
In Pursuit of the “Full Ride”: American Athletic Scholarships and Mobility, Sport and Childhood in Canada

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Abstract: This paper examines the pursuit by Canadian youths of athletic scholarships offered by American colleges and universities, situating their individual efforts within longstanding family projects of child rearing as well as the operations of local sport organizations. Asking why and how the prestige attached in Canada to American athletic scholarships continues to be upheld despite ample evidence of problems associated with this means of obtaining an undergraduate education, the analysis focuses upon the ways in which Canadian youth athletes in the U.S., parents, coaches and college officials play their respective parts in sustaining a distinctive form of coming of age.

Keywords: athletic scholarships, youths, parents, movement, Canada, United States

Résumé : Cet article s'intéresse à de jeunes Canadiens qui cherchent à obtenir des bourses d'athlétisme offertes par des universités et collèges américains, inscrivant leurs efforts individuels dans un projet familial d'éducation à long terme, de même que dans la gestion des organisations sportives locales. Lorsqu'on pose la question de savoir pourquoi les bourses d'athlétisme américaines continuent de jouir d'un tel prestige au Canada, en dépit des multiples preuves des problèmes liés à cette manière d'obtenir une éducation universitaire de premier cycle, l'analyse fait le foyer sur les manières qu'ont les jeunes athlètes canadiens aux É.-U., leurs parents, leurs entraîneurs, et les administrateurs de collèges de jouer leurs rôles respectifs en faisant perdurer un type distinctif de passage à l'âge adulte.

Mots-clés : bourses athlétiques, jeunes, parents, mouvement, Canada, États-Unis.

Introduction

In Canada, sports are broadly viewed as “natural” and “wholesome” pastimes for children that are expected to furnish healthy exercise and companionable leisure. The practices that make up children’s games and athletic competitions may vary substantially from one sport setting to another, not least in conjunction with prevailing levels of inattention or, conversely, of active support and involvement that these activities may attract from adults. Whether child and youth sports remain in the purview of boys and girls or become objects of familial, community or even state attention looms large in determining the shape and conditions of children’s athletic play. The entry of adults and formal organizations into such sporting spheres tends to be accompanied by more or less intrusive premises and purposes that hinge upon socially defined differences between children and adults, not to mention underlying beliefs about the responsibilities that the latter should exercise on behalf of the former. The ways in which resulting rationales and regimes for child and youth sports actually play out often differ markedly from one social or national setting to another (see for example, Anderson 2008; Brownell 1995; Dyck 2000b). But in addition to being intrinsically labile in form, such games, competitive practices and athletes sometimes experience remarkable levels of mobility. What is more, their movement from one locale to another may serve, in unexpected ways, to trigger change or to buttress continuity upon fields of play as well as within other contiguous realms of social and political life.

This article examines how the prospect of Canadian youths winning athletic scholarships offered by American universities and colleges has served to capture the attention and marshal the ambitions of countless Canadian boys and girls, parents, and sport officials in ways that function not only to reshape domestic sporting practices but also to sustain other social undertakings that have been hitched to these. American college athletic directors

have long endeavoured to attract elite athletes from across and beyond the U.S.A. to join their programs. Canadians have traditionally comprised one of the largest sources of non-American students participating in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports (Bale 1991). My concern here is to elucidate how a set of prosaic organizational measures devised for use within one national sports setting can inadvertently, but nonetheless deeply, inflect the organization of child and youth sports in another country. What also requires explanation is why youths, parents and athletic organizations have been drawn to re-envision their respective interests and activities through the prism of sport practices and opportunities enacted elsewhere. To trace the paradoxical impact¹ in Canada of the offering of athletic scholarships by American universities and colleges, it is necessary to take note of both the individual experiences of athletes who take up such awards and move to the U.S. as well as the implications of their choices and mobility upon those who remain north of the 49th parallel. How, indeed, has such a specific version of “coming of age” that revolves around the objective of preparing young athletes to move to the U.S. been articulated in Canada and why is it maintained?

The first section of this article identifies certain salient features of the intercollegiate athletics system in the U.S. and some longstanding, highly publicized controversies it has precipitated in American higher education. The second provides an ethnographically based delineation of how and why American athletic scholarships are spoken of and pursued with such diligence in Canada. The third examines the athletic, academic and social experiences of individual Canadian athletes who take up athletic scholarships in the U.S. and reviews their accounts of the personal and familial objectives that prompted them to pursue this option. The final section brings together questions developed in the previous three to ask why so many Canadian parents and coaches persist in portraying American athletic scholarships in such approving terms, thereby encouraging Canadian boys and girls to devote themselves to pursue these despite cautions and warnings provided in abundance by American critics of intercollegiate athletics. Coming to grips with the implausible naïveté mounted by some Canadian adults about the workings of American college athletics leads the analysis back to the ways in which the continued relocation of young Canadian athletes to the U.S. may, in practice, serve purposes and objectives beyond those declared by award winners.

Intercollegiate Athletics in the United States

Sport has traditionally been a prominent aspect of student life in universities and four-year degree-granting colleges in the United States, reflecting distinctively modernist notions about its presumed capacities to build character. From the commencement of intercollegiate athletic competitions in the mid-19th century between what would subsequently become the “Ivy League” universities,² college sports were promoted as contributing to the creation of well rounded undergraduates who were to be encouraged to seek excellence not merely in academic studies but within a broader range of social endeavours (Smith 1988:vii). While college sports were steadfastly designated as amateur pastimes, thereby precluding the remuneration of players and competitors, more mundane institutional interests, nonetheless, also stood behind the rapid expansion of intercollegiate athletics programs. Within a context of ever fiercer competition among a multitude of varied post-secondary educational institutions to enroll fee-paying undergraduate students and to attract generous donations, the prospect of achieving institutional recognition through victories achieved by varsity teams on the fields of play became irresistible. By the early 20th century, sport had become a prominent feature of college life in the U.S. and was more and more viewed as a competitive “necessity” for college and university administrators charged with building their institutions and garnering bequests from alumni and other benefactors.

But the inherent predicaments of relying upon the popularity of intercollegiate athletics as a means of enhancing the visibility and prestige of post-secondary institutions surfaced before long. Intercollegiate athletics may have remained nominally amateur in status, but the most reliable route to realizing athletic success at the institutional level was then, as now, to attract and retain top athletes, even if this required easing academic standards of admission and overlooking the illicit compensation of star varsity athletes through under-the-table payments provided by local “boosters” of college sports. In 1906, an explosion of these and other problems led to the creation of the institutional precursor of the NCAA, a voluntary organization charged with reforming and regulating college and intercollegiate athletics. The subsequent evolution of the NCAA into the largest collegiate athletics association in the world and the body that governs intercollegiate athletics at many universities and colleges in the United States was accompanied by a stream of controversies that flowed through its operations from the outset. In striving to secure the favoured place of ath-

letics within its member institutions, the NCAA has historically focused on responding “judiciously” to declared problems with and challenges to the collegiate athletics system by perennially revising an ever more complicated and extensive set of rules enacted to guard against all manner of abuses.

Over the years, the NCAA has addressed and re-addressed a range of issues, reaching from endless forms of recruiting violations to abusive coaching practices applied to maximize athletes’ on-field performances. Nevertheless, critics of American college sports generally concur that, despite these efforts, enshrined patterns of “cheating to win” have, over the years, taken hold as “a serious illness, a persistent pathology” (Bailey and Littleton 1991:ix-x). A former President of Harvard University labelled athletics as the oldest form of commercialization in American higher education, noting that “American universities, despite their lofty ideals, are not above sacrificing academic values—even values as basic as admissions standards and the integrity of their courses—in order to make money. Nor will they shrink from exploiting their own students, where necessary, to succeed on the playing field” (Bok, 2003:54). A former Executive Director of the NCAA was moved to observe, “college athletics reform movements . . . have been remarkably consistent. They never reformed much of anything” (Byers 1995:337). At the base of these appraisals is what has been referred to somewhat abstractly as a “collision between the prevailing value systems of sports, on the one hand, and the values of the university, on the other” (Bailey and Littleton 1991:7).

At the heart of American intercollegiate athletics, underpinning not only the extraordinary levels of participation and popular acclaim these receive but also the seemingly intractable difficulties and dissension they engender, lies the vital matter of how college athletes are actually recompensed for their services as varsity team players and competitors. The adoption by many universities and colleges in the post-Second World War era of a formal system of granting athletic scholarships opened the doors to widespread expansion and professionalization of athletics programs, particularly in football and men’s basketball. Recipients of “full” athletic scholarships were initially guaranteed the cost of tuition fees, books, and room and board for a period of four years, no matter how well or how poorly they might perform as athletes. To ensure that incoming athletes would be able to adjust to the demands of their studies, first year athletes were initially barred from competing on varsity teams. Both of these provisions were discarded in the early 1970s when television broadcasting of top-ranked football and bas-

ketball competitions injected massive new revenues *and* expenditures into what came to be referred to as “big-time” college sports programs. Thereafter, athletic scholarships would be offered for only one year at a time, with provision for renewal at the discretion of coaches and athletic officials; moreover, athletes became eligible to play for varsity teams from the time of their first enrolment. In consequence, the annual allocation of athletic scholarships became even more directly responsive to the sorts of pressures to win encountered by ever more highly paid yet “untenured” coaches and athletic officials. In practice, the acceptance of a “full ride,” partial, or even rather nominal athletic scholarship obliged the recipient to make athletics his or her first priority if such aid was to be renewed. The escalating competition between colleges and universities to recruit elite athletes led not only to the creation of what amounts to a college “market” for athletic talent but also substantial but seldom discussed disparities in the amounts of athletic scholarships and other official and unofficial “considerations” extended to some but not all members of a given team. The myth of amateurism in “big-time” college sports (Bailey and Littleton 1991; Byers 1995; Funk 1991; Gerdy 2006; Sack 2008; Sack and Staurowsky 1998; Shulman and Bowen 2001) became an open secret shored up by the improvising of more “athlete-friendly” courses, flexible academic standards, and a host of other measures devised to afford a fig leaf of legitimacy for the notion of the “student athlete.”³

Had these and other problems had been confined to “big-time” college sports, which have traditionally served as development programs for some major professional sports leagues in the U.S., the impact of the mounting contradictions unleashed within American higher education by intercollegiate athletics might have been roughly quarantined within football and men’s basketball programs at the larger public and private universities and colleges. The enactment in 1972 of Title IX of the Educational Amendments to the Civil Rights Act, however, fundamentally altered the terrain of college sports by extending the awarding of athletic scholarships far beyond this sector.⁴ In ruling that no person could, on the basis of their sex, be denied benefits or subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance, Title IX put an end to college sports programs and practices that had overwhelmingly revolved around male athletes in “big-time” sports. From this point on, resources provided for men’s and women’s athletics would have to be distributed in approximate proportion to the percentage of male and female students in a given institution. Nor could colleges restrict

athletic scholarships to moneymaking sports and still comply with the law (Bok 2003:126). In 1973, women's athletics were incorporated into the NCAA and unprecedented opportunities for women to win athletic scholarships opened up.⁵ Although the first wave of women awarded athletic scholarships in the 1970s tended to be more academically accomplished students than their contemporary male counterparts (Shulman and Bowen 2001:262-263), by the late 1980s, this differential had largely disappeared.

Strictly speaking, the awarding of athletic scholarships by NCAA member institutions remains limited by the existence of separate divisions and sub-divisions of athletic competition, each of which is governed by different rules. Institutions with Division I and Division II programs are permitted to offer athletic scholarships, while Division III athletic programs are prohibited from doing so. Regardless, athletes entering institutions with Division III programs—as well as Division I Ivy League institutions that do not offer athletic scholarships—are eligible to receive general forms of student aid and frequently do so with higher rates of success than do other applicants, raising the question of whether the ostensible lack of explicit compensation for athletes at this level might not be more a matter of terminology than of actual practice.⁶ Athletes may receive material considerations—for example, scholarships—for their on-field performances. But just as significant as these forms of material reward is the frequency with which proficient athletes are admitted to otherwise academically selective and prestigious institutions with significantly lower academic scores than those required of other applicants. The common practice of coaches and athletic directors being permitted to nominate and support the applications of a specified number of athletes for admission as well as for annually renewable forms of financial assistance underlines the extent of an athlete's obligations to these figures and the priority that must accordingly be placed upon sport performance throughout their college years.

A painstaking study by Shulman and Bowen, *The Game of Life: College Sports and Educational Values* (2001), furnishes a well-documented basis for assessing some abiding beliefs about the nature and benefits of college athletics. Focusing on 30 academically selective and prestigious institutions,⁷ Shulman and Bowen collected and analyzed extensive and detailed data on some 90,000 undergraduate students, athletes and others, who enrolled in these institutions at three points in time: the fall of 1951, the fall of 1976 and the fall of 1989. With the schools' cooperation, data were gleaned from individual admissions records, transcripts and detailed demographic infor-

mation, as well as extensive survey findings that tracked subsequent graduate education, career choices and earnings, family circumstances and other factors, for both athletes and non-athletes who entered these institutions as undergraduates at selected junctures over a period of nearly four decades (Shulman and Bowen, 2001:xxx). The authors employed all of these sources to address a set of beliefs that “powerfully capture ... the [American] imagination and may or may not be rooted in fact,” including claims that: college sports make money; schools worry about their sports programs for the sake of the alumni; gender equity is giving women new opportunities; and, today's athletes are like those of the past (Shulman and Bowen 2001:xxvi).

Among the key empirical findings of this study was the fact that male and female athletes who are recruited “and who end up on the carefully winnowed lists of desired candidates submitted by coaches to the admissions office, now enjoy a very substantial statistical “advantage” in the admissions process,” an advantage that had grown steadily since the 1970s (Shulman and Bowen 2001:259-260). Yet, athletes recruited by these 30 colleges and universities tended to enter post-secondary studies with considerably lower Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores than their classmates. Although the athletes included in this study graduated at reasonably high rates, over time they had become increasingly likely to receive grades that ranked them in the bottom third of their classes. Only part of this decline in the academic performance of athletes, noted the authors, could, however, be attributed to lower levels of aptitude or preparation when they began college. In contrast, students “who were active in other time-intensive extracurricular activities overperformed academically, relative to their SAT scores and other predictors” (Shulman and Bowen 2001:262). These and other findings led the authors to suggest that athletes tend to enter into a “culture of athletes” that seems to account for why they tend to band together disproportionately in certain majors and fields of study. The study further noted that although college athletes from earlier decades had tended to achieve relatively good grades, to major in a broad range of disciplines and professions, and to fit readily into the broader undergraduate profile of these institutions, these patterns were changing. The concerns raised by this shift were not only that the narrowly focused athletic and career interests of many athletes could be causing them “to neglect the broader educational opportunities offered by schools that describe themselves as liberal arts colleges and universities” (Shulman and Bowen 2001:274), but also that of the longer-term impact of increased levels of athletic recruitment on the mix and

overall academic quality of undergraduate students in these schools.

Shulman and Bowen (2001) observed that while revenues from athletics programs could sometimes cover most and, occasionally, even all of the costs of certain “big-time” sports in given schools, this happened only if they were consistently successful on the field of play. Most schools lost money, the authors reported: “it is unlikely that any school comes close to covering its full costs if proper allowances are made for the capital-intensive nature of athletics” (Shulman and Bowen 2001:267). In the end, the authors advised that “athletic budgets, seen on a “net” basis, should be regarded as expenditures by the institution that must be justified in terms of the contribution that they do or do not make to the core educational mission of the school” (Shulman and Bowen 2001: 267). A similar admonition might no less appropriately be directed to young Canadian athletes, along with their parents and coaches, enticed by the lure of athletic scholarships that would lead them to the U.S. at the end of high school and childhood. What, indeed, are the particular attractions that fuel the ongoing quest in Canada for American athletic scholarships?

Making Sports Pay

Given the absence of “full ride” athletic scholarships in Canada, promising young Canadian athletes have long been targeted by recruiters from U.S. colleges and universities. Young Canadians who do opt to “head south” are locally celebrated as recipients of athletic scholarships that, it is said, will permit them not only to get a “free education” at a “big” (and presumably “prestigious”) American university, but also to move up to much higher levels of sport competition than are thought to be available in Canada. Not surprisingly, the prospect of winning such scholarships has become strongly associated with high achievement in child and youth sports in Canada both in schools and in more extensive community sports clubs and leagues. Indeed, a common means of recognizing individual achievements by young Canadian athletes is to proclaim them as possible or even highly likely candidates to receive an athletic scholarship from an American university. To be spoken of in these terms, whether or not one has an actual interest in seeking or accepting such possibilities, is to be acknowledged as a superior athlete.

It is important to situate the temporal and relational co-ordinates within which the discursive construction of athletic scholarships occurs. Since the legal age of majority in Canada is 18 or 19 years (depending on the province), entry into intercollegiate athletics coincides with the socially demarcated transition from childhood to the world

of adults. In the years preceding this juncture, children and youths exist as minors under the care and protection of parents or guardians. But from the perspective of parents, another way of framing this period is to regard it as the time when they are, or were, mostly actively involved in raising and nurturing their children. It is within this peak period, when the roles and responsibilities of parents are performed either with commitment and effectiveness or sloughed off and neglected, that the domestic “careers” of parents *as* parents take form and are played out.

Because sons and daughters depend upon their parents for financial and other forms of support required for participation in community sports (Dyck 2002:108-113), the athletic “careers” of boys and girls unfold and intersect more or less inconspicuously with the domestic ones of mothers and fathers. Child rearing entails the practice of highly intimate activities and relationships within often glaringly public settings. Indications from time to time of the apparent success—or worrisome lack of it—registered by sons and daughters as they move towards adulthood and (hopefully) begin to demonstrate an inclination and capacity to support themselves offer one sign of the possible wisdom and efficacy of any given parent’s efforts (Dyck 2000b). But any certainty about how a son or daughter will “turn out” in the end is not, of course, available until long after the most active and visible phases of parenting have ended. In the absence of any such conclusive evidence of likely outcomes during those hectic years when children grow to become teenagers, the attractions to parents of a son or daughter who is being or might yet be counted among those who are said to be in the running to win an athletic scholarship become obvious. Although mothers and fathers freely admit that a parent’s assessment of a son or daughter’s accomplishments might not be entirely impartial, the awarding of athletic scholarships by college officials carries with it the imprimatur of objective assessment. Accordingly, learning and talking about athletic scholarships and speculating about whose son or daughter might win one can become absorbing pastimes for many parents.

Discourses about athletic scholarships are constructed and consumed primarily by those who are engaged in or connected to child and youth sport in one capacity or another, making up a list that includes child and youth athletes, parents, coaches and trainers, community, provincial and national sport organizers and directors, media personnel who cover youth sports, and individuals and agencies involved voluntarily or professionally in the recruitment of Canadian athletes to American intercollegiate athletic programs. It is, therefore, necessary to

take account of varying ways through which discourses about athletic scholarships are shaped and shared.

An item that appeared in the sports pages of one of Vancouver's daily newspapers provides an instructive example of how athletic scholarships tend to be treated in media accounts. It reported the situation of a young local sprinter who was, according to the title of the piece, "Weighing her track options." Briefly, "the race to recruit" the young woman, who had been a triple gold medalist at the provincial track and field championships the previous year, was said to be "coming up to the finish line." Although the girl had "talked to dozens of NCAA schools," she had short-listed Hawaii, Illinois, Arizona and Notre Dame and had already made official visits to each campus. Scheduled to compete in a major track meet in California the following weekend, she expected that all of her prospective coaches would be on hand, thus enabling her to meet with each of them again before reaching a final decision.

What this report contained were the key ingredients of most media discourse about athletic scholarships: a local athlete who had registered first-rate athletic results and one or more American colleges and universities that were said to be eagerly recruiting her to join their athletics programs. Reports such as these often list the names and accomplishments of other high school athletes who have received athletic scholarships. What is also stated explicitly or strongly implied in such a summary of an athlete's career-to-date is evidence of the "talent," "hard work" and "maturity" that the athlete in question has exhibited, claims that are frequently corroborated by a coach or teammate. While exact dollar amounts and terms of athletic scholarships tend not to be reported, readers are left with the impression that the recipient will have her or his post-secondary education paid for entirely.

Moving beyond media reports of athletic scholarships and into the ethnography of the extensive and varied realm of child and youth sports, roughly similar sorts of accounts and claims are frequently encountered. Driving his 12-year-old daughter and one of her classmates to a track and field practice for the first time, a father who himself never attended university casually explained to the two girls what their participation in this sport might earn them: "That will be your ticket to get your way paid through university, to have fun attending track meets all over the country, maybe even to travel around the world." Similarly, an assistant coach of an elite provincial team met with 13-year-old soccer players following one of their games in order to invite them to try out for the provincial squad. He explained that to be selected as a member of this team would afford them the opportunity to travel and

participate in top-notch tournaments against American competition. Tournaments such as these, he noted, bring out scouts from American universities who might offer good players a "full ride" scholarship when they complete high school.

Discussion of athletic scholarships can also serve to reveal the knowledge and sophistication of the speaker about these matters. Thus, Nigel,⁸ a youth football coach, advised parents who might wish that their son would one day win an athletic scholarship to consider enrolling them in lacrosse. Ivy League teams are now, he reported, heavily scouting British Columbia for skilled lacrosse players. Conversely, Lorraine, a young ringette coach felt it necessary to advise prospective players from the outset that this sport is a lot of fun for girls, even though there are no athletic scholarships offered to its graduates because it is not a sport that has been adopted in American universities and colleges. Invoking the likelihood of athletic scholarships being won by athletes in "our" sport or club can also be a means for declaring the relative social distinction of "us" compared to "them." Thus, Clint, a sprints coach spoke with a group made up of parents and other coaches about the superior qualities of track and field athletes: "With these kids it's not a matter of them asking each other, 'Are you going to university?' Instead they're asking, 'which university will you be going to?'"

Nevertheless, familiarity with popular discourses about athletic scholarships does not necessarily render one a captive or adherent of them. Frank, the father of a highly accomplished runner, did not concur with the view of his daughter's coach that she would suffer by opting to attend a local university and continue living at home. While allowing that his daughter could be turning down an offer that might take her to an Ivy League institution, Frank stated simply that his daughter was not yet ready to be that far away from home. Inga, a dental hygienist, related the sobering experience of her best friend's son, who after receiving an athletic scholarship to attend Stanford dropped out a short while later due to the incredible demands made upon his time by the coach of his sport: "They were just *too* serious for him!"

The point is, however, that athletic scholarships remain a prominent feature of the rhetorical and organizational landscape of child and youth sports in Canada. Fieldwork evidence that more than a few of the Canadian athletes who "head South" are not actually in receipt of "full ride" scholarships for all or for any of their years in college, indicates that more than a few Canadian parents are quietly making up the difference. In view of the generally much higher costs of post-secondary education in the U.S., the supplementary support required to permit

a son or daughter to take up a partial scholarship can easily amount to more than the total cost that would otherwise be incurred in attending an academically comparable Canadian university. This practice poses intriguing questions about the factors and motivations that shape certain contemporary Canadian middle-class approaches to child rearing. It also raises the possibility that sport organizations, educational institutions and parents may be inconspicuously working together to harness the growth, development and training of children and youth to a set of disparate yet conditionally reconcilable interests, all of which revolve around sharing in reflected forms of prestige⁹ attached to and derived from the pursuit of American athletic scholarships.

Canadian “Student Athletes” in the U.S.A.

The particular circumstances that lead some young Canadian men and women to take up athletic scholarships in the United States and the ensuing academic, athletic, and social experiences they report during or following their college years vary in many respects, reflecting the specificities of individual lives and differing educational institutions and sports. Nonetheless, ethnographic interviews conducted both in the U.S. with Canadian “student athletes” and intercollegiate athletics officials, as well as those conducted in Canada with former athletic scholarship holders and the parents of current and past “student athletes,” also reveal certain striking similarities in the paths and processes by which athletes move to and through the role of varsity athletes in the U.S.

Although electing to leave family, friends and country behind constitutes a vital change in young lives, in another sense, the receipt of an athletic scholarship continues and extends types of activities and relationships within which these young Canadians have been ensconced since childhood. Athletes of the calibre recruited by American intercollegiate athletics programs typically have extensive sport histories. What is more, the parents of these Canadian athletes tend to have been involved at least as strong supporters and sometimes as guiding figures in their children’s sporting endeavours. Garth, the captain of his varsity team, began to play hockey at an early age:

I started skating when I was four and I played hockey when I was five ... It was my dad who got me into it. Like most parents, probably, it’s usually the father that gets them into hockey. And my dad coached me growing up until I was maybe, you know, 13. Then once you get to kind of the higher levels, you know, your dad doesn’t really keep coaching you.

Paige, a volleyball player, reports having sampled a broad range of sports with the unceasing support of her parents:

I started out doing gymnastics, I did like, artistic gymnastics and didn’t really like that. And then I did rhythmic gymnastics for a while and didn’t really like that. I did track [and field], I did baseball ... a lot of sports. [My parents] were like, very supportive all the way along, always willing ... to drive wherever. And like, they never, never complained, always very supportive.

The parents of Pete, a college baseball player, consistently attended his games and accompanied him during his many years of youth competition:

I started playing sports in elementary school and high school, [and my parents] were always there. Especially, you know, [when] playing for [the provincial baseball team], there’s a lot of travelling involved. So they were always there with me, travelling around to all the different ballparks and everything.

These levels of parental involvement in community sports for children and youth are by no means unusual in Canada. Indeed, parental provision of financial and logistical support has become a mandatory requirement of most community sports organizations as well as many extra-mural school athletics programs, eliciting concern in some quarters about the impact of arrangements such as these on sport participation by children from low income families. Within this social realm, determining the extent to which children autonomously chart their own courses through sports activities or instead may be led to, encouraged, and guided within these activities by fathers and mothers remains a complicated matter. When the parents of a seven-year-old girl publicly speculate about the possibilities of their daughter one day receiving an athletic scholarship to a “big” American university and when, a decade later, that comes to pass (Dyck 2003:56), it can be tempting to allocate “ultimate” agency in this field to adults and to regard girls and boys as relatively “acted upon” figures. But the intimacy, intensity and continuity that can come to characterize relationships between parents and children through their joint involvement in sports—not to mention those between young athletes and coaches—can also combine in ways that defy convenient categorical assumptions. This becomes acutely evident when one seeks to determine whether decisions made by teenaged sons and daughters to pursue an athletic scholarship are essentially their own undertakings or whether these might represent a logical and prefigured step within and validation of larger family “projects”

rooted in shared domestic sporting histories in which the athletic predilections and accomplishments of children become inextricable components of the child-rearing performances of mothers and fathers.

Fran, a varsity basketball player, appreciates the unstinting parental encouragement and support provided for her youthful ventures into hockey, volleyball and basketball. Her father, a doctor, was “very excited” about the process that led to her winning an athletic scholarship. Her high school coaches had also been integrally involved in this process:

They contacted schools and stuff, um, would talk to [American college] coaches, would during games say, “you know, this school is here to watch you, Fran,” just little things like that. They were good coaches, they recruited, like, good players to come play for them. So we always had a very strong team.

Lane, a member of a national youth sports team during his high school years, decided at age 17 to drop out of that sport and to fly to the U.S. where he hoped to focus on another sport that he had played casually since childhood. Growing up in a small community where “everybody knows what time you go to the bathroom and stuff like that,” Lane had been desperate to leave his home town after high school graduation and “to get far, far away.” Staying with relatives, he spent a year elevating his game, participating in amateur tournaments and preparing videos of his performances to send to athletics departments across the U.S.A. To aid his efforts, his mother drove Lane’s car down more than a thousand miles from Canada so that he would have the use of it during this preparatory year. Daley, a hockey player, also benefitted from his mother’s assistance during this period, albeit in another capacity: “Luckily, my mom helped me out a lot with it. She did most of the paperwork. I guess I was kind of a baby on that one [laughing], she kinda did most of it.” When asked whether his parents had been supportive of his decision to come to the U.S., Daley observed: “Yeah, they’re very supportive and, you know, they don’t make my decisions or anything, but they help me out a lot and give their opinions and also I take them into account. So, they helped me out a lot.” In contrast, his older brother, identified by Daley as “the smart one,” had chosen to remain in Canada and attend a local university.

Naomi received her athletic scholarship as a result of an impromptu venture launched by another father who, wanting to ensure that his own daughter would be seen and considered by American college coaches and recruiters, had organized a special “pick up” team to travel to and compete in a major American tournament. Naomi’s

parents agreed to finance her travel and accommodation on this trip, and she and several teammates subsequently received offers of athletic scholarships. The circumstances that led Elise to be admitted to an Ivy League university with sufficient financial aid to permit her to attend were hardly a spur of the moment matter. She had been enrolled since Grade 9 in a specialized fee-charging sport academy attached to a local public high school. Through this arrangement, she and her classmates received on-ice coaching sessions four times a week as part of the school curriculum, as well as a weekly life skills training class within which students were shown how to prepare university applications as well as personal résumés and videos of their sport performances to be addressed to athletics directors and coaches at American colleges and universities. Yet notwithstanding the more or less elaborate measures taken to increase the likelihood of young Canadian athletes being noticed by American college recruiters and coaches, the making of final decisions about which scholarship offers to seek and which to accept is often a somewhat haphazard affair (Dyck 2006:73-75). While Elise had little difficulty in choosing an offer from an internationally known East Coast university over that of a non-descript state university in the Midwest, when doing so she put particular weight upon the lower ranking of the women’s hockey program at the latter school. In other cases, Canadian athletes found it quite difficult to assess and balance the relative merits of the academic and athletic programs at different schools. The personal attention that they received or did not receive from prospective coaches and athletics officials often played a critical role in their final selections.

The college experiences reported by Canadian students who take up athletic scholarships in the U.S. take the form of detailed and highly personal accounts that serve to illuminate the challenges and complexities that arise when a young person moves away from home to another country, enters into higher education and strives to find his or her place in a demanding athletics program. They generally report having been warmly welcomed by their coaches and teammates and of settling into a packed daily round of classes, training sessions, practices, games or competitions. While the calibre of coaching that they encounter may not always be better or even necessarily as good as that which they had received previously, almost invariably the levels of competition facing them both within their teams as well as in intercollegiate competition is much, much higher than these young athletes had expected it to be. The importance placed upon not just winning games but on working as hard as possible at every practice session, lest an athlete become the object of a

coach's wrath, emerges again and again in students' narratives. Although fully appreciative of the "state of the art" athletic facilities, equipment, physical training and therapy services made available to college athletes in the U.S., nonetheless, they must cope with recurring levels of physical fatigue that soon visit most of them. At the same time, the sheer thrill of being suddenly at the centre of sports programs and events that typically receive levels of attendance and fan adulation virtually inconceivable within Canadian university sports can be seductive.

In the classroom, Canadian athletes frequently discover to their relief that they have, in fact, been reasonably well prepared by high schools at home to meet the academic demands made of undergraduates even at Ivy League institutions. A certain number of athletes engaged in sports programs such as football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey—sports that might well lead to subsequent professional sport careers—appear to decide at a relatively early stage to give their "academics" only as much time and attention as is necessary to remain eligible in terms of NCAA, university and team requirements to continue to compete athletically. Others strive to observe, at least in some manner, parents', coaches', and administrators' repeated injunctions that they must take care to "balance their academics and athletics." In many schools varsity athletes are required, during their first year of university, to attend study hall sessions to ensure that they do not fall behind in class assignments. Athletics departments also frequently arrange and pay for the services of tutors who assist individual athletes who encounter difficulties with particular courses. Academically more able athletes are released from mandatory study hall attendance as soon as grades are reported at the end of their first semester of studies. A few of these young Canadians set their academic sights considerably higher than do most of their teammates, enrolling in demanding programs such as engineering or pre-medicine studies. But to do so may complicate their college lives in ways that may not initially be apparent. Since athletic scholarship holders are obliged to take part in daily practice and training sessions, they are sometimes unable to enroll in essential pre-requisite courses due to academic and athletic scheduling conflicts. In this respect, a somewhat more convenient means of "balancing academics and athletics" may be to enroll in whichever program fits well with an athlete's schedule. One or another assistant coach is likely to be well-versed about programs of study that readily suit team practice schedules as well as about instructors on campus who are known to be "friends of the athletics program."

When asked about the athletic and academic challenges that she encountered during her college years, Naomi recalled:

Freshman year was rough. I cried every day ... Well, you're so far away from home and you're young. Like I'd just turned 18 when I went. And you go from living with your parents and practicing twice a week or whatever ... to [university] where you study all day. We had classes from 8 [am] to about 1 [pm]. And then we had a break. From 2 to 3 we had [physiotherapy] treatments, 3-6 [team] practice, 6-7.30 was dinner and a shower. And then 7.30-9.30 we had to go to study hall and tutors. And that was every day, like six days a week. We had one day off and they [coaches] usually used it for travel. So there was a rule that you can only practice 20 hours a week and then you have to have a day off. But, like, it can be on the road, so ...

Like if you have a bad practice, you're not going to start [the next game]. Like even if you're the best player on the team, it doesn't matter. Like you have to prove yourself every practice. And like, they don't tell you the starting line-up until an hour and half before the game. So like all week—and it gets really catty and competitive on the field. 'Cause even though you're a team, you're trying to be better than your teammates 'cause you want to start. So, yeah, they make it hard, like in drills. It's always a competition. Like you're not just dribbling through cones: you're racing ... and if you lose, then you have to sprint a lap of the field. Like you get punished for everything. Not punished, but you know ... the motto of our team was "it pays to be a winner." So everything we did was either a race or a competition. And if you lost, you had to pay...And that was like, that was the roughest thing I think [during] freshman year. And the coaches are mean. Our head coach ... was like super tough. And we had like two assistant coaches ... and they were super harsh. And we got yelled at. But that was freshman year, and when you're not used to it, obviously it's very hard. And then, you know, the older you get, you don't learn to ignore it, but you ... you don't let it affect you. And then, like the older you are, then you're responsible for the freshmen. So like you, even if you're unhappy, you have to pretend to be happy and to agree with the coaches, 'cause you can't give a bad impression to the freshmen. So ... [whispering] it's very psychological. Like it's a, it's a head game. Like everything is mental. And that's like what, yeah, that's what I hated. 'Cause they screw around with your head. And even if you think you have had a good practice, they'll bench you on purpose just to see you're gonna react and if you're gonna let it bring you down or if you're gonna fight and, you know, try and be better. They just, yeah, they play with your head.¹⁰

Persuaded by her parents to stick with the program at least until Christmas of her first year, Naomi managed to complete her career as a varsity athlete and to earn a degree. As demanding as her experience had been, she judged it to have been preferable to that of a younger relative who had followed her example, taken an athletic scholarship at a smaller university with a Division I sport program, suffered a major injury and had subsequently been forced to forego a second year of competition. Turning to her academic experiences, Naomi recounted:

Freshman year, I was like a “no-preference” major. So I just sort of took whatever random classes you have to, like math and whatever. And I didn’t try. So I got a 2.5 [grade point average] ... And I never went to class, and if I did, I was sleeping. ‘Cause I was so tired. I was sooo tired. Like I rolled out of bed every morning, threw on my sweatpants, and went to class and took a nap. And then sophomore year, I decided I wanted to be a Kin[esiology] major. So I was that for one semester, and then I decided it was too hard and I couldn’t handle it. And then, yeah, I changed it to Merchandising Management. And that was easy. [laughs]

Ironically, Naomi had selected this university in part because of the balance between academics and athletics that she had been told it offered. Indeed, when the university had brought her to campus for one of her permitted recruiting “visits,”¹¹ she had spent an afternoon meeting with academic counsellors to verify that this would be the case. When asked whether her coaches had wanted her to do well in her studies for herself or primarily because they wanted her to remain eligible to compete for the team, Naomi replied:

I don’t know, it’s hard to say. I think both. Like for sure—it’s really hard to fuck up and not be—like I think you need to have like a 1.6 [GPA] in order to not be able to play. And like honestly, you’d have to be pretty dumb to get a 1.6. [laughs] ... So, like they knew we’d be able to play. I think they actually cared. And like you know our team always had awards for [high] GPAs and stuff like that. So I think they cared. But yeah, they wanted us to play. But I think they just take so much pride, like in everything in the [United] States. There’s so much pride, like yeah, I’m an athlete and, you know, it looks good when you can put in your media guide that, you know, ten of your athletes are academic [high achievers]—like it’s a selling feature.

Although ethnographers of American college life (Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005) have confirmed the enthusiasm and dedication with which undergraduates away from home and the watchful eyes of parents throw themselves

into partying and other forms of socializing, athletes like Naomi are restricted in the time and opportunities they have to do so:

We were friends with other athletes, just ‘cause, like it’s really easy, right? You just meet at study hall and ... athletic functions ... But really I didn’t have that many friends. [laughs] Mostly the team. The girls on the team. Yeah, and other athletes ... So, like I tried to make friends in my classes, but I really didn’t have time to have friends. And I didn’t care ... And like I knew I was leaving there anyways, so ... it sounds kind of snobby, but I was like, well I’m never going to see these people again. So yeah, like the athletes just hang out with each other and we go to parties. You know, there’s like the hockey house, football house, soccer house, like we were just hanging out.

Other Canadian athletes related similar sorts of experiences, although some of them struggled to maintain friendships with a few non-athlete students whom they met in classes or in their dormitories. Some athletes found it particularly important for them to foster social outlets and relationships beyond this circle of teammates and other athletes, but again their unyielding schedules often frustrated their attempts to do so. Many universities extend varsity athletes special privileges in recognition of their packed schedules. Thus, one line at the campus bookstore may be reserved for athletes to deliver them from the otherwise lengthy waits endured by other students at the beginning of a semester. Athletes are also entitled to wear sweaters, “hoodies,” and sweatpants with team insignia that identify them as varsity athletes and which are not available to outsiders. But being set apart from other students can prove problematic in other respects. Garth’s membership in a team effectively determined the scope and nature of his social life:

We kind of tend to stay within our group ‘cause that’s all we know. Like I don’t have any friends outside of the hockey team ... That’s a big thing, being part of, like, a family of 27 guys and you go out together in big groups ... Other guys don’t like us, and we’re intimidating being in such a big group, so it’s really hard to meet people ... I haven’t really met a lot of people over four years compared to what most people probably do.

Canadian athletes sometimes experienced their identity and distinctiveness *as* athletes as a social liability. Jane, a swimmer at an Ivy League school, doubted that she would have been accepted as a student there or granted as much student assistance as she received had she not been an athlete. She would certainly not have been able to afford

to be there without that assistance. But her grades, she believed, were lower than they might otherwise have been because she was so exhausted most of the time: "I feel like a lot of the students—well not a lot but some of the students—look down on you and think you're stupid just because you are an athlete."

Keeping in touch with family and sometimes friends "back home" became an essential yet costly matter for most athletes or, more commonly, for their parents. Many mothers and fathers visited their sons and daughters in the U.S. at least once and often more frequently. Trips home over Christmas or during the summer are not covered by scholarships or student aid, and athletes, who are encouraged by coaches to take summer courses in order to lighten their class loads during the playing season, often do not have the time to take a summer job, unless one is arranged on campus where athletes can also readily satisfy team requirements for off-season physical conditioning. While varsity athletes travel extensively by airplane and bus to "away" games and competitions across the U.S., they seldom have time to see much more of these places than the airport, hotel and stadium. A number of Canadian student athletes enrolled at universities and colleges in and around a major East Coast city felt that they had really not gotten to walk around it and to know it nearly as well as they would have liked to have done.

When an athlete's undergraduate years come to an end, advises a guide marketed to Canadian high school students and their parents, "life in the real world begins." Some college athletes may catch the attention of professional sports scouts and be invited to attend a professional training camp:

In the majority of cases, however, graduates must enter the work force after graduation. By combining athletics with a college degree, the individual has kept all of his options open. Many employers are eagerly willing to hire an individual who has successfully combined academics and the tough competitive athletics. [Lahey 1993:157]

A few of the athletes interviewed for this study hoped to pursue professional sports careers or to extend their post-college amateur athletic careers for a few years more. But most of them were prepared to move on from sports and to discover whether former holders of athletic scholarships do, in fact, "have it made for life." A few had formed contacts with local boosters of campus athletics and hoped to land jobs through these ties in the U.S. Several others planned to pursue graduate studies or professional degrees either in Canada or in the States. A couple of athletes married Americans, while several others

returned to Canada to long-term relationships that had started before and somehow continued throughout their college years. A substantial proportion of them were not certain that, if given the opportunity to choose again, they would necessarily have done exactly the same thing and enrolled in this or that particular school. Yet almost to a man and a woman, they depicted their college years as "having been worth it," a time when they left home, became somewhat independent and grew up. The years they spent as varsity athletes had not only coincided with, but had actually constituted, their particular coming of age.

Conclusions

Canadian athletes who obtain athletic scholarships or equivalent forms of aid and consideration that enable them to attend colleges and universities in the United States become, in a sense, inadvertent transnationals. Only one of the athletes interviewed indicated that the possibility of using an athletic scholarship as a possible means to move permanently to the U.S. had been a conscious part of her "pursuit of the full ride" from the beginning. Yet a number of them had made local American contacts that might, they hoped, lead to jobs. None of these athletes would have been unable to afford a university education had they not received an athletic scholarship. Most of them had identified "fall back" options to enroll in Canadian universities and to continue playing their sports if American scholarships not been forthcoming. In many cases, parents declared that they were not prepared to provide any more in the way of financial assistance to underwrite the supplementary costs of a vastly more expensive American college education than they would otherwise have offered to subsidize the costs of post-secondary education in Canada. Yet some parents, nonetheless, discretely pay more than this would entail in order to permit a son or daughter to accept a partial scholarship or to complete a degree when scholarship funding has run out. Although Canadian athletes often manage to complete college more or less free of financial debt, it is not certain that the same can always be said of their parents. Parents who announce with pride that their daughter or son has won an athletic scholarship may be less forthcoming in explaining which part of the costs incurred by this option for post-secondary education will be financed by the college and which by mom or dad. In truth, the complete costs of taking up an athletic scholarship in the U.S. may not become entirely apparent until, so to speak, all of the bills are submitted.

Returning to the concerns identified at the beginning of this article, why and how has the pursuit of athletic

scholarships that lead young athletes to the U.S. been so successful in capturing the attention and enlisting the involvement of countless boys and girls, parents and sports officials in Canada? The desire of American athletic directors and varsity coaches to recruit elite athletes—be they from Des Moines, Toronto or Nairobi—to join their programs is easy enough to understand. Moreover, some college athletes—including Canadians—who compete in sports such as football, basketball, baseball and hockey, do ultimately pursue longer or shorter careers as professional athletes, even though it is widely known that the overwhelming majority of varsity athletes in these sports will not do so. Canadian athletes who play one or another “non-professional” sport in U.S. schools might improve their level of performance to Olympic qualifying standards, although in some sports moving outside of Canada may effectively serve to prevent them from being selected for Canadian national teams that compete at the world level.

When so few of the Canadians who accept American athletic scholarships end up with professional or elite amateur careers as competitive athletes beyond the one, two, three or four years that they spend as varsity athletes, why do so many coaches and sports officials in Canada tailor their programs and focus their efforts on encouraging athletically accomplished young Canadians to head off to the U.S.? Why do youths and parents become so caught up in the excitement that surrounds the annual pursuit of “full ride” scholarships when anyone who lingers for a short while around even the outermost edges of Canadian sporting circles can scarcely avoid hearing sotto voce recitations about one or another athlete’s discovery of the “downsides” of American athletic scholarships? Moving beyond the specificities of individual cases and circumstances to account for the general features and outcomes of this fascination with American athletic scholarships obliges us to take note of the ways in which the prestige that steadfastly continues to be attributed to these awards rewards not only the young men and women who are said to “win” but also the adults who have more or less conspicuously helped them to do so.

For a Canadian teenager who has devoted so much of her or his young life to sport, the acclaim that accompanies competitive success erupts when one becomes the object of open speculation and then actual negotiations leading to the awarding of an athletic scholarship by an American college or university.¹² Individuals accepting these awards report being thrilled by the prospect of being able to continue their sporting exploits by moving up to what is taken to be a higher calibre and more celebrated level of competition. Many later acknowledge that their

desire to keep playing sport after high school initially overshadowed their interest in the particular courses of study into which they would be entering. Although facing, along with the rest of their classmates, the uncertainties, excitement and dislocation that come with the conclusion of one’s high school years, those “heading south” to take up athletic scholarships assume that their college years will revolve, in substantial measure, around practices, activities and relationships with which they have long been familiar. Although soon to be separated from family and friends, they look forward, as many of them put it, to being “paid” to play sports and getting their education for “free.” Why would a young athlete second-guess the appropriateness of choosing to accept such an offer, given the pride and excitement so often exuded by their coaches and parents?

For coaches and local sport officials, the accomplishments registered by young athletes whom they mentored for longer or shorter periods of time reflect well upon their sporting expertise and burnish the status of their organizations. For mothers and fathers who have not only underwritten the costs of many years of child and youth sport activities but also devoted thousands of hours to driving their son or daughter to sports practices and competitions and to watching them perform, an athletic scholarship may validate a distinctive form of child rearing that might otherwise be deemed somewhat obsessive. While there is relatively little or, in most cases, no chance of athletic scholarships leading to the fame and fortune of a professional sports career, they do offer those who receive them the prospect of obtaining a college education. And for those who have been responsible for raising these boys and girls, even just informal local discussion of a son or daughter as being the sort of athlete who *might* be considered for an athletic scholarship stands as recognition of not only the talents and dedication of the child but also of the care, attention and wisdom of their parents.

Ironically the movement of some young Canadian athletes away from their homes and country offers not only a reassuring form of continuity in their own lives but also an impartial endorsement and sealing of given family projects that children and parents may have been engaged in for a decade or more. The college years that young Canadian athletes spend in the U.S. do, indeed, stretch the spatial bounds of family. Determining the eventual outcome of an athletic scholarship on the future life of a given award holder necessarily remains a matter for the future. In the meantime, young Canadian athletes, their parents, youth sport coaches, and American college athletics officials continue to play their respective parts in sustaining the premises and prestige of a distinctive sort of coming of age that

continues to thrive as long as all involved continue to overlook certain incongruent and, thus, less spoken of facets of the “full ride.”

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Notes

- 1 As has been widely noted in the emerging literature on the anthropology of sport, paradoxes of various types abound within sport. Viewed as a genre of performance that seeks to reproduce society according to one or another selected model (MacAloon 1984; Mentore 2000), sport may be framed in terms of its constitutive and procedural rules and strategies (Shore 1996:105-6). Yet as a deeply improvisational genre of performance, sporting events frequently yield unanticipated outcomes that frustrate the reproduction of preferred values. A more detailed consideration of sport as cultural performance is considered in Dyck 2000a, along with a number of other theoretical approaches to the anthropology of sport.
- 2 The term *Ivy League* refers to an intercollegiate athletic conference made up of eight private institutions of higher education (including Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth College, Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania and Yale). The terms *Ivy League* or *Ivies* are also synonymous with notions of academic prestige, social exclusivity and selectivity of admissions.
- 3 The NCAA’s use of the term *student-athlete* to refer to athletic scholarship holders is one that has increasingly attracted comment. Schulman and Bowen (2001:xxxi), for instance, note that “we do not use this term, since everyone who is enrolled at a college or university is a student.”
- 4 See Mitchell and Ennis (2007) and Hogshead-Makar and Zimbalist (2007) for treatments of the varied impacts of Title IX on intercollegiate athletics and post-secondary education in the U.S.
- 5 See Festle (1996) for an account of the not altogether “friendly” take-over of the fledgling Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) by the NCAA.

- 6 For illustrations of this, see Bowen and Levin 2003:108, 308, 330.
- 7 These were drawn from the ranks of NCAA Division IA private and public universities, Division IAA Ivy League universities, Division III universities and co-ed liberal arts colleges, as well as Division III women’s colleges. Included amongst the 30 institutions were Duke University, Stanford, Rice, Notre Dame, Yale, Princeton, University of Michigan, Emory, Tufts, Oberlin College, Swarthmore, Barnard and Bryn Mawr (Shulman and Bowen 2001:xxviii).
- 8 Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to protect the confidentiality of research subjects.
- 9 Ethnographic encounters with various situated forms of prestige sometimes elicited a well-intended collegial suggestion that it would probably be “well worth it” to consider the operational workings of these arrangements in terms of Bourdieu’s (1984) study of distinction and his notion of cultural capital. Although Bourdieu mentioned sport in this work (1984:209-225), his insights into the oppositions between “popular” and “bourgeois” sports in France in the 1960s cannot be readily or usefully transposed on the organization of child and youth sports in contemporary North America. Briefly, Bourdieu explained cultural distinctions in sport practices in terms of clearly delineated class oppositions; in contrast, child and youth sports in Canada tend to blur class distinctions, with middle-class youth athletes becoming increasingly focused upon pursuing athletic scholarships that have traditionally been identified as a means by which boys and girls of more modest means might be able to obtain a university education.
- 10 Adler and Adler (1991:81) also discuss coaches’ tactical shaming of varsity athletes including acts such as threatening them with “benching,” suspension, and non-renewal of scholarships. These and other forms of “status degradation” become part of what the Adlers identify as a “rite of passage” to reshape high school stars into more compliant college players.
- 11 The NCAA strictly regulates the number, duration and nature of officially permitted and subsidized visits that each prospective athlete can make to universities and colleges prior to committing to attend a particular institution.
- 12 There are, of course, other paths to athletic acclaim than being awarded an American athletic scholarship. For boys, the prospect of being drafted and signed by a Canadian Hockey League (major junior, Tier 1) team by age 16 is a highly recognized accomplishment. Appearances by teenaged gymnasts and ice skaters, for instance, in national and international competitions tend to receive somewhat less attention at the neighbourhood level than do other more “mainstream” sports.

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