

From the Sports Desk

by WES RUSSELL

The Sports Desk column of May 1 has drawn a reply from Kelowna's radical referee, Herb Sullivan which I will pass along to the reader.

However, I will give Mr. Sullivan credit for the fact that he also enclosed a letter from the April 30 edition of the Kelowna Courier which was written by another minor hockey referee. This letter stated that the writer would rather give a player a five minute penalty for fighting than carry him off the ice with a concussion that would come about as the result of butt-ending, spearing, and elbowing which would increase drastically following a fighting ban.

So, Mr. Sullivan's little plan isn't receiving complete support, even in the refereeing ranks, but here's his letter:

We are all entitled to an opinion and I certainly appreciated your comments re fisticuffs in hockey and the thoughts of others that you interviewed re your May 1 column.

Allow me to make a few comments on your article. Why do people think that hockey is any different from many other sports where bodily contact is involved? The same provocations for fighting exist in rugby, basketball, soccer, football and yet there is no fisticuffs in these sports from the adult level to the minors. The same rule applies for these sports re fisticuffs, a game misconduct. Yes the fans, a minority of them, would like to see fighting a part of the game but saner minds prevail. I asked a 15-year-old why he fights in hockey and not in soccer and his reply was a "three game suspension and soccer is a gentlemen's game."

College hockey, I understand is drawing good crowds across Canada and many of these players are ticketed for NHL if they so wish. A few weeks ago I wrote the coach of the University of Alberta Golden Bears re the ruling of fisticuffs in hockey in college. Clare Drake replied that they enforce all rules in the CAHA book with an additional rider: "Players involved in fighting and who are assessed a major penalty, shall receive a game misconduct penalty but their teams will be allowed immediate substitution on the ice for the offending players. Such disqualified players shall not enter the penalty box and may not, while in uniform, occupy any designated area reserved for players. Further, that should fighting occur after the 15 minute mark of the third period the offending players shall incur a match penalty which automatically results in a full game suspension for the next WCIAA game participated in by the offending players team." This ruling was passed by the coaches of that league unanimously.

From your article the players in Junior "A" sound like pawns for the fans and probably some coaches too. I'm concerned at the moment about our players in the minor ranks who comprise at least 95 per cent of the players in B.C. and all of Canada for that matter. If hockey is played for the fans sake with high sticking, spearing, fighting, treated with a minor or major penalty and the kids in all leagues from peewee up think that this is part of the game, hockey could quite easily eliminate those who play for fun.

How many people can we continue to interest as referees in hockey on a voluntary, non paying basis with the continuing harassment from players and coaches who mimic those in Junior "A" and up? It takes three years at least to know the rules to ref fairly well and towns with a great number of kids playing minor hockey cannot retain these people that long due to the guff they take from everyone including parents.

Hockey is a great game. If it means more and stricter rules so that it doesn't become a survival of the fittest, this might be the answer.

H. Sullivan,
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*Sports Eds Note: "And so with both sides having aired and re-aired their views, let's close the Sullivan file, Miss Jones, for the time being at least. But wait . . . what's this?"

May I say that I usually enjoy reading your column "From the Sports Desk." In the main you write a very interesting and at the same time a clear thinking and well reasoned approach to your subject; however, I feel that you have gone completely off the tracks with your column of Thursday, May 1, wherein you take issue with those who would clean up the game of Hockey in so far as this fighting nonsense is concerned.

I have been in close contact with the game as player, administration and executive for close to fifty years, and in my present capacity am in a position to witness the mental gyrations of players, coaches and managers more so than the average "Fan," and let me say this, that in my opinion many of these pugilistic players are playing to the gallery when they start swinging punches, and in many cases try to make up in this way for what they lack in hockey ability.

But to get back to your column, let us analyze your statements. You seem surprised that Jim Anderson of the BCAHA and CAHA Rules Committee feels the same way as Herb Sullivan does in regards to fighting during a hockey game. You say that this line of thought puts the game in jeopardy. You also say that "Everyone likes to see a good fight now and then." Sorry, but here's one who doesn't. If I did, I'd pay to see professional prize-fights, not a couple of rank amateurs, who don't know the difference between a left jab and a right hook.

You state that you took a survey of hockey fans and people who have very little interest in the game and that the result was the same in every case. Really, how is a person who takes little or no interest in the game able to express an opinion in this respect.

You mention that in your opinion ejecting players from the game would lead to the ban on all body contact and turn hockey into a "sissy" sport that would play in empty arenas. Has abolishing fighting in Canadian football made a "sissy" game of it? Does it play to empty stadiums? The same can be said of basketball, where crowds in many cases are larger than those watching NHL hockey games.

If you know your hockey rules, you know that when two players get into a fight they usually get a five minute penalty, and if another player joins in the fight as a combatant or peacemaker, he gets a game misconduct, which means that he is out of the game for the balance of time remaining. Why should either of the latter be put out of the game when the two who started the fracas get only five minutes.

I am sorry if I disappoint you Wes, but I must join the the ranks of the Sullivans and Andersons to try and stamp out this nonsense of fighting in sports such as hockey.

People pay money in the main to watch a skillful display of skating and stick-handling, not a couple of idiots trying to prove some-

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Very good. Now ca