been initially planned, hosted both the 2002 and 2003 championships in

Akwesasne and Cornwall, Ontario. Akwesasne was a perfect fit due to community support, as well as receiving sponsors from a variety of areas for the first two years. For example, the championships had a budget of around \$100,000, which came from four major sponsors, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous corporations, providing \$25,000 each (Cott Beverages Canada, Iroquois Water, Akwesasne Petroleum Co-Op, and the Government of Canada) (Barnsley 2002b).

Akwesasne was to be the testing ground for future NAHC events, where the organizers would be able to iron out potential problems in an environment where they had a lot of support from the surrounding community. Showcasing it where the ASC offices were located meant the organizers had both an understanding of logistics and could resolve problems that might arise during this process. For organizers, this was a proud moment when Indigenous athletes who usually would not receive support would be able to showcase their talents both to Indigenous communities throughout Canada and, to some extent, to the wider hockey world.

The press conference to announce the inaugural championships was held at the A'nowara'ko:wa Arena on Akwesasne Mohawk Territory on December 4<sup>th</sup> 2001 (Barnsley 2002a). A'nowara'ko:wa Arena was a state-of-the-art arena designed in the shape of a turtle that held 2,500 spectators (Barnsley 2002a). Attending the official announcement for the inaugural championships was former Mohawk Olympian Alwyn Morris, Ojibwe NHL head coach Ted Nolan, as well as Akwesasne Grand Chief Mike Mitchell who announced that, "it is with great pride and enthusiasm that we accept the honour of hosting the first-ever National Aboriginal Hockey Championships. . . . We join with our neighbors, the city of Cornwall, to welcome all participants and spectators to our

territory, knowing that for all involved that this will be an experience of a lifetime” (Barnsley 2002a). Furthermore, the championship’s combination of hockey and cultural events was a central organizing principle from the beginning when Alwyn Morris stated that, “this event is unlike other hockey tournaments as it will offer a unique blend of high-performance competition in a strong supportive cultural environment” (Barnsley 2002a).

The inaugural championships consisted of six male and six female teams, with some provinces and territories planning to participate in future championships. The first teams were Team New Brunswick, Team Eastern Door and North (region of Quebec), Team Ontario North, Team Ontario South, Team Manitoba, and Team Saskatchewan. While hockey was considered the most equal sport talent-wise between regions, there were still relatively large skill gaps, particularly on the female side of the championship. To partially rectify this problem, organizers decided that female teams could have up to five over-agers between the ages of 19 and 21 (Barnsley 2002a). Teams were encouraged to have a combination of older and younger athletes where older athletes could help mentor younger athletes for future championships. On the male side, athletes who had played more than ten major junior or college games were ineligible to play. The justification was that the tournament was there to support developing athletes and to bring them recognition; athletes already participating in major junior or college hockey did not require that support and recognition.

As with the first championships, the second was held in Akwesasne and Cornwall. Alongside the championships was the selection for the third annual National Aboriginal High-Performance Hockey Camp, which subsequently took place in Ottawa (Laskaris

2003). The all-star team was larger this time with twenty-three female and twenty-three male athletes selected for the camp at the University of Ottawa to “hone their skills under the tutelage of Olympic and national level coaches” (Laskaris 2003). The boys' team went on to play a Junior B team that they bested and then lost to a team of players from various Major Junior teams (Laskaris 2003). On the female side, the team played a AA Ottawa area team that they bested in two games, with scores of 3-2 and 9-2. Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi and former NHL player John Chabot coached the male team, while Wally Kozak, a non-Indigenous assistant coach for the Canadian women’s national team in the 2002 Olympics, coached the female side (Laskaris 2003). It was clear early on that there was interest from elite level hockey to support the event, and it was also evident at this point that Indigenous hockey players could hold their own against high-level non-Indigenous players.

The ASC’s goal of regions with P/TASB support hosting the championships was achieved with tournaments held in Prince George, British Columbia in 2004, Miramichi, New Brunswick in 2005, and Kahnawake, Quebec in 2006. This period saw growth of the championships from a media perspective, with Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) broadcasting the gold medal games (Zary 2006). Furthermore, there was more recognition from elite hockey with the involvement of former and current Indigenous and non-Indigenous hockey players (Zary 2006). For instance, the first Inuit NHL player Jordin Tootoo became an ambassador to the 2004 games (Clarke 2004), and Algonquin and former NHL player Gino Odjick from Kitigan Zibi and Team Canada non-Indigenous Olympic goalie Kim St-Pierre attended the championships in 2006 (Meagher 2006). Tootoo, taking on the role of ambassador, stated, “this is a huge deal for



[A]boriginal youngsters out there. . . . I know when I was growing up I always wanted to go to tournaments and this is where you can get noticed. It's always great to have the [A]boriginal kids out and about and staying out of trouble. This is one event where you can gather a lot of youth and have a great time, and I think that's what it's all about" (Clarke 2004a).

As the tournament expanded to different venues, regional hosts grappled with new problems. The 2004 championships in Prince George struggled to find enough volunteers and sponsorships (Clarke 2004b). The Prince George Spruce Kings, the local Junior A team, provided off-ice officials to help with the championship; however, there were difficulties filling the 6000 seat arena with spectators, at times resulting in a sparse looking crowd (Clarke 2004b). In leaving Akwesasne, this was also the first time the championships had been in a non-Indigenous community, which produced its own set of problems with many teams feeling as though they did not receive particularly good treatment with hotel and travel accommodations.

In the period 2004 to 2006, the competitive balance had not been found. It was a period of growth with more teams entering the championships, resulting in an average of eight male and eight female teams participating. The female teams were beginning to become equal talent-wise, which meant the championships could pull back the over-age rule from twenty-one down to nineteen. However, with this growth came problems of unequal treatment between male and female teams. For example, male teams received better timeslots for their games, higher quality refereeing, and better uniforms than the female teams. In response to this, during the 2005 Championships, ASC emphasized gender equality in future bid packages and rulesets for the championships.

Although this may have been an issue that emerged right from the beginning, it was also clear by 2004 that certain teams, like Team Ontario South, held an advantage over some other teams. This partially depended upon the wealth and size of the population in the specific region. For example, a representative of Team Ontario South stated, “I think a lot of our kids play higher levels of hockey. . . . Most of our kids don’t play on reserves anymore. They’re going into cities and playing for teams at an AA or A level” (Laskaris 2004). This suggests a divide between what kind of training could be accessed, which also meant certain athletes from wealthier backgrounds were potentially able to participate in the championships while other athletes could not.

There was also a clear differentiation in how much guidance athletes received from their teams. For example, Team British Columbia, for the 2005 championships, brought strength and conditioning coaches and nutritionists to the championship (Laskaris 2005). Coaches involved at the time state that while some players already had this luxury in minor hockey, others on the same team did not. This differentiation of experiences in hockey environments is developed further in the following two chapters, where seemingly simple problems, like where an athlete is from, can lead to rifts for the athletes and coaching staff. Overall, the 2005 event seemed to be a success and had its first team from the territories, Team Northwest Territories, involved in the tournament. The final game had 1400 spectators at the Miramichi Civic Centre (“Adams Misses . . .” 2005). Momentum for the championships continued to grow, and as one organizer described, the Kahnawake, Quebec event was their best one since moving away from ASC hosting to regional hosts.

Between 2007 and 2009, the championships were relatively stable from an organizational standpoint; however, throughout my research, hints of financial problems were ever-present for athletes and teams. At the 2008 Sault St. Marie championship, Team Alberta's female team head coach stated that their top forward could not participate for financial reasons (Laskaris 2008). Something that I also repeatedly found in my interviews was the emphasis that hockey might be a means to an end, but not an end in itself. Team Alberta Female did not let two of their top defense participate in 2008 as they did not provide letters of good academic standing (Laskaris 2008). Crier, the head coach, stated that "schooling is the most important thing. . . . None of my kids are going to get paid to play in the NHL" (Laskaris 2008).

Following the 2009 championships, the tournament started to display outward struggles, with difficulty finding a host for the 2010 event (Laskaris 2009). Whereas in previous years, the announcement of the next host followed the end of the final gold medal game, in 2009 there was no future event announcement for 2010. Financially hosts struggled to afford the cost of banquets and other features of the event beyond the games. The championships were still not receiving the regional support required to run, such as cities stepping up to provide ice-time for free or at a significantly reduced cost. There were rumours that the championships would be in Atlantic Canada, but uncertainty carried on for months, and by October 2009, the bidding process for the event reopened. These bids were expected to be evaluated a month later; however, a suitable host never emerged. This meant that once again, the ASC would have to host the championships in order for it to be played in 2010. As a result, the tournament was hosted by the ASC in Ottawa, where its head offices were then located.

With the host announcement coming so late, P/TASBs were worried that adequate teams could not be formed in such a relatively short period of time. For example, Team Alberta's manager Danny Buffalo stated, "I don't think it's going to be as good as other years" (Laskaris 2010), due to their team not being able to host their annual December camps where they could evaluate top talent during a period of downtime for most minor leagues. Team Alberta's evaluation camp was pushed to January, and they noted that their roster for 2010 would be young compared to previous championships (Laskaris 2010). The shortened period also left certain teams in more of a financial bind than usual. In the case of Team New Brunswick, the 2010 championship was marked by a financial struggle with an approximate cost of \$50,000 to send a male and female team to the championship (Barrett 2010). The team raised half, but they were left struggling to find the remaining \$26,000; this shortfall came as sponsorships fell through, and this was also a period of economic downturn for Canada nationally (Barrett 2010).

While it looked as though the NAHC had weathered the storm of uncertainty over hosts following 2010, it became clear that finding a 2011 host would also be an arduous task. Media speculation suggested that struggles to find a host were tied to finances, and most hosts were breaking even at best, some were even incurring a deficit. One organizer stated that "I think it's a championship that has a lot of costs associated with it. . . . That's probably why regions are hesitant to host it" (Laskaris 2011a). Like 2010, deadlines for bids were extended with no region coming forward to host. Eventually, the Saskatoon Tribal Council, who was interested in hosting the 2012 championships, agreed to host the 2011 event so long as they could also host in 2012 (Laskaris 2011b). Organizers in

Saskatoon felt that they would run at a loss in the first year but would be able to make up the shortfall by the second year.

This period was also a struggle for the ASC itself. The ASC had lost its federal funding in 2011 due to various issues of “financial mismanagement and governance issues” (Davis 2012). According to one source, the ASC had been struggling with financial issues for at least four years previously and the ASC had received \$634,000 in funding from Sport Canada during the 2010-11 fiscal year, but in 2011-12 they received no financial support (Davis 2012). The absence of the ASC was a massive blow to the NAHC administratively, as the ASC provided support and oversight to the organizers, for example, fostering relationships with Hockey Canada and ensuring insurance was covered year-to-year. Now more pressure would be placed upon the NAHC organizers and P/TASBs to fill in gaps with ASC out of the equation. This meant organizers had to place more responsibility on the hosts for organizational support and administrative support which included now dealing solely with the bidding process, working directly with Hockey Canada, along with numerous other relationships that now had to be done directly through NAHC organizers, without help of the ASC.

Ted Nolan’s all-star teams, which had ceased since the 2009 games, were replaced with APTN’s television show *Hit the Ice* for the 2012 games in Saskatoon (Desaulniers 2012). *Hit the Ice* was not outright associated with the championships but recruited athletes from it to participate in the show. Similar in some ways to the previous all-star games, Indigenous athletes were invited to a camp to be trained by high-level coaches, with the significant difference being that it was now a televised event.

When the 2015 NAHC in Halifax began, it is clear that media coverage was growing along with the championship itself. *The Chronicle Herald*, Halifax's largest newspaper, produced semi-regular articles on the championships throughout the week. Previous championships had media coverage, but it was mostly by a handful of dedicated writers associated with smaller newspapers and magazines. This event set the standard going forward for hosts where city support was vital, which could mean offering ice time for free or providing city workers as volunteers. It was also at this period that NAHC became a means of gauging interest in other Indigenous events, like NAIG, for city and community officials.

Along with the championship being in Halifax for the first time also came problems of costs for teams. This phenomenon is not uncommon for the championships; when the event is located in far east or west regions of the country, travel costs can balloon for teams in the opposite regions. For example, Team Alberta Female had 23 players make the roster, but only 18 were able to pay the \$2,000 fee to participate in the tournament (Laskaris 2015). To save money, Team Alberta downsized on various amenities for the athletes, like moving from rooms for two athletes to rooms for four athletes. On the male side, athletes were expected to pay \$2,500, \$500 more than the female side, as they received additional practice sessions and meals, and were accommodated in double rooms (Laskaris 2015).

The 2017 championships in Cowichan, British Columbia was significant as that was the moment when the Turtle Island Cup was born. Before the Turtle Island Cup, organizers had a more traditional hockey trophy given to the teams annually, but with the importance of emphasizing the NAHC as an Indigenous event, officials from Team

British Columbia approached Carey Newman, an artist who had done work for NAIG previously (DeWolfe 2019), to fashion a new trophy. The Turtle Island Cup was incredible to see as both a trophy and a piece of art. Locked into two cases, the cup was treated with as much reverence at the championships as the Stanley Cup. The head of British Columbia's P/TASB, Rick Brant, explained that while teams do not get to take the cup home, "[t]he legacy of this work will be the tremendous sense of pride that players, organizations, and communities across Canada will share as a result of being able to bring home their own replica of the Turtle Island Cup" (DeWolfe 2019).

The 2018 championship was held in the Mi'kmaq community of Membertou, Nova Scotia. These championships were significant as it was the first time ASC had been directly involved with the NAHC since the financial controversies of 2011-12. It meant that the NAHC would have extra support, whether in the form of administrative support or volunteers that they had lost in the preceding years. At the opening ceremonies, Membertou Chief Terry Paul welcomed visitors, stating, "this is our home and for the next week it is your home – you are welcome here" (Jala 2018). Entering this tournament, Gerald McPhee, the co-chair of the host community, expected the championships would have a \$1.2 million benefit locally. The hosts spent approximately \$150,000 to host, of which most money went to the transportation of teams from Halifax to Sydney, Nova Scotia because the only team that had direct flights to Sydney was Team Manitoba (Googoo 2018).

This tournament was held a month after the Humboldt Broncos bus collision in Saskatchewan, which saw 16 Bronco team members killed and another 13 injured. Team Saskatchewan players wrapped themselves in a Humboldt Broncos flag and participated

in a team prayer before every game, showing their alignment with the widespread grieving that Canadians felt after the bus crash. However, they also entered the championship with “CB” stickers on their helmets to honour Colten Boushie, an Indigenous man who was fatally shot by a white man who was subsequently acquitted (“Team Honours Colten Boushie . . .” 2018). Bringing the symbolism of these two Saskatchewan events together – the senseless loss of the majority of a team of white hockey players, and the equally senseless loss of an Indigenous man at the hands of a white man – highlights the team’s sense of community with a team of majority-white players and, at the same time, recognizes their ongoing struggles with racism in Canada.

Similar to previous tournaments, Membertou had its fair share of iconic Indigenous hockey players, like former Ojibwe of Berens River First Nation NHL all-star Reggie Leach who discussed how “all First Nation communities across the country are all different. . . . They each have their own personality and for them to come out here and visit Sydney and Membertou, it is a great experience for everybody” (Mansfield 2018). This was a proud moment for the community as Chief Terry Paul expressed: “We are proud to be hosts. . . . It showcases Membertou, it showcases Mi’kmaq and Unama’kik and the Atlantic” (Mansfield 2018), exemplifying the importance the NAHC has in inviting Indigenous people from around the country.

The 2019 championship in Whitehorse, Yukon that I attended was the first time the tournament had been held north of the 60<sup>th</sup> parallel. There was a lot of optimism coming into the tournament with hosts predicting that the event could bring in \$1.4 million and that this type of impact in the communities has led to what NAHC organizer Jeff Spencer calls, “international-quality bids” (“Puck drops. . .” 2019). For the hosts,



their bidding process emphasized the fact that the championship had never before been held in the north as well as their goal of integrating Indigenous cultural activities into the event (Tonin 2019). The other major reason it was possible to host in the north was the host's ability to procure sponsorships through Air North, a Whitehorse based airline, who were able to charter flights from various areas of Canada in an easier fashion than usual (Tonin 2019). Without the contribution of Air North with chartered flights the logistics of holding the tournament in the north would have been much more difficult.

The championship went relatively smoothly, until the final day of the tournament when it turned out that Team Alberta had booked flights to leave on the day of the gold medal game. Team Alberta's male team qualified for the gold medal game following their 6-4 semi-final win over Team Manitoba. However, because Team Alberta would not be able to play at the scheduled time, Team Manitoba, who played for bronze earlier that Sunday morning, ended up playing for gold against Team Saskatchewan after the ASC removed Team Alberta from the championship (Hopkins-Hill 2019).

## 2.4 « A Multi-Provincial/Territorial Team History – The Case of Team North »

The idea of creating a multi-territorial team was not new when Team North formed in 2012. Team Atlantic, a team that had existed in various forms since 2005, had combined talent pools by bringing together the Maritime provinces alongside Newfoundland and Labrador. The success of Team Atlantic, forming a competitive team at the NAHC, became a significant motivation behind the push towards the creation of Team North. In 2005, the first territory to be represented at the championship was the Northwest Territories, and the result of having such a small pool of athletes from which to choose was many lopsided scores against them. Team Nunavut entered the

championship in 2006 and ended up with similar results to that of Team Northwest Territories. Thus, there was a clear motive and precedent in creating a multi-territorial team that would have a better shot at being competitive at the championship. It was not that these territories could not individually show up and win – Team Nunavut defeated Team Newfoundland and Team Atlantic in the 2009 championship – but that they could bring consistency to their program with a larger pool of athletes from which to recruit. The formation of Team North did improve fortunes for the team, and in 2016 the male team was able to win the silver medal in Mississauga/Toronto.

As one organizer described to me, in a perfect world, all the regions would be well represented with their own provinces or territories, but beyond that, multi-region teams are a must if all regions of the country are to be represented currently. In fact, there was at least one instance where Cree nations in the Quebec region, which make up Team EDN, discussed the creation of their own Team North, separate from the Mohawks of the Eastern Door. This proposal did not get very far as, while Team EDN was successful having won a gold medal, there were only approximately eight Cree players on that team. The split would have had the potential to hurt competitive balance at the championships where Team EDN was Team Ontario South's major competition in the early years of the NAHC.

In July 2019, an announcement was made that put Team North's future into jeopardy (McCarthy 2019). The Aboriginal Sports Circle of the Northwest Territories' (ASCNWT) 2020-25 Strategic Plan suggests a push towards maintaining traditional sport with a cultural component ("Strategic Plan 2020-2025"). When examining the strategic plan alongside their Annual Report (2019), it becomes clear that with a budget of \$1

million, it is difficult to justify devoting \$150,000 to a single weeklong championship. For example, to accommodate around 2000 athletes for the Northern and Dene Games costs around \$92,000 in contrast to the nearly \$200,000 it cost for around 40 participants of the 2018 NAHC in Membertou (“Annual Report 2018/2019” 2019). ASCNWT desired to provide for a larger group of Indigenous youth, which would be more difficult with so much funding going to Team North.

This announcement did not mean the story is over for Team North. While they were not expected to be at the 2020 championship in Regina, Saskatchewan, there is a road forward to bring Team North back together in the future. In February 2020, Team North announced they had secured funding and that they would be going to Regina for the 2020 NAHC. However, by March 2020, the Regina championships were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## 2.5 « The Future of the Championships – A Model for Other Indigenous Championships »

A theme that came through in various interviews was the ability for Indigenous athletes to attend not just this tournament, but to participate in organized hockey. Several interviews suggested a desire by a lot of Indigenous youth to participate in hockey, but financial reasons hold them back. However, it was also suggested that it is not just a financial problem but also that communities need to support youth in their endeavours. Money is obviously essential for travel, ice time, and other factors; however, if Indigenous communities are unable to receive more direct funding for sport it can mean the only option to pursue higher levels of competition is to leave communities and be away from family. It is not uncommon in general for high-level athletes to leave their communities, but in the case of Indigenous athletes, it is more often than not their only

choice and with that choice, as discussed in chapter 3, come problems of isolation and racism for Indigenous athletes.

For athletes interested in participating in the NAHC, there are various barriers to entry. The financial barrier varies by region, and the cost can range from \$1500 to \$3000 per athlete to attend, depending on how their P/TASB funds their teams. Furthermore, athletes may need to seek funding from their local communities, such as from their band, or sponsorships from private entities. Hockey generally carries with it a more significant cost contrasted with other sports due to the cost of equipment and access to ice time, which is limited.

The ASC's strategic plan, as a non-profit, aims to provide a national voice for Indigenous sport and to ensure access to sport for Indigenous people. Their goal is also to make sure that the needs of Indigenous people are met and include training leaders for Indigenous sport. In section 2.05 of the ASC's 2015-2020 strategic plan, the ASC uses the NAHC as a model for future championships with sports like softball, soccer, and golf ("Strategic Plan 2015-2020," 5). The NAHC, similar to NAIG, has the potential to be the framework for national championships that other sports can follow. Learning from the growing pains seen in the history of the NAHC may help other sports to achieve success.

The history of the championships has not been linear growth; it is an event with ebbs and flows and has persevered, nonetheless. In times when finances have been tight, organizers find workarounds. Where the ebbs might be one step back, the championships' progress forward has brought it to the point of being an important event for Indigenous hockey players and the larger hockey community. Coming to the attention of external junior and college scouting is still location-dependent, with higher scout numbers when

the championships are in eastern Canada. Still, no matter where the championships are held, it is an event for Indigenous athletes to receive recognition for their skills and leadership both on and off the ice.

## Chapter 3

### 3 « Coaching at the NAHC »

The day-to-day struggles Indigenous youth face can be glossed over, even in an event like the NAHC. For coaches, the championships represent not just a game but a “love for kids, a love for youth, a love for Indigenous youth, and breaking barriers, socially,” as one organizer and former coach described. But hockey is just a sport, and Indigenous youth must go on with their lives following the championships. While many athletes at the event come from stable environments, that is not always the case, and, for some athletes involved, the championships are a means to escape difficult situations, if only briefly, and gain mentors through their coaches.

One of my participants recounted the story of a player, Chris, that resonated with some of the other coaches’ comments about the lives of their team members. Chris, an exceptional hockey player, was drafted in by a Canadian Hockey League (CHL) team. He had his off-ice struggles but was committed to and excelled at the game, nonetheless. Chris had struggled in his first and only season of CHL hockey, playing five games as a rookie before being sent down. As the NAHC rolled around, Chris, was eligible to play for his region’s team. However, problems arose that year when his region was not able to ice a team for a number of reasons, which meant Chris’s chance to play was in limbo. However, rules stipulated that players could move to the next region to play if their region did not have a team. So, the neighbouring region came knocking, interested in a player that coaches felt could be a role model to the other athletes and a great player on the ice.

Chris was not in particularly good game shape at the time, having spent time away from the game the previous months, but came into the event with a great attitude and a solid presence on the ice. A former team representative described him as “a good leader on and off the ice.”

Six months after the championships, the team representative received a phone call bringing news that Chris had passed away. It was a massive blow to the Indigenous hockey community to lose such a young life and potential future leader within Indigenous hockey. Chris’s parents did not step foot into a hockey rink for years until the NAHC came to their region. During the opening ceremonies, there was a tribute to Chris, and the NAHC had all the players from the most recent iteration of his team sign a jersey, which was then given to Chris’s parents. During one of the opening games of the championships, Chris’s parents had come to the arena but did not want to leave the lobby for the rink. As the representative told me this story, I could hear his choked-up voice as he described his interaction with Chris’s parents, but also as he thought back to a young life lost. In the end, Chris’s parents did enter the rink and received an ovation from people in the stands as well as athletes on the ice as the game had been paused for their entrance.

It is important not to get wrapped up in creating essentialist stories that label every Indigenous hockey player as having a story of tragedy tied to them. However, there were a couple of stories in a similar vein to Chris’s. The championships may open doors for Indigenous athletes. Still, something that cannot be ignored is inter-generational colonial and racist trauma that many Indigenous athletes face and its long-term impact. In many of these circumstances, coaches can be protectors and mentors for athletes,

providing them with a reprieve from otherwise difficult life situations, but hockey will not solve systemic racism and settler colonialism. Stories like Chris's were in the back of the minds of Indigenous coaches at the NAHC.

This chapter explores three critical aspects of coaching: institutional policies that constrain coaches' ability to coach at the championships, recruitment of athletes and coaches, and experiences and approaches to coaching at the championships. A vital component to any competitive organized hockey team is a coaching staff to organize and train athletes off the ice and to prepare them on the ice. Coaches at the NAHC are involved in a wide range of activities, such as recruiting players, designing practices, and building team chemistry. However, coaches at the NAHC also take on a variety of unique roles not highlighted in mainstream hockey. For example, many coaches emphasize mentorship, which goes beyond coaching athletes at the event to include the long-term process of working with them to develop as people. As one coach told me, "we weren't just coaches, but female mentors and we wanted to coach them on the ice but prepare them off the ice." Not all coaches interviewed framed this as mentoring. Yet, in my view, most coaches saw mentoring as part of their role, as mentorship was a common theme in many interviews implicitly, if not explicitly.

At the NAHC, my interactions with coaches were primarily through interviews and informal discussions, usually after morning meetings or around the rink. Interviews varied from one coach to another, with some coaches providing very matter-of-fact responses to questions with little deviation from what was explicitly asked. Other coaches elaborated and brought in a lot of their own experiences, both as hockey players and coaches. The coaches interviewed came from a wide variety of backgrounds with varying



levels of experience with the NAHC. For some, Whitehorse was the first time they had had a role in the event and even their first experience with Indigenous hockey tournaments. For others, Whitehorse represented one of many times that they had participated in the championships, with some going back to the event's inception in 2002. These differing degrees of familiarity provided an array of accounts of the experience of being at an event that ties hockey and Indigeneity together.

### 3.1 « Policies and Institutions »

The impact settler colonial structures have on Indigenous people in Canada and, in this case, sport, was recognizable within the NAHC. Patrick Wolfe's (2006) statement that "settler colonization is a structure rather than an event" (390) is a fruitful way of thinking about how Indigenous coaches and their teams must manage those structures that continue to impact Indigenous people. The NAHC and teams aim to briefly shield their athletes from the impacts of settler colonial structures, especially in more recent years. For example, team managers deal with much of the athletes' identification process; however, colonialist structures' impact remains pervasive even in an Indigenous hockey tournament. This chapter will examine, from a coaching perspective, institutional constraints, approaches to recruitment, and approaches to coaching. Coaching at the NAHC requires the ability to navigate through a system designed, historically, to erase Indigenous people through forms of assimilation. Furthermore, many coaches must navigate through not just an under-delivery of programs, such as proper coach training and credentialing, but also a system in which racism continues to exist and has made

hockey inaccessible to many Indigenous people in both rural and urban regions of Canada.

In Canada, as of 2014, 8.8% of the general population and 18.7% of Indigenous people living off-reserve fall into the low-income bracket. (“A Backgrounder on Poverty in Canada” 2016). Economic disparity plays an integral part in the role in the unequal treatment of Indigenous people; however, by examining just the economic side is to look at a symptom rather than systemic causes.

Robidoux’s (2004) examination of hockey in southern Alberta exemplifies how it is not just under-delivery that causes problems for Indigenous athletes and teams, but outright systemic racism. In this instance, the Kainai Minor Hockey (First Nations Hockey Association) was removed from Foothills League in southern Alberta. Arguments for their removal revolved around claims, by settlers, of violence and harassment which explicitly ignored the racism and harassment directed at First Nations athletes and their parents, and transformed the predominantly Euro-Canadian families into victims to justify removing Kainai from Foothills League. Sadly, this is not a unique story within Canadian hockey, and there have been a number of similar stories in recent years such as in 2018 when a Junior B league in Manitoba reformed without the First Nations team (Malone 2018) or in 2019 when Beardy’s Blackhawks, the only AAA First Nations hockey program in Canada, were replaced by a non-First Nations team in the Saskatchewan Hockey Association (Provost 2019). These are not simple stories of under-delivery, but stories of outright exclusion and systemic racism.

Solving systemic racism is not a simple policy reform away, but there are potential solutions to some of these problems, namely in allowing Indigenous run

organizations to receive direct funding to strengthen self-determination. However, as of 2020, this is not being done, for example “[t]he Aboriginal Sport Circle received \$800,000 for 2017-2018 from Sport Canada. . . . On the other hand, Right To Play’s programs received \$1.5 million over four years from the Ontario government — and an additional \$2 million from private sponsors — to offer programming in Ontario alone” (Giles and van Luijk 2018). Right To Play, the “only named organization in this category in the 2018 federal budget” (Giles and van Luijk 2018), is an international non-profit organization that provides support for vulnerable children globally through the ability to participate in sport. Programs like Right To Play carry with them a lot of baggage as they do not take into account local populations and are arguably another form of colonialism operationalized through neoliberal development (Darnell and Hayhurst 2012; Giles and van Luijk 2018).

The federal government’s emphasis on non-Indigenous organizations being used to fund Indigenous sport also goes against the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 90, which states:

*We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing:*

- i. In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples.*
- ii. An elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes.*

- iii. *Programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that are culturally relevant for Aboriginal peoples.*
- iv. *Anti-racism awareness and training programs.*

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015)

Providing funding to Right To Play, rather than to Indigenous-led organizations, means that Indigenous people are not working directly with federal, provincial, or territorial governments, but through intermediaries. Paraschak (2013) argues that “the sport structure for Aboriginal peoples in Canada provides a racialized, a racializing, and at times a racist sport space for Aboriginal peoples” (95). Thus, the relationship of the double helix, discussed in chapter two, used to describe Indigenous sport policy and parallel Canadian sport policy, has broken down. By providing indirect rather than direct funding to Indigenous organizations, the ASC’s double helix relationship with Sport Canada becomes a one-sided affair.

So, with the breakdown of the double helix relationship, settler colonial structures continue to have an influence on Indigenous hockey, and Indigenous sport generally. Wolfe (2006) contends that “[s]ettler colonialism destroys to replace” (388) through what he calls “the logic of elimination [which] can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into alienable individual freeholds, native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations” (388). Settler colonial logic of elimination can be observed in sport policy which positions Indigenous people as beneficiaries of benevolent federal

services, rather than allowing for Indigenous self-determination. Perceived colonial benevolence through sport is not new as evidenced in the examination by Te Hiwi and Forsyth (2017) of how in 1951 Indian Affairs toured an Indigenous youth hockey team from Pelican Lake School, a residential school infamous for its abuse of Indigenous youth, through southern Ontario to promote, to the media, the notion that residential schools were a net positive.

Essential characteristics of settler colonialism are the “displacing, spatially confining, and restricting mobilities [that] are pivotal strategies by which European settlers have disposed Indigenous peoples” (Norman et al. 2009, 113). Settler colonialism, and the way it pertains to sport policy in Canada, is troubling. Norman et al. argue that “contemporary Canadian sport policy is itself embedded within a logic of containment” (118). In other words, Indigenous people in Canada are restricted by settler colonial policy and Norman et al. argue that sport policy in Canada is a decidedly Euro-Western model that shapes Indigenous sport policy. For example, instead of directing at least some of the 2018 federal budget of \$50 million for Indigenous sport to Indigenous run organizations like the ASC, this funding earmarked by the federal government, over five years, is channelled to non-Indigenous organizations like Right To Play (Norman et al. 2019). This is a problematic example of a much larger funding package being provided to a global sport organization while ignoring national Indigenous organizations who want self-determination regarding sport. The lack of respect for self-determination is far from new, as Te Hiwi and Forsyth (2017) argue, “[s]port is never about sport alone; rather, it is a visible expression of the unequal power relations that structures relationships between different groups of people. Within the context of the Indian

residential school system, sport became the vehicle through which those unequal relations were reinforced” (83).

Forsyth and Heine (2008) researched Indigenous youth in inner-city Winnipeg. They showed how Euro-Canadian conceptions of sport and recreation, specifically that organized sport is the normalized form of recreation, does not take into consideration how Indigenous youth conceive of recreation. Forsyth and Heine point out that, “in spite of the infrastructural obstacles that they face, and in spite of their marginalization in the city’s dominant recreation landscape, Aboriginal youth have the ability to shape and create their own recreational landscapes and practices, particularly by constructing meaningful recreational spaces outside the area of recreation validated in dominant discourses that emphasize sports participation” (107). I believe it is important, when looking at how organizations like Right To Play are implemented, that they are not taking into consideration the populations they supposedly serve as their programs are “inflected towards a normalized understanding of engagement in organized sports as the most desirable form of recreational practice” (110).

### **3.2 « Coaching Credential System in Canada »**

Various institutional entities are involved in sport and coaching development in Canada. Sport Canada, as part of the Department of Canadian Heritage, “provides leadership and funding to help ensure a strong Canadian sport system which enables Canadians to progress from early sport experiences to high performance excellence” (“Role of Sport in Canada”). Programs funded include Canada’s Olympic program, Hockey Canada, and the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC). Important here is the CAC, which is the non-profit organization tasked by multiple stakeholders, including Sport Canada, provincial sport bodies, and corporate entities, with providing training and

certification for coaches in Canada. CAC's National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) began in conjunction with Sport Canada in 1974 ("Reinforcing the . . ." 2014).

The NCCP develop sport-specific coaching education and training programs for a wide range of sport associations in Canada. With the NCCP, there are three general streams of instruction a coach can take: "Community Sport," "Instruction," and "Competition." The streams of interest here are Community Sport and Competition which form the basis of the qualification on which an individual is eligible to become an assistant or head coach at the NAHC. Standard across these streams are the statuses of "Trained" and "Certified" as a means of assessing the level of coaching attained. For the NCCP, "Trained" means that a coach has completed the required training modules, whereas "Certified" means they have also completed the evaluation component via a field evaluation of their coaching ("Trained vs. Certified" n.d.).

To coach at the NAHC requires more than desire and commitment: it also requires a range of formal qualifications dependent upon whether the coaches in question aspire to be head coaches or assistant coaches. Head coaches at the NAHC are required to attain their "Development 1 Certified" status, and assistant coaches require "Coach 1 Certified." While Coach 1 Certified is relatively attainable, some regions struggle to produce Development 1 Certified coaches. There are a variety of differences in these two levels of training, a major one being that Development 1 Certified requires that an NCCP Field Evaluator observe a practice ("NCCP Levels and Requirements" n.d.). In populous regions like southern Ontario, arranging for observed practices is not a problem for interested coaches. However, in more remote areas and smaller provinces, coaches have difficulty obtaining access to field evaluators. Research by Edwards and Leadbetter

(2016), using New Brunswick as a case study, argues that a national credentialing program like the NCCP does not take into consideration regional differences in the amount of support available to implement certification programs. The difficulty of access to certifications has led to challenges, according to several coaches and managers I interviewed.

Currently, most teams involved with the NAHC either have the coaches in place or have contingency plans. For example, some teams have been provided exemptions for a specific number of years to have non-Indigenous coaches until an Indigenous coach can fill the role. However, the certification process may become problematic as some regions' coaches begin to retire, and one major question comes to mind: who replaces them? For example, one coach interviewed discussed the credentialing process and stated that there is an abundance of certified coaches currently in their province. However, coaches with the equivalent credentials had their certification grandfathered when Hockey Canada changed their levels of coaching certification in 2009. When implementing the new credentialing system in 2009, the process of grandfathering was the only way there was an abundance of coaches with the proper Development 1 Certified. However, due to a lack of field evaluators, especially in smaller regions, new coaches moving through the system have a difficult time receiving proper certifications to become a head coach. For at least one region, there is a comfort level and acceptance that, due to population levels, non-Indigenous coaches are the way they have to go for now, but for other regions where there are people interested in coaching but they unable to receive the training, it becomes problematic.



Beyond the standard NCCP certifications, all coaches at the NAHC are also required to complete the Aboriginal Coaching Modules (ACM). The ACM focus is mostly around Indigenous athletes off the field of play in three specific areas: *Holistic Approach to Coaching*, *Dealing with Racism in Sport*, and *Individual and Community Health and Wellness*. Objectives of the ACM include “coaching the whole person; coaching beyond the physical to include the mental (intellectual and emotional), spiritual and cultural” (“Aboriginal Coaching Modules” n.d.). Each module is described below:

*Module 1:*

*Holistic Approach to Coaching encompasses a holistic approach to coaching which includes topics such as creating a positive environment, the Medicine Wheel, a coaching perspective: physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual aspects, values (the Four Pillars), coach-to-community relationships.*

*Module 2:*

*Dealing with Racism in Sport encompasses issues on dealing with racism in sport including definitions that may be useful in the discussion of racism and knowing when to use the right word to describe what is happening in a certain situation, i.e. discrimination, racism, prejudice, stereotype, systemic discrimination. It also discusses how to respond to racism and the three choices of response, examples of coaches’ responses, organizational responses to racism, creating a positive environment, and coach-to-family relationships.*

*Module 3:*

*Individual and Community Health and Wellness encompasses topics on lifestyle, health, and nutrition, and how to be familiar with the unique lifestyle, health situations, and challenges that Aboriginal youth may face. Topics in this chapter include: understanding the community where you coach, mental health, personal and community health practices, diet and nutrition, health conditions and diseases, and influencing change*

(“Aboriginal Coaching Modules” n.d.).

From the foundation of the ASC, there was an interest by the organization to have the ACM integrated into the NCCP with the desire to ensure all coaches received education on being inclusive to Indigenous people (Forsyth 2020). While CAC provided funds to develop the manual, they did not make it a requirement of the NCCP, thus leaving the ASC to implement it alone (Forsyth 2020). This decision suggests not just a lack of commitment by the federal sport bodies of Canada to make sport safer for Indigenous athletes, but an outright marginalization of Indigenous athletes. What this move suggests is that only explicitly visible Indigenous events like the NAHC or the NAIG require these modules. CAC fails to recognize Indigenous athletes involved in mainstream sport in Canada and ignores the absolute damage that racism and cultural insensitivity can cause to an Indigenous athlete.

This damage was exemplified in 2017 when a recording surfaced revealing a Saskatchewan Midget AAA head coach berating the only Indigenous player on the team. The incident angered both the player’s family and the broader Indigenous community who felt that, while no racial slurs were uttered, the player was the target because of his Indigenous heritage (Yard 2017). Following the incident, in discussing the cultural

training and the ACM, Saskatoon Tribal Chief Mark Arcand stated, "if we're doing it as First Nations people, that's reconciliation for ourselves. Why can't other organizations do it? What are they afraid of? It's for the betterment" (Yard 2017). Jason Peters, CEO of Aboriginal Sport and Recreation New Brunswick, believes "the [ACM] should be offered to any coach that will come into contact with an Aboriginal athlete" (Yard 2017). These examples further underline the need for exposure to cultural training for coaches outside of explicitly Indigenous sporting environments; however, it also underlies the lack of commitment by non-Indigenous organizations to work with Indigenous organizations.

Connecting back to Robidoux (2004), it is evident that the rural/urban division is not a good determination of access to sport for Indigenous people, as even where facilities are available, systemic racism continues to be a barrier. Forsyth (2014) points out that "[t]he lack of baseline data is compounded by a common misconception that there are more, and more affordable, opportunities for sport in urban areas. While this is true to some degree because competitive, organized sport usually requires the types of resources found in cities – from specialized facilities to high quality equipment and certified coaching, as well as a broad range of sport sciences to assist with athlete development – it is mostly individuals and families from middle- and upper-class backgrounds who can afford to engage in sport on a regular basis" (217). Furthermore, Forsyth also suggests that in Canada an emphasis on "middle-class values and approaches to sport" (219) may not fit the needs or desires of Indigenous youth in the inner-city areas. However, it is valuable to contextualize how, and possibly find an explanation as to why, rural and more isolated regions do not receive services like field evaluators. One way to contextualize this is by recognizing that a higher percentage of the Indigenous

population lives in rural areas as compared to the rural percentage of the general population. Furthermore, while it is important to recognize the differences between rural and urban experience, it is also vital to recognize that access to sport is not a guarantee and that class also plays a strong role in who can participate in sport, especially hockey where cost of entry is high.

In the NAHC, teams from small regions fear that as older Indigenous coaches retire, there will not be a younger group of Indigenous coaches with Certification to replace them. However, simply focusing on under-delivery does not get to the core of the problem which is systemic racism and settler colonial structures. What is recognizable is that both urban and rural Indigenous people face exclusionary actions and that while they are different in nature—no access due to isolation in contrast with no access due to explicit barriers of entry—what underlies both the rural and urban Indigenous sporting experience is the denial of self-determination.

### 3.3 « Team Recruitment »

The way that coaches recruit their teams is very region dependent. The history of the championships presented in the previous chapter demonstrates how most teams define themselves in terms of provincial/territorial borders. Team North provides an excellent example of how three territories working together cover vast distances that stretch beyond their territories into the south, where many of their players compete in higher-level hockey. On the other end of the spectrum, Team Ontario has historically split into two teams with Team Ontario South and North, due to the large population. These two regional examples show how different the territorial scope of recruitment can be between teams. Team Ontario South can recruit athletes from a relatively small geographic region with a large population in southern Ontario and part of New York state. In contrast, Team

North must scour not just the territories for their athletes but find athletes originally hailing from the territories who play throughout the southern provinces where high-level competitive hockey is more readily available.

Common for all teams that cover larger geographic regions is the role word-of-mouth plays in the recruitment of athletes. Similarly, all teams share the difficulty of finding and identifying Indigenous athletes who are eligible to participate. Canada, as a settler colonial state, has set up a system that can make it difficult and sometimes impossible for Indigenous athletes to participate in the NAHC. This troubling contradiction will be explored further in the following chapter on identity.

Recruitment for Team North, a team that covers a geographic region as vast as the combined territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut, is difficult, and it becomes especially tricky when many of those athletes play in southern Canada. However, even before recruitment of athletes, Team North first builds a coaching staff which, in more recent years, has become formalized with interviews and a selection committee. Before formalization, the process of becoming a coach of Team North was relatively simple. Essentially, the first coach to step up, so long as they had the proper credentials, was named the coach. In more recent years and with a growing interest in coaching, Team North has moved to a more detailed and selective process of interviewing coaches. Now, once the head coaches of the male and female team are selected, the head coaches hold interviews through which they select their assistant coaches. With Team North, the coaches of both the male and female teams have been head coaches for multiple years, meaning this process is not currently required.

After the process of coach selection, the coach and the broader coaching team build connections for team selections. Unlike the southern teams that hold tryout camps, Team North must approach team selection purely by word-of-mouth and scouting. Coaches turn first to the athletes they already know about who may have participated in previous championships. A second option is asking coaches that may have Team North eligible players on their teams about their opinions about those athletes. Generally, to get a good representation of the regions, the coaching team will include members from all three territories, if possible.

When Team North is looking for new athletes, another approach is to ask people in specific hockey associations which players they would recommend. Coaches look, particularly on the male side, at whether the athlete participates in relatively high-level hockey. High-level hockey is important for two reasons. First, this is a sure way to confirm the player is talented enough to keep up with the pace of play at the championships. And second, this confirms that the athletes involved have experience with body checking as it is a safety risk to have athletes who have never participated in contact hockey coming into the tournament.

There is also a gendered component to recruitment. Whereas many of the male athletes play outside the territories, most female athletes play within the territories. For example, many male athletes participate in Junior A and B or Bantam and Midget programs in southern provinces. While some female athletes in the Yukon participate in British Columbia leagues, for the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, this is not physically possible. A Team North official stated that girls who participate in hockey in the north, especially in the smaller communities, tend to play in recreational leagues,

which reflects not just under-resourcing, but the common emphasis on male hockey in general in Canada. The asymmetry of treatment is also noticeable in the number of scouts that come out to games. As one coach described:

On the girls' side, it's a lot more about who you know and connections you have whereas on the boys' side there are just so many, and scouts are constantly out here, and their budget is so much bigger, and the girls' side is more about connections you have and who you know.

For Team North Female, from my observations, it is clear that there is still quite a vast difference in the level of hockey in contrast with their male counterparts which, I believe and one Team North official also argued, has a lot to do with access to organized and competitive hockey in the north for girls. While the championships have emphasized equality in recent years, it is clear that boys' hockey still receives a lot more support. The major contrast is that most athletes on Team North Female are not expected to travel south to join elite teams whereas Team North Male are expected to be participating in high-level hockey. Thus, Team North Male athletes, on average, will be receiving much higher levels of training than their Team North Female counterparts. This contrast is best recognized in the recent success for Team North Male and the relative competitiveness of their team.

Even with a small population to choose from and a short period to build chemistry, Team North Male has had success at the championships. The 2016 tournament in Mississauga/Toronto saw the team take home silver. The silver was a massive victory for the program that had never reached the quarterfinals of the championships before this moment. In the semi-finals, Team North faced tournament favourite Team Ontario and

defeated them to go on to the gold medal game where they eventually lost to Team British Columbia (Hinchey 2016). Team North Male, with all their obstacles to success from geographic distance to small populations from which to recruit, shows the impact a group of people can have in bringing together and developing a dispersed group of athletes. This contrasts with Team North Female, who struggled at the Whitehorse championships, coming last in round-robin play. Part of this can potentially be explained by the fact that most Team North Female athletes do not get to compete in high-level competition, in contrast to their male counterparts. It ties into a more significant problem where girls' and women's sport is not taken as seriously as boys' and men's, with the expectation that the latter will produce elite athletes.

Provincial teams have nuances to their approaches to the recruitment of coaches and athletes. Unlike Team North, other coaches I interviewed were able to hold formalized tryouts for their teams. Here I highlight how recruitment varies between provinces and Team North. Most teams allow any athlete to apply for tryouts with a fee that usually amounts to around \$100. Some regions take a centralized approach where the tryouts are in one location, like Team Ontario South, who in previous years used the annual Little Native Hockey League in Mississauga, Ontario, as their proxy recruitment camp. In this context, Team Ontario South can take advantage of a large number of Indigenous hockey players who are in the city at the time. To make sure certain regions are well represented, teams that have more dispersed populations hold multiple tryouts. For example, Team Alberta holds identification camps in Lac La Biche in northeast Alberta, Morley in southwest Alberta, and a final centralized camp in Hobbema in central Alberta.



Team Atlantic shows some similarities to Team North, drawing its players from multiple provinces. Team Atlantic's approach to recruitment has transformed over time, and currently is a hybrid of Team North's approach to scouting and the centralized tryout camps found for other provincial teams. Team Atlantic does a lot of preliminary scouting and an open call to those interested in trying out, followed by a centralized tryout where the team makes its final selections. Like the problems of Team North, Team Atlantic deals with many rural and distant communities, especially those in Newfoundland, where there are challenges in getting those athletes to selection camps. Given that recently Team New Brunswick was created as a separate team, the sizeable geographic distance covered by Team Atlantic has resulted in it currently being very Nova Scotia centric in its recruitment.

Team British Columbia holds tryouts in mid-April over three days, and practices following team selection. The team then disperses for a month before meeting up again, in Vancouver, for two practices before they headed to Whitehorse. Team EDN has one centralized camp where athletes can be travelling from as far as 15 hours away to try out in Kahnawake, a community south of Montreal, Quebec.

Other teams take different approaches: for example, Team Saskatchewan is one team that had explicit ties to a specific hockey program, the Beardy's Blackhawks, a First Nations run hockey program located at Okemasis Cree Nation north of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. For Team Saskatchewan's boys' team, considerable recruitment happens via word-of-mouth by talking to parents about potentially participating. While Saskatchewan is a relatively large province, they also have the benefit of having a minor hockey organization that helps track Indigenous athletes throughout the province. Thus,

the process of identification is always ongoing, which is an advantage when it comes time to recruit for the NAHC teams.

However, this process of identification and recruitment for Team Saskatchewan may have to transform into something completely different in the future. In November 2019, the Saskatchewan Hockey Association announced it would remove Beardy's Blackhawks' midget AAA and AA boys' team and replace them in the league with a team located outside their community (Provost 2019). This will have potential implications for the future recruitment approach for the NAHC, as well as for Indigenous hockey in Saskatchewan. It is one of many instances where reconciliation has taken a back seat to mainstream sport interests.

Many teams try to space out their camps to cover as broad a geographic region as possible. However, there are still athletes in isolated communities and others that may not have the financial means to reach these camps or afford the tournament itself. Most teams can subsidize some of the cost; however, the amount of subsidy available varies from region to region.

Some coaches can do more long-term planning that goes beyond looking at the current tournament, with a view to a two- or three-year recruitment planning horizon. Teams that have had success in this approach have generally had consistent coaching management staff for multiple years. Teams with a lot of turn-over end up losing athletes who could potentially make the difference on those teams. The Technical Package for the tournament strongly suggests teams recruit from a wide variety of age ranges and that coaches not stack the players too much to one end of the spectrum. Maintaining a range of ages on the team does two things. First, it allows older players on a year-to-year basis

to help younger upcoming players. Secondly, it helps balance out a tournament by preventing the use of a lot of older athletes, which has the potential to lead to competitive imbalances. One coach explained his thought process on creating future leaders:

You could be first- or second-year bantam . . . we have three of them on our team this year, and we work them in with the older girls. We feel if you're young and can be exposed to the hockey [environment], you'll be our leader one day. [For example], we brought [one athlete], well [now] it's her 5<sup>th</sup> year, so I brought her as a young girl to [the 2015 tournament in] Halifax and I figured she'd be a leader . . . I was gone from the [the team] for three years and she's [now one of] our leaders.

Team recruitment varies, but a commonality between regions is the financial requirements in order to participate. Geographic distance plays a significant factor in recruitment and can limit the ability for teams to recruit and athletes to participate in the event. A combination of factors including distance, dispersed populations, limited resources, and a limited number of athletes to choose from means that some regions are working from a disadvantaged position when it comes to forming teams.

The coaches attempt to form teams with provincial and territorial wide representation but face a wide array of difficulties that a typical mainstream Canadian select team does not encounter. For example, non-Indigenous competitive teams can use the Telus Cup, a U-18 male national club championship, to select from a much larger pool of athletes and do not have to go through the process of identifying whether an athlete is Indigenous. Furthermore, mainstream competitive teams predominantly select from urban regions and do not need to spread their reach into rural areas, like reserves or

more isolated communities. Finally, whereas many mainstream national select teams are funded directly by organizations like Hockey Canada, provincial and territorial teams do not have a similar funding possibility.

### 3.4 « Mentoring »

As Forsyth and Gilies (2013) argue, “attention to Aboriginal culture needs to go beyond policy considerations and extend to all aspects of sporting practice” (232).

Indigenous coaches represent that move from policy to practice. To coach at the championships requires a substantial time commitment by all those involved with the team. Many coaches involved in the championships are not interested in competing in higher-level hockey, and for many, the NAHC is the most competitive hockey they coach. In many cases, coaches involved use vacation time to participate in the tournament and sacrifice a lot of their time to be involved. These championships are a chance for many coaches to give back and teach Indigenous youth in ways they may have missed out on themselves and to provide a lasting positive experience of hockey for the athletes.

As one coach told me:

[Many] Aboriginal people across Canada have lost touch with their identity and who they were. I think this combined with a sport that they really enjoy and brings in this cultural aspect is a natural fit and for our kids . . . . [For] some of them this is the first time they’ve done it, and I think it’s an eye-opener and they appreciate it . . . . It doesn’t mean they’re going to go back home and dig into their heritage to become more aware to make it a bigger part of their life, but when they go back, they are aware of it, and they can [choose to] make it a bigger part of their life.

What is apparent with the ACM discussed previously is the emphasis on mentorship and the importance of focusing on the whole person, not just the athlete or athletic endeavour. ACM's focus is not coaching on the ice or field but an emphasis on mentoring off of it. While interviewing coaches, it became clear that many coaches take this approach to heart.

For several coaches at the championships, the most important lessons happen before the players step onto the ice and after they have come off it. During interviews, something that became very apparent was the coaches' desire to keep in touch with their athletes and provide guidance outside the rink. This mentorship included helping with college applications, life skills, and teaching moments about Indigenous experiences and history. For example, for one coach, this meant educating their athletes on the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Inquiry and bringing in speakers, such as Elders and former high-level athletes, before the start of their games. For these particular coaches, hockey was important but was a conduit to much more essential discussions about Indigeneity, settler colonialism, and other discussions beyond hockey. In some interviews, coaches expressed a desire to provide Indigenous youth with experiences they may have never had previously. As one coach pointed out, their athletes come from varied economic circumstances, and the NAHC is something that they, as coaches, want to be a positive experience the players have and something to hold onto for the rest of their lives.

Barriers for Indigenous athletes do not end once they have made a high-level mainstream team. Various studies (Johnson et al. 2020; Blodgett & Schinke 2015; Schinke et al. 2010) provide examples of how Indigenous athletes fare in mainstream

sport. These studies point to a frequent lack of cultural sensitivity, which leads Indigenous athletes to feel isolated from the teams they are on and the communities in which they are competing. A number of coaches I interviewed indirectly expressed measures to combat these forms of isolation through promoting cultural identities and introducing Indigenous athletes to traditions they may not have ties to otherwise. As one coach explained regarding Indigenous athletes' experiences in mainstream hockey,

From my perspective, part of the reason is that historically . . . there have been some not so great experiences with Aboriginal hockey players. There are a lot of reasons for it. When you take an Aboriginal hockey player, and this is why I think this tournament should stay around. If you [sit the player] on a bench, he's sitting there; everyone around him is probably . . . white, affluent middle-class kids [and Indigenous athletes are] certainly out of their element. I would think that's pretty hard on them. They'll get homesick, they're away from their culture, their heritage, family, and it's tough to stick it out. We know statistics when kids go to college, we know how many return by Christmas because they're homesick.

This NAHC tournament fills in a gap where many Indigenous athletes can feel welcome participating in a sport that has historically been and continues to be racist towards Indigenous athletes. For teams from smaller regions, there is a realization that the chances of winning are small, and I found that in these regions mentorship is vital: as one coach told me, "we want kids to leave feeling successful . . . and you can see in many interviews how proud they are of themselves."

We brought an Elder with us; he was with our boys' and girls' team the entire time. We did cultural sessions every day while we've been here. Some [sessions]

have been a quick fifteen minutes [and] some closer to an hour. [The cultural sessions have] helped the kids . . . and it's something the kids will always have in their lives.

One coach discussed the importance of emphasizing how close many of the players are to playing higher-level hockey and college hockey specifically. They emphasize that their players belong with other high-level athletes. In this context, the coach discussed difficulties and different expectations between female and male players.

It's kind of a delicate thing with girls [when it comes to bringing up college hockey]. I mean boys, you can look at them and say 'so you're playing Junior A next year?' [. . .] With girls, [I ask] what's your plan after you graduate? Where do you want to go? Do you still want to play hockey? Do you still want to be involved? If they say yes . . . that's where you start the conversation of have you ever thought about playing in post-secondary? [. . .] Usually when parents find out they get mad because then they're like 'now we have to pay for college and hockey still,' but then the parents find out there are financial aid and scholarships then they're like 'we're in'.

On getting girls exposed to college scouts, another head coach of a female team commented:

I know it's hard, [scouts] want to go out there, but [scouts have] been tracking them. I've been out of this program for [a number of years], but I was tracking them right away like I was tracking girls on the team, off the team, this and that. [Scouts] know they're out there [and] sometimes they might [call our team manager] and say like ask where this girl is . . . . In [2015] Halifax I did notice a

lot of scouts four years ago for the girls' program because they have a lot of little colleges between those four provinces so there were lots there and a lot of our girls got interviews. They got asked to leave the program for a couple of hours to look at the college or university . . . . Girls' hockey has come a long way in the last 10-15 years . . . . Like if I have to, I've even tracked girls in [other provinces] because some go to school. They can go to school in [this province] and maybe they could play for us next year.

For some coaches, mentorship also means showing athletes that there is life beyond hockey and that in their experience, moving into coaching was a form of coping once college hockey was over.

[Hockey] 100% [shaped my identity] . . . . I knew once I was going to graduate from university, I was going to have a very hard time figuring out who I was outside of hockey. This is a sport where it's 24/7 . . . . I went quite literally from twenty-four hours seven days a week [being a] hockey player to [graduating as] a regular college student . . . . I had no idea what to do with my life, and it was hard because I always had people that I could talk to on my team. I always had that second family and I had to figure out who I was, not as [me] the hockey player, but what I was outside of that . . . . If [players] don't get the opportunity to play post-secondary and that transition comes faster, I can help them along that process that this isn't the end of the world. You're still a person [even if] . . . you're not playing hockey.

Off the ice, coaches also become surrogate guardians for the weeklong event. Some coaches I spoke with discussed balancing how they had to treat athletes off the ice



and recognize how athletes from different backgrounds, for instance, growing up on the reserve or in a city, require different approaches. Coaches also recognize that they are at a tournament with a lot of young athletes who are away from home and sometimes sneak out at night. This constant watching over the players means some coaches have sleepless nights to ensure their players are meeting curfew.

### 3.5 « Coaching »

Before interviewing coaches at the championships, I sat down to watch the first day of games at Takhini Arena. Viewing the games helped develop an understanding of how coaches approached the game. Compared to off the ice where coaches had a variety of goals for their athletes, on the ice was a different story. Not a single coach interviewed would say that they did not have a desire to win. As the week went by, I was able to watch the male and female teams compete and noticed some teams, notably weaker ones, playing their best players double or sometimes triple the regular playing times of the typical player. In some cases, coaches told me that this idea of potentially benching a player to play another one more was also crucial as it showed players that this was a tournament worth winning and that they were not just there purely for fun.

With [our team] we try to be the happy medium between both worlds [of competition and fun]. Both for our [girls'] team and the [boys'] team, [in round-robin play] you want to get every kid as much ice time as possible and to seed high. You also want to give every kid the experience [of playing] but once we're in the semi-finals and finals you see a shortening of the bench . . . . It becomes more about competition . . . . [We] want to represent well as a province, and we want to be able to go back home and encourage more people to try out because we won gold. It's still competitive, but it's still about the experience as well.

Another coach of a female team shared a similar sentiment of giving their athletes of all skill levels as much ice time as possible until crunch time in the semi-finals and finals.

I don't think we'll have to deal with [shortening the bench] unless we get to the final. We bring two extra forwards and one extra [defense] to get exposure [to the tournament]. When you get to a tournament like this everyone wants to play, so that's what we're trying to do . . . . If you're going to keep excelling, what I [tell] my girls [is that] we have nine [teams] here, only two make it to the show, and it doesn't matter if you come in first or last, but if you make it to the show, you give yourself a chance.

During interviews, I learned that the championships had evolved in terms of teams' approaches to the game itself. In Whitehorse, it was clear that skill was paramount to the game, but historically skill was sometimes secondary. Hockey is a rough sport, but at certain moments that roughness can translate into violence. A relatively common phenomenon in boys' hockey is the escalation of violence, especially when perception around the tactic of intimidation is considered effective. As one coach discussed, this approach to intimidate an opponent was quite common in their early years at the event.

When I first got involved, we played a team . . . [that] were not out to play hockey, they were out to play a brand of hockey that, I guess, they felt was their brand. And it was [a] physical [brand], they crossed the line many, many times. I think what has made the tournament better is . . . that refereeing has gotten much better. They've clearly said to referees: we don't want this hockey tournament to be known as one where it's rough and unsafe and . . . not about hockey. What you

see now, it's more about the game and skill, and I think it has made a huge difference in terms of people now coming to this and understanding this is good hockey and it's not all about running around trying to hurt people.

That did not mean the coach was interested in removing body checking but instead, "I don't want to see anyone get hurt, and the only reason you body check [is to separate someone from the puck], and if you're bad [at hockey] and trying to hurt someone that's not what the physicality is for." For coaches and tournament organizers, hitting and physical contact are part of both the male and female game. However, it is a fine line that teams, coaches, and players can quickly overstep.

Just knowing the roles that players can play and putting them into positions to succeed as opposed to positions to fail. In short term competition, it's pretty challenging, give us a month with these girls we can probably close that skill gap quite a bit, but two practices you're not going to close that skill gap. So you just kind of manage girls' ice times how you can and always put them into a position to succeed. If they go out and make a mistake, you can't necessarily get mad at them if it's a mistake that's outside their skill set.

Coaches and players want to win, and there is no mistaking that, but the cultural emphasis of the tournament also suggests it is an event about more than winning. The emphasis coaches have with on-ice approaches is a focus on positive experiences over an explicit goal of winning, which is something not generally seen in mainstream national championships.

### 3.6 « Conclusion »

The NAHC is an event made by Indigenous people for Indigenous people; however, settler colonial structures hold sway over numerous aspects of the championships. The difficulty of credentialing head coaches is not a problem exclusive to Indigenous populations in Canada; however, Indigenous teams are affected to a higher degree than others. One reason revolves around low population numbers spread across geographically large regions. Team North, which recruits from a vast territory, does not have NCCP coaching credentialing available. Without the ability to achieve credentials locally, interested coaches must travel south if they desire to become head coaches at the NAHC, a privilege not all people have.

The double helix model, briefly discussed in the previous chapter, is fundamentally flawed, given the discrepancies that coaches explained to me in terms of Indigenous people's access to credentialing. The asymmetrical implementation of coach credentialing falls into the "logic of containment" as Norman et al. (2019) discuss, as policy in practice limits many Indigenous people in rural and isolated areas from receiving the proper training. Another factor that influences the Indigenous coaching situation is a lack of initiative by the NCCP in requiring that the ACM are implemented and required for all coaches in Canada, not just those who are explicitly coaching Indigenous players. This chapter has explored a complicated mesh of institutional constraints within a settler colonial society and its impact on coaches' participation in the NAHC.

Colonialism is deeply expressed when it comes to recruitment, through the barriers athletes face, and in the credentialing of coaches. Approaches to coaching also differ in many ways potentially due to this, such as the focus on mentoring, as many

coaches implicitly or explicitly recognize the damage colonialism has done and attempt to mitigate that further through their approaches.

Coaches provide in-depth insight into how teams recruit for the tournament and their approaches to training and mentoring athletes on and off the ice. Altogether this highlights the advantage of focusing on coaches in this research, as they are instrumental in building teams and have a variety of experiences across different years of the tournament. Settler colonialism plays a troubling role in the way sport is experienced by Indigenous coaches and athletes. Hockey, as the de-facto sport of Canada, is an example of the troubles of Canadian sport policy towards Indigenous people.

## Chapter 4

### 4 « Identity, Identification, and Tension »

Identity is complex, and the process by which organizers and teams at the NAHC identify athletes is also complicated. Teams and organizers try to follow, as best they can, a formalized approach to identification; however, settler colonial impact on Indigenous lives has made flexibility necessary in the identification process. An example of this flexibility is an incident where an athlete had been adopted at birth from a reserve in Saskatchewan by a Euro-Canadian family in Ontario. Throughout the athlete's youth, they were exceptional at hockey. When the adoptive parents heard about the NAHC, they were interested in having their child participate in the championships and potentially find their biological parents. The adoptive parents knew the community from which the child came, but other than knowing the community, there was little information. NAHC organizers got into contact with Saskatchewan's P/TASB, who used the athlete's adoptive parents' testimony to allow the athlete into the event, and organizers and the P/TASB then went further in narrowing down the location of the athlete's parents. The organizer could not confirm whether the athlete was ever able to find their biological parents; however, these championships exemplify how Indigenous athletes can connect with other Indigenous youth, and, significantly, begin retracing their heritage.

Paperwork in the form of Status Cards and other legal documents plays a vital role in authenticating Indigenous identity. Still, Canadian colonialism adds an extra layer of complexity into the equation, as evidenced above. Identification of Indigenous athletes from outside Indigenous communities is not always a simple process, and a lot of care and trust must be used in such situations. Organizers and teams are sensitive to the

problems that surround identification and take steps to make sure that athletes who may not have the proper paperwork have a chance to participate. The burden of proof to participate is high. Still, organizers are willing to be flexible towards identification in cases where ancestry can be difficult to authenticate, or where athletes have unique circumstances.

Importantly, identity can also be conferred and reaffirmed via documentation. Identity can be affirmed through official state documents, like a Status Card or an Inuit Identification Card, but what happens when an important aspect of identity is denied through documentation? Or, what happens when someone claims identity that they do not have rights to claim, despite having a form of documentation, such as with Métis cards and questions about what is euphemistically known as “self-Indigenization”? This chapter tries to understand the development of pressure and tension at the championships that come in these various forms of both documentation and lack thereof.

#### 4.1 « Identification »

At the NAHC, all players must go through a process to verify their eligibility to participate. Identification at the NAHC is the process whereby organizers and team officials collect the required documents to declare whether an athlete is eligible to participate in the event, or not. Identification is hypothetically simple: confirm that athletes are First Nations, Inuit, or Métis, and the process is complete. However, the history of colonialism has complicated the identification process.

Framing identification through tension was fundamental to understanding my fieldwork with the NAHC. During the opening days of the 2019 tournament, I noticed that participants at the NAHC were rightfully sensitive towards the possibility of non-Indigenous athletes participating in the championships and, at the same time, fearful of

unintentionally excluding athletes who had legitimate claims to participate. Informing my conception of identification and tension at the championships were the coaches, managers, and organizers who had varying levels of sympathy regarding those working through the process of identification. There was no universal agreement on the identification process; some interviewed were confident that there were no non-Indigenous athletes participating in the championships. In contrast, for others, there was doubt, but an understanding that with identification came difficulties that go beyond the championships into larger discussions about Indigenous experiences with colonialism. The dichotomy between confidence and doubt informed how I came to understand the foundation of tensions at the championships.

Identification is fraught with disagreement, and I argue in this chapter that once the Canadian state is involved, identification is not as simple as yes, this athlete is eligible or no, this athlete is not eligible to participate. However, identification is also further complicated by questions of what makes an Indigenous person Indigenous? For example, is it land, language, or ceremony that defines Indigeneity? The NAHC involves relative and constantly shifting interactions tied to the Indigenous self-determination, state ideology, teams, and the organizers, which then form the foundation of tensions. These tensions fall into three broad categories: the first is the state's power to define Indigeneity through laws like the Indian Act; the second is tensions created via non-Indigenous settlers making claims to Indigeneity; and the third is tied to on- and off-reserve lived experiences, which regularly lead to tensions in the dressing room. On- and off-reserve tensions have less to do with the process of identification itself, and more to do with the dynamics that the first two tensions generate. The first two tensions are vital because they



display the contradictory nature of federal policy as it relates to who can legally identify as Indigenous, or at least First Nations, in Canada. The Indian Act places Indigenous, and specifically First Nations, communities in an awkward position by creating potential uneasiness around non-status First Nations people. While tautological, non-status Indigenous people are Indigenous, but what happens when a non-Indigenous person makes claims to Indigeneity?

The Indian Act is purposely inequitable for Indigenous people in Canada through land dispossession and disenfranchisement (e.g., Lawrence 2004; Simpson 2012). However, as Harold Cardinal (1999) argues, the Indian Act is inequitable towards First Nations people, but also an embarrassment which First Nations people must hold over the federal government until something better is arranged. The Indian Act protects Indigenous communities from further cultural destruction, as while the treaties are not, by any means, inherently good, they do provide a layer of protection against further state encroachment into First Nations' lives. However, the Canadian state also complicates notions about legitimacy relating to claims of Indigeneity. These arguments regarding legitimacy become further obfuscated when non-Indigenous entities, like Eastern Métis organizations, enter the picture.

Where First Nations have the Indian Act, Métis are a relatively easy target for settlers because, as Anderson (2014) argues, Métis people end up stuck in an in-between state category of "mixed-blood." The category of "mixed-blood" has meant that instead of defining Métis people through cultural and historical traditions, Métis are essentialized into a purely biological category. Thus, Métis people, in many instances, end up racialized as a group that is not culturally distinct but a catch-all term for those of mixed

heritage. The rise of Eastern Métis organizations, which adds to the confusion, only further antagonizes Métis people with legitimate claims to Indigeneity as they now must deal with settlers making claims to Indigeneity, through the category of Eastern Métis. Eastern Métis organizations, which are not recognized by the National Métis Council (Hobbson 2018), exemplify a constant underlying tension to identification created through settler colonials.

The third tension, the on- and off-reserve divide, emerges from the first two tensions through the Indian Act as well through the historical division of Indigenous people. The on- and off-reserve tensions are, usually, temporary until athletes become accustomed to one another at the championships. These tensions come in various forms, whether that is questions about claims to Indigeneity or the very different life experiences between those on- and off-reserve.

It is helpful to think of these tensions separately because it will allow for a better understanding of how tournament organizers, coaches, and managers expect to balance a multitude of problems relating to identity and identification. A noted gap in this chapter is that there is a focus on First Nations' and Métis' experiences, in part because most of the coaches and managers interviewed were Métis or First Nations. However, it is essential to note that Inuit also play an important role in the tournament. Unfortunately, due to interview limitations, I was not able to access an Inuit perspective on the championships.

These tensions, while not always on antagonizing poles, mean that organizers and teams occasionally have different conceptions of how identification should work for athletes and coaches. The tension between organizers and teams becomes apparent

regarding how to define Indigenous athletes and who makes the final decisions about eligibility to participate in the tournament. Tensions are exacerbated further through historical problems, like the creation of the Indian Act and made worse by contemporary settlers who make claims to Indigeneity, which becomes a catalyst for organizers' and teams' difficulties.

## 4.2 « State Influence on Identification »

As stated in the introductory chapter, to participate in the NAHC, athletes are required to produce a valid Indian Status Card, an Inuit Identification Card, or a Provincial Métis Card. If none of those are available, the athlete “must complete [a] Declaration and Ancestral Chart, which provides a detailed and official/verifiable account of your ancestry” (“Technical Package (Final Version)” 2019, 18). This system is not perfect, as it must work within a broader context of the impacts of the Indian Act and colonial structures. The power the state holds over identification was expressed in one interview on expired Indian Status Cards and the contention that surrounds what defines Indigeneity:

[Indigenous players] don't realize that their [status card] expires, oh, well, you're no good. [But] I'm still here I'm not dead, don't call me expired, just because there is a date on the god damn card.

The card is expired, but I don't expire.

[. . .] You're still Indian.

The Indian Act is an essential feature in the development of tensions within the NAHC as the Indian Act is important as a method of identification for First Nations people in Canada. Lawrence (2004) argues that the Indian Act shapes Indigenous identity “[through] classification and regulation . . . [and has] therefore indelibly ordered how

Native people think of things ‘Indian’” (25). However, Lawrence also points out that it is important to recognize that, although

[t]he Indian Act . . . has permeated the ways in which Native people understand their own identities is not to deny us the agency to move beyond its logic, or to suggest that we have lost all access to traditional cultural ways of understanding the relationships between people, their communities, and the land. It does, however, suggest that we have to think very carefully about how concepts of self and community have been violated by generations of living under colonial laws (Lawrence 2004, 26).

One problem is that the Indian Act is also one way in which First Nations people in Canada can reliably identify those who have legitimate claims to Indigeneity, especially at national level events that bring Indigenous people from diverse backgrounds together. However, it also means that non-status Indigenous people can encounter doubt as to their Indigeneity and that, “even the darker-skinned nonstatus or Métis individuals I interviewed spoke of times when they have encountered suspicions about their Nativeness because of their lack of Indian status” (Lawrence 2004, 221). The Indian Act proves useful for the state as a method of framing who can identify as First Nations, through status. Still, it leaves room for non-status First Nations people to be considered suspect and for non-Indigenous people to self-identify as Indigenous within that same window of skepticism. For example, at the championships, there was an implicit understanding by some coaches that non-Indigenous athletes were probably participating.

We can even look at how those with status still run into problems through identification. A statement like, “the card expires, but I don’t expire,” displays the ways

that the federal government impacts identification at the championships. The tension created here is expressed through the desire not to lose the right to claim Indigeneity once one's Status Card has expired. The tension lies in the ability for tournament organizers to verify athletes as Indigenous and the requirement of official government documents to do so and whether an expired document can, or should, restrict one's access to an Indigenous tournament through the complex interplay between what Indigenous identity means at the tournament and what it means to the state. These tensions expressed in other interviews where, similarly speaking, denial of Indigeneity was a spark point at the 2019 event:

We were told some of the players we have [had cards from a] made-up organization. I said, pardon me, how do you know that? Where are your facts to say that's made up? Show me the reference, and [they] couldn't. The only reference [they] had was that [they had] been doing it for 40 years . . . . That's not good enough for me. Now you have a legal issue saying [they do] not exist. That's the only problem I have. It's great that we see more families identify themselves as Métis and identifying their roots that makes me proud because it's more of us, and we are getting rid of that.

The Indian Act still proves useful for Indigenous people in Canada even though, it is detrimental to Indigenous people throughout the country. The Liberal Party and Pierre Trudeau's 1969 White Paper that aimed to abolish the Indian Act was attacked for various reasons, as Harold Cardinal argued that,

We do not want the *Indian Act* retained because it is a good piece of legislation. It isn't. It is discriminatory from start to finish. But it is a lever in our hands and an embarrassment to the government, as it should be. No just society and no society

with even pretensions to being just can long tolerate such a piece of legislation, but we would rather continue to live in bondage under the inequitable *Indian Act* than surrender our sacred rights. Any time the government wants to honour its obligations to us we are more than ready to help devise a new Indian legislation (Cardinal 1999, 119-20).

With the question of expired Status Cards, we can begin to understand one way these tensions regarding identification form. Part of the problem with allowing the federal government to authenticate who is Indigenous is that it also follows how other government documents expire like work visas, passports, and permanent resident cards. The expiration of cards is sensitive because a Status Card carries with it the legal identity for a status First Nations person that I argue can be at least partially denied until the card is renewed. For example, when my driver's license expires, I am no longer eligible to drive until I renew it, but to drive a car is not a principal part of my identity as being Indigenous is for an Indigenous person. In these instances, it is those documents that give the user privileges, but a status card represents rights of First Nations people in Canada, not just privileges. This brings up the question of why a status card expires at all when one's birth certificate does not. A simple bureaucratic answer is that a status card carries with it a photograph of the individual who, as a person ages, will begin to look much different. A more complex answer would be that settler colonial policy, and the Indian Act specifically, have shown that historically there is a desire to make it difficult for one to identify as Indigenous, or to complicate the process, such as with the stripping of Status for First Nations women who married non-Indigenous men, for example.

So returning to the NAHC, why could these athletes not simply renew their cards? In a number of interviews, coaches and organizers noted that the bureaucratic nature of identification, and Canadian bureaucracy more generally, held negative connotations for many of them and their athletes. Indigenous people in Canada, when dealing with the bureaucratic system of the state, have had less than favourable results to put it lightly.

Historically one can discuss how the Indian Act attempted to disenfranchise First Nations people, and particularly women (Barker 2006; Simpson 2012). The 1876 amendment to the Indian Act meant that the “‘Indian status’ was defined by patrilineal descent. Men with status passed on status to the women that they married, and their children; women with status could not. . . . If a status woman married a non-status man, she lost status in the band of her birth. If a status woman married a non-status man, her status would be determined by his band. . . . The only way for a non-status woman to (re)gain status was by marriage” (Barker 2006, 130-1). The 1876 Indian Act actively aimed to assimilate Indigenous people and “anticipated the eventual and total dissolution of band governments and trust lands” (131). Indigenous women who had lost their status were not able to regain their status until 1985, through a long struggle, that meant Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men could keep their status.

Even with Indigenous women receiving their status post-1985, that did not mean all First Nations women who had lost status suddenly received it. For example, the complicated requirements for those interested in regaining their lost status meant that not all women were receiving their status. An Anishinaabe woman, Lynn Gehl, had to fight with the federal government for thirty-two years to receive her status because even with Indigenous ancestral charts going back five generations, she could not identify her

paternal grandfather; thus, the state denied her status (Perkel 2017). Gehl is an example where, due to the extensive ancestral charts, she would likely have had no problem having her children enter the championships, but this example only continues to show the power the state has on Indigenous identification.

At the 2019 event, while there was a discussion of potential athletes who did not meet the proper criteria to participate, it would have placed at least one team in an awkward position to ice a team. While this instance was cleared up, it left organizers and teams in challenging positions. A lot of the problems in this instance stemmed from the relatively new team management that had not learned the ins and outs of the process of identification. Other, more senior team management I talked to discussed how they were able to identify athletes who would not be able to participate in the championships long before travelling to the event. However, this is not all the responsibility of teams; organizers as volunteers are stretched thin, running an event where a mainstream event of this calibre would potentially have paid employees and no need to focus on confirming one's identity. This meant that many teams had to rely on a combination of their own coaching staff's experiences with the identification process because organizers sometimes could not be contacted due to their obligations outside of the tournament.

The tournament is organized mostly by the NAHC Working Group, a small dedicated group of volunteers that handle everything from the year-to-year bidding process to daily logistics, as well as being the final arbiter of athlete eligibility. These organizers come from several regions in Canada and stay connected through the ASC. While the tournament lasts only a week, the work and time put into the event are that of a fulltime job. For organizers, work begins to accelerate late in the calendar year, around



November, when the Technical Package is released. During this period is when teams begin to form and begin to ask questions about eligibility for their athletes. There were some frustrations as teams were not always able to receive information quickly, which is understandable given the small group of volunteers.

This constant pressure of bureaucratic anxiety is tied to both how the Indian Act has impacted First Nations communities, and how it places stress on relationships at an Indigenous event. As one coach commented,

These poor kids who have been there for three-four years and are denied eligibility to play for their nation, it has become too bureaucratic. It's supposed to be for the kids to showcase their skill and talent. It's not about a piece of paper.

In this case, a status card expiring raises the question of whether that ends the eligibility of an athlete to play until they have renewed their card. Or, as one interviewee responded bluntly, "when the government tries to tell us that we are going to tell you whether you're [Indigenous or not], we tell them 'fuck you.'" This is a problematic position for organizers who, with best intentions, attempt to make sure all athletes involved are eligible. However, there are fundamental problems that can arise out of allowing self-Indigenizing populations into the tournament that go far beyond the NAHC itself, which becomes apparent with the rise of Eastern Métis as will be discussed. As Cardinal (1999) states, the Indian Act is one method by which Indigenous people can hold onto many of the things which they hold sacred. Nonetheless, the Indian Act also raises these potential questions of legitimacy. Even though the federal government website states that "Indian status does not expire but your card does" ("Is Your Status Card Still Valid?" 2008), if one cannot access specific rights because of an expired card,

it could be argued that a First Nations person with status can temporarily lose their Indigenous rights through the expiration of their status card.

Another simple question is, why do these athletes not just renew their cards? As one coach pointed out to me, some of their athletes do not realize their cards expire, and while in previous years they have run into problems with expired cards, they have rectified this in more recent years. One team told me that one of their questions for all athletes is whether their Status Cards are expired, and they confirm this long before the championships begin. But what happens if an athlete for several reasons has an expired card? This is a challenging and unenviable position to be in for organizers of the championships:

This year they just took the cards . . . . [We] went with them, and they matched them with the roster, and everything lined up. [In previous years] the kids had to present themselves and some of them, their cards are from when they were ten. Your band card will last five years, usually, so when they're ten [they look like little kids but] now they're fifteen [and they look like men].

Paperwork surrounding identity and confirming who is eligible to participate can become vast and complex. Teams and organizers are generally working together to confirm that non-Indigenous athletes are not slipping into the tournament. As one organizer described to me, one team with the desire to verify that all their athletes were eligible brought paperwork that went back hundreds of years regarding ancestral charts, alongside status and identification cards. From my perspective, this detail seems to come down to team experience where teams with more experienced staff ran into few problems regarding identification. In contrast, teams with relatively new staff had more

complications getting their athletes identified. For example, early on, a team with a relatively new staff looked as though they were going to lose five players – who had already arrived at the tournament and incurred expenses – to problems with identification.

Organizers have their problems to solve throughout the process of identification that go beyond the tournament itself and are broader problems facing Indigenous communities throughout Canada. Due to problems with communication, there were periods when teams had to make decisions themselves on their comfort level as to whether an athlete was eligible. However, eligibility differs from province to province, and without consistent regulation from organizers, this means some teams may be following stricter eligibility rules. This dilemma with communication and different comfort levels as to eligibility means that while athletes might meet a team's definition of eligibility, their teams must be careful in confirming that their athletes meet the tournament's standards.

### 4.3 « Settler Indigenization »

One problem surrounds whether an athlete is Indigenous, which may seem obvious, but in recent years settler colonial organizations have blurred the lines of settler-Indigenous relations. Non-Indigenous claims to Indigeneity have become increasingly problematic with the rise of Eastern Métis organizations. These organizations are controversial because traditionally, Métis are in western Canada, and Eastern Métis organizations take non-Indigenous claims of Indigeneity. Leroux and Gaudry (2017) note that “rather than a spike in birth rates, almost all of the increase is due to white Franco-Québécois and Acadian settlers ‘becoming Indigenous.’”

Reflecting on *Fear and Temptation*, Terry Goldie (1989) raises the notion that the “Indian is Other and therefore alien” (13), but how can an Indigenous person be alien? Goldie suggests there are two ways this conversion of the Indigenous person to an alien Other is achieved: first, through superficial means such as naming things after Indigenous ethnicities or nations, writing novels, and creating art. The other way the settler deals with the Indigenous Other is through what Goldie describes as Indigenization. Indigenization is “the impossible necessity of becoming indigenous” (13), where the settler naturalizes as Indigenous. It is through this process of Indigenization that some tensions at the championship form. When settler organizations, like Eastern Métis organizations, make claims to Indigeneity, they place stress on Indigenous organizations, like the teams and the NAHC itself, to put a lot of emphasis on making sure those participating are legitimate.

So, the question then becomes, what are Eastern Métis, and why are they problematic? It is essential to understand that the phenomenon that leads to something like Eastern Métis is not new or unique to Canada. Circe Sturm developed the concept of race-shifting in *Becoming Indian* (2011) to explain a similar phenomenon in the context of the United States and particularly in Oklahoma with the Cherokee. Important to race-shifting in Sturm’s analysis is that it is a process where white settlers claim Cherokee identity through “racial conversion” and blood-quantum. Sturm suggests three major reasons race shifting settlers are drawn to Cherokee, in particular, is due to "enrollment policies, exogamy rates, and cultural stereotypes that Cherokees are understood as being potentially white—both in physical appearance and culturally—in ways that set them apart from most other tribes" (2011, 16-7). Sturm also suggests that "when race shifters suggest

that they are Cherokee, in part, because—as they see it—real Cherokees look and act white, are the product of a melting pot, and are in many ways no different from the larger Euro-American population" (2011, 61). Race-shifters then become a threat to “citizen Cherokees” because race-shifters put pressure on defining who are “real” Cherokees and whether or not race-shifters are, in fact, “better Cherokees” (136).

Leroux (2019) estimates that “upwards of 10 million white French descendants likely share the same small number of Indigenous women ancestors born primarily in the 1600s” (2). Race-shifting is a fast-growing phenomenon in Canada, particularly in the eastern provinces. Leroux (2019) maps much of Sturm’s race-shifting onto the phenomenon of Eastern Métis in Canada in a compelling way. Much of the focus of Leroux is on French Euro-Canadian claims to Indigenous ancestry that can date back to up to 375 years ago. According to Leroux, the rise of Eastern Métis is a 21<sup>st</sup>-century development and he argues that two of the largest Eastern Métis organizations involved do not just claim Indigenous heritage but actively push against legitimate Indigenous claims to land. What this leads to is a reinforcement of status-quo as settlers infiltrate and even push out Indigenous people from these processes.

Settlers claiming to be Indigenous is not a new phenomenon; it goes back centuries. Still, the forms that Eastern Métis take are new, as Kolopenuk (2018) states: “armed with digital networking technologies and discourses of DNA, [they] are ready to traverse the dimensions of modernity into liminal bodies that bend what is Indigenously real” (336). Leroux and Gaudry (2017) argue that, “[t]hese ‘new Métis’ identities are essentialized in ways that capitalize on settler puzzlement over forms of Indigeneity

based on kinship and belonging and replace these forms with an imagined past of racial mixedness leading to supposed societal unification” (2017).

One similarity that Gaudry has found between organizations in eastern Canada and the self-identified Cherokee “tribes” that Sturm studied is their creation of a narrative of past victimization that led them to hide their true “Indigenous” identities—in this case, for over two centuries. Gaudry points out that in the organizational narratives he studied, these “hidden Métis” individuals are waiting for a more tolerant time, what he calls a “kind of new age,” when they can reclaim their true selves. The dawn of the twenty-first century seems to have offered such a moment (Leroux 2019, 23).

Eastern Métis organizations are also highly problematic because, as Leroux and Gaudry (2017) state, they reproduce status-quo and settler colonial structures through the façade of Indigeneity. While NAHC organizers have assured me that they have not allowed any non-Indigenous athletes into the tournament, that does not mean it could not become an obstacle in the future. Thus, organizers, who are incredibly dedicated volunteers, have to be expected to keep up with a variety of potential exploitations created by such organizations.

There were rumblings in some interviews that athletes who fell into the category of non-Indigenous had made it into the event. This is a problem that organizers are actively trying to combat, and it is a threat that can only complicate the process of identification further. As discussed earlier in the chapter, some people interviewed were frustrated with what they saw as a denial of athletes’ right to participate. From my observations, part of the problem is just that Eastern Métis organizations are so new that

organizers and teams are still attempting to grapple with them as this continues to be a sensitive, not to mention legal, area.

NAHC organizers are tasked with the unenviable position of hosting an event for Indigenous athletes within a Canadian colonial framework. On the practical side, as the championships progressed, different approaches to identifying athletes have become the norm. In some years, organizers have been more successful in identifying athletes as much as possible before they reach the event, whereas, in other years, identification happened solely at the event. NAHC Working Group's goal is to confirm who is considered Indigenous; however, they must do so under a framework that may exclude Indigenous athletes due to a variety of circumstances, for example, the loss of status through the Sixties Scoop, which saw Indigenous children forcefully adopted or placed into foster care as a method of assimilation.

Here, organizers must make it clear who is eligible and who is not. Identification is not always a perfect system; thus, tensions form through miscommunication on eligibility, which can mean event organizers and teams have different understandings of who can participate. In some interviews, there was a clear desire to confirm that athletes were Indigenous but also to err on the side of caution in denying athletes.

I understand that it's an Aboriginal hockey tournament. You can't take someone completely non-Native, but if their nation takes them . . . you can't question their nation, or you're doing what the federal government is doing. You're getting away from the whole concept of what these championships involve. I don't know if it's because a lot of them grew up off the reserve, so they lost the concept of traditional values and they're used to what the federal government tells them.

This excerpt brings in all three tensions to the forefront. The first is framing the tournament as an inclusive environment that must balance, allowing athletes to participate while not denying athletes that have rightful Indigenous claims. The second portion is tied to the creation of tensions via the federal government's ties to identification and their importance. The third piece follows with the potential differing of experience by those on and off-reserve.

The complexity of identity at the championships can be further discussed through how one is physically identified and how it relates to the on- and off-reserve experiences. As one interviewee told me, "when I was playing in 1986-87, all of us were brown face, black hair, dark skin. Then all of a sudden, we see a kid come on that has light skin, different colour eyes, and we think he's not Indian. That was my first introduction to it. Sure enough, he's Métis or half-Cree." These complexities are also noticed outside of the NAHC at other Indigenous hockey tournaments. For instance, Indigenous athletes who have never participated in the tournaments have begun to appear. As one team official told me, "we have a province-wide provincial tournament . . . and we look at each other and say who is this kid? [We usually] know [the kids] because we know everyone. We know, hey, this is a new one he's Métis he's got his status now, but what we're seeing here is a lack of consistency across the provinces [regarding Métis recognition]."

At the tournament, usually expressed in more implicit forms, there was an emphasis on inclusivity with a focus on being reluctant to deny athletes entrance into the championships. On the other hand, there was also a notable desire on the part of both organizers and teams to confirm that athletes participating are indeed Indigenous. Coaches interviewed were confident that their athletes identified correctly, but even that



did not mean there were not questions surrounding who could and could not participate. For some teams, problems have arisen due to vague wording within the Technical Package. Receiving clarification and confirming eligibility has also been very difficult as organizers are stretched thin to complete all of their duties.

The rural/urban tension led some within the tournament to be fearful that athletes from urban centres will eventually push out those from the reserve. Tensions express in two forms. The on- and off-reserve tension can arise where athletes come from origins where they have little knowledge of their Indigenous heritage and risk being considered outsiders. The secondary tension comes through Indigenous athletes from urban centres pushing out athletes from the reserve.

Essentially what you might see is some of these newer players that are Métis slowly push out other Indigenous [players] . . . obviously when it comes down to the standard of living . . . you're going to see better opportunities for kids that aren't raised on reserve. Because they have access to everything.

These urban/rural tensions can also be tied to economic factors, but this is more difficult to generalize. However, as Forsyth (2014) points out, Indigenous youth in urban areas may be surrounded by recreational and competitive sporting programs, but barriers, both racist and economic, can deny their access just as much as an Indigenous athlete from a rural area. As one coach told me, many athletes have very different expectations as to how they are treated at an event like the NAHC. Athletes at the tournament come from a wide range of class backgrounds, which also means athletes have very different experiences.

This sentiment is echoed by Forsyth (2020), who quotes a founding member of the ASC, Rick Brant, who positions this divide succinctly: “there are those extraordinary athletes who have emerged from that [reserve] environment. But, with today’s sport systems, there are so many barriers for a First Nations athlete to overcome. Unless you have access to a knowledgeable and committed coach, training facilities, the sport sciences, and a significant amount of money to cover the cost of training and competing at an elite level, the odds are stacked against you” (116). Adequately funding programs can be economically inaccessible to people in urban areas as well, as evidenced by the enormous costs to play high-level minor league hockey in Canada (Mertle 2013; Pecoskie 2016).

These tensions are not unique to the NAHC; similar tensions can arise within Indigenous communities when athletes leave the reserve to join Euro-Canadian communities for sport. Tensions can manifest in negative responses when those athletes return to their respective communities, “they think that I’m thinking I’m too good for them and I’m better than they are” (Blodgett, Schinke et al., 119, 2015). Similarly, tensions were found within the dressing room for various teams at the NAHC, between Indigenous athletes off- and those on-reserve. In part, coaches find that there needs to be a warming up period for a lot of athletes where they can build trust across these different experiences and origins.

The NAHC helps to bridge the divide between rural and urban Indigenous youth, and as one Team Alberta player said, “[w]ithout this Team Alberta, I’d be shy about my culture . . . . Just because when you grow up in a town, you don’t have other [A]boriginal people to lean on” (Ryan 2016). I think it is crucial to emphasize still how the tournament

can bring in and embrace Indigenous youth that have lost their connection to their Indigenous heritage for a variety of reasons.

#### 4.4 « Conclusion »

What this chapter aims to achieve is an understanding of identity through a confluence of tensions placed on participants of the championships. Identification at the championships is an example of the insidiousness of settler colonial structures in Canada. This insidiousness, expressed through tensions at the tournament, leaves in its wake doubt for organizers and teams that desire to confirm that their athletes are Indigenous. These forms of suspicion leave a gap through which non-Indigenous settlers can make claims to Indigeneity. Where the non-status Indigenous person has the potential to lose legitimacy to their claims, the non-Indigenous settler can step into that gap and confuse the process further. Bands and nations, teams and organizers go the extra mile to prove that their athletes belong at the event while simultaneously working to stop non-Indigenous people from potentially entering. Race shifting settlers have the potential to damage the championships' legitimacy as an Indigenous event; however, settlers making claims to Indigeneity has implications that stretch far beyond the NAHC, as evidenced in Leroux (2019). In part, settler race shifting is liable to promote the status quo and ignore the problems that Indigenous people and their communities face throughout Canada (Leroux 2019). It is important to emphasize the over-sized influence the state continues to have over NAHC. Much of the influence does not appear through current direct action by the state, but the historical conditions that lead to status loss for First Nations people, for example.

On- and off-reserve tensions are also crucial to this argument, and, while valid, it is not as simple as stating that there are tensions that spring up due to different lived

experiences. It is essential to recognize that these tensions develop due to the existing concerns about legitimacy as to who belongs at the event. These tensions come from either perceived or real differences in lived experiences by those in rural and urban locations.

## 5 « Conclusion »

Hockey in Canada continues to be steeped in settler colonial policies, which was made evident to me through interviews and discussions with coaches, managers, and organizers of the NAHC. These structures are not unique to hockey in Canada; however, the explicit ways sport, and hockey specifically, is used as an assimilative feature to define who is Canadian intensifies it. Indigenous coaches' experiences varied, but something that was recognized by most interviewees was the impact settler colonial structures and systemic racism has had on them as people, as athletes, and coaches. Solutions to many of these problems are not just incremental policy change, but wholesale systemic change that answers directly the question of why Indigenous sport organizations are not being given self-determining control over their sporting policy, but provided half measures and intermediaries, like Right To Play?

The development of the championships from elite sporting camp to elite tournament-style event did not occur overnight. A thread from the early 1990s, with Willie Littlechild's emphasis on elite sport, created the roots for what would become elite Indigenous sport, and the NAIG and NAHC (Forsyth and Wamsley 2006). Also fundamental to the development of the NAHC was the foundation of the ASC in 1995, which became the organization used to complete the double helix relationship between Indigenous sport and Sport Canada. ASC became vital as an administrative entity within the championships, especially during years of the event that set the championships up for success for years to come.

Dedicated organizers and the support that the NAHC received early on, with the involvement of the ASC, meant that the championships were relatively stable for a brand

new event. Later, struggles emerge when the championships branched out following the first two years in Akwesasne and Cornwall. Struggles from year-to-year range from lack of local community support, funding, along with many other unique factors dependent on the host. In the eighteen years of the NAHC they have been numerous ebbs and flows regarding the stability of the event. The biggest test for the NAHC came in the early 2010s with the financial instabilities of the ASC and their eventual departure as an administrative entity for the championships until their return for the 2018 tournament in Membertou. As of 2020, the NAHC Working Group appears excited regarding the growth of the championships. Interest cities and P/TASBs have had in hosting the event, going so far as having the next two locations confirmed, means stability for the championships. However, Covid-19 could prove problematic for many national events, and the NAHC is no exception. The 2020 championships in Regina were cancelled, and it has yet to be seen what long-term damage the global pandemic could have on Indigenous sport broadly and the NAHC specifically. In the end, there is confidence and an understanding that 2021 championships will commence, barring further pandemic related cancellations.

Chapter three analyzes coaching experiences from credentialing, recruitment, to the actual activities of coaching and mentoring at the event. What became apparent was the colonial structures that impact coaches within all facets of the championships. To coach at the NAHC requires meeting specific credentialing criteria. For many regions, access to credentialing is difficult due to distance for isolated communities. It can also be financial, and the continued prevalence of systemic racism within hockey also denies Indigenous coaches the opportunities to receive credentialing. In some regions, the

problem of access to credentialing means several teams must use exemptions to have non-Indigenous coaches as they do not have Indigenous coaches with the required credentials to be head coaches at the event.

This chapter also examines the recruitment of athletes and coaches, which varies from region-to-region due to numerous factors. For example, Team Ontario South has a much larger population base of athletes to choose from in a relatively small geographic region. Contrasting this with Team North or Team Atlantic and their large geographic footprint, it becomes clear that teams have to take varied approaches to recruitment that take into consideration where their athletes are coming from and the most effective means of being able to scout and choose their teams.

Beyond credentialing and recruitment, many coaches emphasize the importance of mentorship beside coaching. Mentorship meant taking approaches to coaching that focus not just on hockey, but on developing the athlete as a person to impact them long after the championships are complete. Furthermore, there is a balance between these forms of mentorship off the ice and approaches to coaching on the ice. Mentorship came in various forms, whether that just being someone the athlete could talk to about personal problems to teaching their athletes about various structural and systemic problems that Indigenous people face. On the ice, the goals are very similar to mainstream hockey; coaches emphasize the importance of winning the championships as a point of pride.

Chapter four delves much further into the clear implications settler colonialism has for the NAHC. Identity plays an essential role in the championships, and it becomes clear the influence the Canadian state has over the identification process at the championships. This influence is explicitly observed through the Indian Act, which

serves as a legal function in defining who is and who is not a status First Nations person. This has implications that go back to defining who is considered Indigenous and the role status plays in defining Indigeneity.

There are also other factors relevant to the identification process. Settler Eastern Métis organizations, though relatively new, mean that the NAHC teams and organizers have to be aware of settlers making claims to Indigeneity. Race shifting settlers place pressure on Indigenous people and their communities to prove their “authenticity.” Race shifting, as a concept, is relatively new and informed my analysis of how organizers of the NAHC have to deal with potential settlers identifying as Indigenous. Race shifting is problematic not just for the NAHC but carries with it broader concerns about the enforcement of status-quo and the denial of Indigenous people with legitimate claims to Indigeneity.

## 5.1 « Recommendations »

In the second chapter, I aim to build up a history of the NAHC to help contextualize the championships. The knowledge I gained of the history of the championships came via interviews and news stories. However, a more comprehensive history of the championships may be feasible if it is important to the NAHC Working Group. To avoid burdening the NAHC Working Group with additional tasks, they may want to explore other avenues to develop this historical record. For instance, Western University has a Public History MA program where students complete placements with different organizations. During their placement, they work with institutions to gather archival and other materials to hone their skills as public historians. Where I was unable to focus all my energy on the history of the NAHC, a public historian would have the



focus and knowledge to build out the history of the championships and provide a much more complete picture of the event. Having a centralized place to archive information about the development of the NAHC over the last two decades might also facilitate the creation of a manual for tournament organizers that would consolidate the lessons learned over time.

A second recommendation is focused more on Hockey Canada, Sport Canada, and CAC. In July 2020, Hockey Canada has begun to take steps towards a focus on equality and anti-racism through newly required seminars focused on unconscious bias. Scott Salmond, senior vice-president of national teams for Hockey Canada, states, “Mandatory diversity and inclusion seminars for Hockey Canada’s national teams are a critical first step in making the hockey community more enjoyable, inclusive and safe for all those who wish to participate” (“Hockey Canada Implements Mandatory Diversity . . .” 2020). It is important to emphasize these are first steps and that more must be done on the national level and that it cannot end with seminars, but actively must pursue programs that allow Indigenous and other minority athletes and coaches to prosper. While the CAC is the first body that deals with coaching credentialing, Hockey Canada is also part of this process and should be active in fully implementing accessible credentialing for Indigenous coaching. Furthermore, Hockey Canada, Sport Canada, and the CAC should emphasize and broadly implement the ACM, not just for coaches within explicitly Indigenous hockey environments, but also for coaches within mainstream hockey.

## 5.2 « Areas for Future Research »

There were various areas I was unable to explore in this thesis that deserve more attention. On a strictly financial side, oil companies and other large resource extraction companies represent a large portion of sponsorship money that goes into hockey

tournaments, and the NAHC is not an exception. Sponsorship money is significant in keeping tournaments like the NAHC alive, but with resource extraction, there may be further ethical and moral decisions to be made that go against tenets of the NAHC. In the case of the 2019 NAHC in Whitehorse, a major sponsor was Victoria Gold Corporation, a large gold mining company based out of Toronto, Ontario. Resource extractors, and particularly oil companies, have historically sponsored major hockey events and other entities tied to hockey. For example, the Esso Cup is the national women's under-18 club championship. Furthermore, Imperial Oil has been a consistent sponsor of NHL events. This might prove to be a fruitful place to examine the relationships and potential contradictions that come with sponsorships with resource extraction companies, especially for Indigenous hockey.

Another critical aspect that would benefit from additional research is an analysis of gender and the role it plays in the NAHC. While this thesis does bring in important features about gender, something of a blind spot in my fieldwork interviews was the small number of female head coaches I was able to interview. In fact, a majority of head coaches for female teams were male, which meant I was only able to interview one female head coach of a female team as well as two female assistant coaches. More insight into the experience of women and girls who participate in this tournament and in Indigenous hockey more broadly could expand our understanding of the diverse experiences Indigenous hockey encompasses.

Along with gender analysis, a class analysis could also provide additional insights into the dynamics at the NAHC. Athletes at the championships come from varied backgrounds, but hockey participation does skew towards middle- and upper-class

families nationally (Mirtle 2013). The cost of travel to a tournament like the NAHC, and the frequency with which teams lose promising athletes who cannot cover the cost, are obvious starting points.

Finally, I believe another topic that would merit a more in-depth focus is neoliberal approaches to Indigenous sport, particularly market-based solutions developed to improve Indigenous sport. These neoliberal solutions focus on the financial conditions of Indigenous sport but do not go beyond that in their analysis so that the end solution is usually money. Something this thesis tries to emphasize is how funding solutions do not solve systemic problems that Indigenous sport continues to face. Along with this, Indigenous self-determination is essential and having intermediaries (such as Right To Play) fund Indigenous sport is not a solution. Self-determination for Indigenous sport would be a vital starting point, as the use of intermediaries is a key way that settler colonial structures continue to impact Indigenous sport. Probing the obstacles placed in the path to self-determination in sport decision making could open up further questions about the legacy and ongoing impact of settler colonialism for Indigenous athletics, which go far beyond sport itself.

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## Appendix (List of Acronyms)

ACM	Aboriginal Coaching Modules
APTN	Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
ASC	Aboriginal Sport Circle
ASCNWT	Aboriginal Sports Circle of the Northwest Territories
CAC	Coaching Association of Canada
CHL	Canadian Hockey League
EDN	Eastern Door and North
NAHC	National Aboriginal Hockey Championships
NAIG	North American Indigenous Games
NCCP	National Coaching Certification Program
NSRP	Native Sport and Recreation Program
P/TASB	Provincial/Territorial Aboriginal Sport Bodies
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

## Ethics Approval



# Western Research

**Date:** 15 April 2019

**To:** Dr. Kim Clark

**Project ID:** 113621

**Study Title:** Indigenous Hockey Coaching at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships

**Application Type:** NMREB Initial Application

**Review Type:** Delegated

**Full Board Reporting Date:** 03/May/2019

**Date Approval Issued:** 15/Apr/2019 18:37

**REB Approval Expiry Date:** 15/Apr/2020

Dear Dr. Kim Clark

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

**Documents Approved:**

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
113621_Letter of Information and Consent_5 April 2019	Written Consent/Assent	05/Apr/2019	2
113621_Verbal Consent Script_5 April 2019	Verbal Consent/Assent	05/Apr/2019	2
In-Person Recruitment Script	Oral Script	15/Mar/2019	1
Interview Guide for Coaches	Interview Guide	15/Mar/2019	1
Observation guide	Non-Participant Observation Guide	15/Mar/2019	1
Recruitment Business Card	Recruitment Material	15/Mar/2019	1

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000641.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Randal Graham, NMREB Chair

*Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).*

## Curriculum Vitae

<b>Name:</b>	Dallas Hauck
<b>Post-secondary Education and Degrees:</b>	Western University Master of Arts London, Ontario, Canada 2018-2020
	University of Alberta Bachelor of Arts Edmonton, Alberta, Canada 2010-2016
<b>Related Work Experience</b>	Teaching Assistant Western University 2018-2020
<b>Research</b>	Member, Indigenous Hockey Research Network Western University & Queen's University 2018-present
	Researcher, National Aboriginal Hockey Championships Whitehorse, Yukon May 2019
<b>Conferences</b>	Co-Presenter, 51st Annual Canadian Sociology Conference <i>"Move Along:" Outsiders telling the stories of 'Others'</i> presented with Elaine Laberge University of Calgary June 2016