

“Dispelling the Myth: Basketball in a Hockey Country”
Southern Alberta as an Exception to the Rule

By

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Hockey is Canada and Canada is hockey. Canada has developed the game and a reputation for being the best at it. The image Canada sends to the world is one of a country full of hockey players. Doug Beardsley asserts: "My country is not a country, it's the winter; it's hockey."¹ Hockey in Canada has "a history that has allowed the game to represent something quintessentially Canadian. For better or worse, ice hockey is something 'we' invented; it is 'our' game."² Hockey is given the task of providing something that Canadians all across the country can identify with. Hockey is used to identify Canadians to each other and to the world. The literature tells us that hockey "has become one of this country's most significant collective representations—a story that Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be a Canadian."³ These sentiments are part of an ongoing myth which tells Canadians and the world that all across this country people are playing hockey.

Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, the authors of Hockey Night in Canada state that "hockey acts as both myth and allegory in Canadian culture."⁴ The authors go on to note that "The word myth is most often used to suggest something that is essentially false. It implies a contrast between the world of fable or superstition and a 'reality' that the fables often disguise."⁵ Using this definition, one is able to expose the statement "Hockey is Canada and Canada is hockey" as a myth by examining an area of Canada where hockey is not as dominant as another sport: basketball. There are countless references to the "Canadian-ness" of hockey and it seems as though there is no other way to identify such a diverse nation. With these convictions, it is hard to imagine that any area of Canada could exist without hockey as its unifying feature.

¹ Doug Beardsley, Country on Ice (Winlaw, BC: Polestar Press, 1987), p. 32.

² Richard Gruneau, and David Whitson, Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), p.3.

³ Gruneau and Whitson, Hockey Night in Canada, 13.

⁴ Gruneau and Whitson, Hockey Night in Canada, 13.

⁵ Gruneau and Whitson, Hockey Night in Canada, 132.

It was a dark, chilly Wednesday night in January. Cars filled the parking lot and were lining the street in front of the Civic Centre in a small town in Southern Alberta. You could hear the cheers as you walked towards the doors. Something important was going on in the building that is the traditional site of the local ice rink. Since our setting was rural Canada, one might assume that these people were congregating to watch a hockey game. That assumption would be wrong. In this part of the country people come out in droves to support a sport other than hockey. In what used to be an indoor ice rink is now a home to various activities, the most important of which, is basketball.

There is an interesting phenomenon in many of the rural towns south of Lethbridge, Alberta; they identify themselves as communities through basketball, not hockey, as one might expect when they read something like "Hockey remains a focal point for community life in small-town Canada,"⁶ a comment made over and over again by Canadian writers. Basketball has become a huge part of the lives of everyone in these communities, whether they are active participants or not. Sports allow people to fulfil their "quest for excitement in unexciting societies."⁷ But the choice of sport tells us something about these communities, The dominance of basketball over any other sport, including hockey, in this area of Southern Alberta, makes it an exception to the rule that all of Canada is hockey. This dominance can be linked to the nature of basketball itself, the institutions through which the sport developed, the people who first settled in the area, and the area's close proximity to the United States.

Basketball is an interesting sport, in that it was created by a particular person for a particular purpose. Unlike other sports that developed over time and whose origins are blurry,

⁶ Ann Hall, et al, Sport in Canadian Society (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc, 1991), p. 38.

⁷ Ann Hall, et al, Sport in Canadian Society, 33.

basketball has a clear beginning. In 1891, James Naismith, a Canadian, was employed by the Young Men's Christian Association Training Institute in Springfield, Massachusetts. The directors of the Institute were looking for a game which would be suitable to play indoors during the winter, when it was almost impossible to play outdoor games. They wanted a game that could be "played on any type of ground...so that no special preparation would be necessary."⁸ The goal of the YMCA was to have all members involved, so this new game would have to allow a large number of players. It needed to "exercise a man all-around. Every part of his body should get attention."⁹ It also had to appeal to the men so they "would desire to play it for its own sake."¹⁰ And, "it should have little or none of the reputed roughness of Rugby or Association Football [soccer]."¹¹ Finally it would have to be easy to learn. These were the founding principles of the game we now know as basketball.

Naismith took these guiding principles and on December 21, 1891, the first game of basketball was played. The most important thing about this new game was the de-emphasis it placed on violence. Naismith explained: "There should also be developed that manly courage which is so essential in every true gentlemen."¹² In The Rules of Basketball, Naismith explains "that a man should keep complete control of himself or his play is more than likely to count for nothing."¹³ The person with the ball was not allowed to run with it, but had to pass it to one of his teammates in order to discourage violence. If a man's attention was centred on the ball instead of the opposing player, Naismith hope it would take the element of personal spite out of

⁸ James Naismith, The Rules of Basketball, (Springfield, MA: Springfield Printing and Binding Company, 1892) p. 3-4.

⁹ Naismith, Rules, 5.

¹⁰ Naismith, Rules, 5.

¹¹ Naismith, Rules, 6.

¹² Naismith, Rules, 5.

¹³ Naismith, Rules, 5.

the game. There were strict rules against any form of body contact with another player. For the first infringement of those rules, a player received a foul. A second foul resulted in the sitting out of that player, with no substitute until the next goal was scored. Three consecutive fouls for your team would lead to an automatic goal for the other team. This rule was thought to discourage any team from committing three fouls in a row which would hopefully make for a more gentlemanly game.¹⁴ Naismith himself explained the game's stance on violence when he said: "If some rules seem unnecessarily severe, it should be remembered that the best time to stop roughness is before it begins."¹⁵

The game was started at a Christian institute and from the beginning was an example of 'muscular Christianity.' This idea, adopted by many Protestant churches, taught people that a healthy life was a Christ-like life. Team sports were very important to this movement as they taught equality and fair play. Team sports were also thought to contribute to the development of moral character of those who played, while teaching them skills that would lead to a better life.¹⁶ Sports were used as a means to control emotions. The bottom line was that Christianity meant a healthy way of living. The YMCAs became big supporters of the 'muscular Christianity' theory. As a result, basketball, along with other sports, became very popular in the YMCA.

The YMCA is an historic institution. It began with a group of twelve young men in London, England on June 6, 1844 who wanted to "influence young men to spread the Redeemer's Kingdom amongst those by whom they are surrounded."¹⁷ These men held meetings, Sunday School lessons, Bible study and activities for community relief. The Association was extremely popular and within fifty years there were five thousand YMCAs in twenty-four countries around

¹⁴ Naismith, Rules, 13.

¹⁵ Naismith, Rules, 6.

¹⁶ Morris Mott, ed., Sports in Canada—Historical Readings (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1989), p. 98.

¹⁷ C. Howard Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America (New York: Association Press, 1951), p. 5.

the world, with approximately half a million members.¹⁸ The first YMCA in North America was established in Montreal in December 1851, followed closely by one in Boston in the same year. From there, YMCAs became popular across British North America and the United States and by 1854 were dotting the map all across the countries. By this time the purpose of the YMCA had developed to focus on "the improvement of the spiritual and mental condition of young men."¹⁹ The goal of the program changed again by 1866 to "the bringing together of Christian young men and 'the leading to the saviour' of those who are ignorant of [H]im."²⁰ Today the mission of the YMCA is "To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all."²¹ The slogan for the YMCA is "We build strong kids, strong families and strong communities," showing that they are still concerned with helping people build a better life. By the second half of the 1850s, YMCAs began to introduce sporting activities into their programs, showing their adaptation of 'muscular Christianity.' The directors of the YMCA decided the young men needed a place to participate in athletic activity away from the evils of the city streets. So the first YMCA gymnasium was built in New York City to "afford physical development, conducive to health and vigor, and thus better fitting the members for life's duties."²² Gymnastics, swimming, rowing, camping, baseball and bicycle clubs were some of the first sports to take place at the YMCA and by the 1890s sports in YMCAs were well established. Most of these sports were individual and it was the "invention of basketball [that] ushered in the YMCA era of group games."²³

¹⁸ Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 6.

¹⁹ Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 18.

²⁰ Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 180.

²¹ <http://www.ymca.com/index.jsp> 09 Dec 2003.

²² Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 246.

²³ Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 259.

Basketball was so popular from the first time it was played that it did not take long to spread. Since the YMCAs across the country were inter-linked, it was only natural for the sport to spread throughout the YMCAs first. The rules for basketball were printed in the YMCA magazine, *The Triangle* and sent to many colleges across the country. From the YMCA it was introduced to high schools and colleges across the country, picking up fans all along the way, spreading "like wildfire."²⁴ Five years after it was first played, basketball was introduced to China through the YMCA and in the same year, 1896, the YMCA held its first national tournament.²⁵ High school basketball became the most popular sport among boys by the beginning of World War I and was second only to football in colleges in the United States.²⁶ By 1915, basketball "was popular in every modern society, and in many not-so-modern ones."²⁷ Such widespread popularity of the sport around the world could only be accomplished in such a short period of time through a well-developed institution such as the YMCA.

The first rules for basketball were slightly different than they are today. As the game spread, the rules became more standardized. Five-man teams were established by 1897. Dribbling was introduced in 1896, however between 1901 and 1908 the dribbler was not allowed to shoot. The pivot was allowed in 1893 and toss-ups after each basket were discontinued. While basketball was in its early stages different organizations had different rules. The colleges played with different rules than the YMCAs, so in 1915 a Joint Basketball Committee was formed with representatives from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), Amateur Athletic

²⁴ Hopkins, History of the YMCA, 261.

²⁵ Allen Guttmann, From Ritual to Record (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 40-1.

²⁶ Richard A. Swanson, and Betty Spears, History of Sport and Physical Education in the United States (4th ed.; Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1995), p. 175.

²⁷ Guttmann, From Ritual to Record, 41.

Union (AAU) and the YMCA in order to establish an agreement upon rules.²⁸ These would come to be accepted around the world, showing the dominance of the sport by the United States at an early age. Once the rules were standardized, basketball continued to be popular throughout the world, including Canada, although our common mythology is not very concerned with basketball.

To understand how basketball could become so popular in an area of Canada, it is important to note how that area was developed. The communities of Cardston, Magrath, Raymond and Stirling all have a common heritage. These communities were settled mainly by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the Mormons, as they are generally called. It was through these settlers that basketball was introduced to the area. The communities of Coutts, Masinasin and Milk River were not settled by the Mormons, but a majority of the settlers did come from the United States. A shared American heritage marks the first settlers of the area. The American frontier was closed off by 1890. At the same time most of the Canadian West was open to those who were willing to settle it. The openness of the Canadian West was a blessing to the first American settlers: Mormons who were fleeing prosecution in the United States for polygamy. As early as 1843, the Mormon Church instituted polygamy and some worthy men were called to have more than one wife.²⁹ Persecution in the east caused the members to blaze a trail across the United States to seek safety in Utah. At first, while the members were in their new homes in the Salt Lake Valley in Utah there were no problems. But as more non-Mormons moved west, there became increasing pressure on the government to do

²⁸ Swanson and Spears, Physical Education in the United States, 175.

²⁹ The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), p. 272, Section 132:61. It is important to note that not everyone was allowed to participate in plural marriage. It was seen as a calling from the Lord, and one had to be worthy to take part in it, therefore some of the first settlers were some of the most righteous members of the Church.

something about the plural marriages. On March 22, 1882 the United States government passed the Edmunds Act. This act listed the punishment for polygamy as disenfranchisement, a five hundred dollar fine, and three years in jail. The Edmunds-Tucker Law of 1887 increased the penalties and things were difficult for the Mormons.³⁰ Many had taken to hiding out or leaving the Salt Lake area altogether. Charles O. Card was one member who had been facing increasing prosecution and was forced to leave the state. The President of the Church at the time, John W. Taylor, sent Card and a small group of men to find a place for a new settlement in Canada. Card set out in 1886 on an exploratory mission and decided the best place would be at the head of Lee's Creek, the site of present-day Cardston, Alberta. Card returned to the United States to gather a larger group to return with him to the new settlement. By June 3, 1887 there were ten families and some single men living in what would later become Cardston.³¹ Steady immigration to Cardston continued until 1891. In a statement issued by the President of the Church, Wilford Woodruff, the practice of plural marriages was officially denounced by the Church in 1890.³² After that time the numbers of people emigrating declined, until 1898 when things were picking up in Southern Alberta.

Mormon settlers to Canada left Utah for other reasons besides potential prosecution. Many were prompted by economic factors. By 1862 there was no more farmland available in Utah.³³ Many people were delighted at the thought of large pieces of land for very little money. The thought of starting out in a new frontier appealed to many people, along with the opportunity

³⁰ Archie G. Wilcox, Founding of the Mormon Community in Alberta (Calgary: University of Alberta, 1950), p. 12-13.

³¹ Wilcox, Founding of the Mormon Community, 49.

³² Doctrine and Covenants, 291-92, Official Declaration-1.

³³ Wilcox, Founding of the Mormon Community, 16.

to make use of a transcontinental railway system.³⁴ Southern Alberta was becoming prosperous. Lethbridge was booming because of the discovery of coal nearby and many people started farming in the surrounding area. To help with the farming, it was decided that an irrigation canal should be built, running from south of Cardston to south of Lethbridge. The Alberta Irrigation Company decided that the Mormons would be the best choice to build the canal. The Company chose to ask the Mormons to take on the problem as a result of their hard work and pioneering efforts in the past. They also knew the problem first-hand and had irrigation experience in Utah.³⁵ For those reasons they were approached to build the canal. So the Church made a deal with the Alberta Irrigation Company which would see an irrigation canal built, along with two towns on Company land. The towns were to have at least two hundred fifty people in each, and the land for the towns would be earned by the Church. The workers would be paid "half in cash and the balance in land at three dollars per acre."³⁶ Not many people were eager to take part in this new program and the church published pamphlets to encourage people to take part in this new venture. The Church also called people on missions to Canada to build the canal and fulfil their part of the contract. The canal was officially opened on November 14, 1899 by Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior. The settlement obligation was fulfilled with Magrath being founded in the fall of 1898 and Stirling in May 1899. The Church had managed to find people to live in the new area, with most of them staying to build a legacy. Mormon immigration to Canada again cooled off after the canal was finished. The finishing of the canal signalled the end of church-sponsored immigration to Canada. When the next Mormon town was founded, people

³⁴ Wilcox, Founding of the Mormon Community, 17.

³⁵ John R. Hicken, Events Leading to the Settlement of the Communities of Cardston, Magrath, Stirling and Raymond, Alberta (Logan, UT: Utah State University, 1968), p. 69.

³⁶ Grace Snow, ed. Under Eight Flags: Milk River and District, (Milk River, AB: Milk River Historical Society, 1989), p.25.

came purely for the economic opportunities, not because their church told them to. Jesse Knight, a member of the church, started the town of Raymond in 1901 by building a sugar beet factory. People were drawn to this new enterprise and therefore many settled in Raymond to build and work in the factory or to grow the sugar beets for it. People were also drawn to Raymond because of the coal deposits in Lethbridge and for the chance to work on a railway linking Lethbridge and Great Falls, Montana.³⁷ It took less than a year for the hamlet of Raymond to reach village status and by July 1 1903 it officially became a town. Raymond was settled much more quickly than any other nearby town and was soon even rivalling Lethbridge in population.³⁸ However, by 1906 Mormon immigration to Southern Alberta had virtually dropped off and people were coming in from other parts of the United States, Eastern Canada or other countries.

Settlement in the non-Mormon communities of Southern Alberta was slower and did not start until the Mormons were already in place. Settlement in Milk River, Coutts and Masinasin happened in much the same way and at much the same time. It started slowly, with a few single ranchers settling in the area around 1902. Regular migration began in 1906 and there was "a steady stream of land-seekers from the south" who came by railroad.³⁹ The settlement of Milk River did not reach hamlet status until 1909, after being prompted by the Homestead Rush in 1908.⁴⁰ The Homestead Rush saw many people enter the area because they had heard about good

³⁷ Dean Cook, History of Educational Institutions in Mormon Communities of Southern Alberta (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1958), p. 4-5.

³⁸ Kathryn Bales, and Jack Bales, eds. Raymond Remembered, Settlers, Sugar and Stampedes: A History of the Town and People of Raymond (Raymond, AB: Town of Raymond, 1993), p. 3-33.

³⁹ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 30. The majority of the settlers to this area came from the Dakotas, Minnesota and Iowa.

⁴⁰ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 37.

farming land in the area. Settlement continued slowly in comparison and these communities did not reach comparable size with the Mormon communities until the 1930s.

The Southern Alberta settlers had a common "American heritage" through which basketball was introduced to this area.⁴¹ One reason basketball is such an integral part of community life in this area is due to the people who first settled in the area. The gentlemanly nature of basketball made it popular with Christians, especially the Mormons, who also subscribed to the 'muscular Christianity' theory. The philosophy of the Latter-day Saints has always been "that the spirit and the moral tone of the members can be elevated and maintained on a higher plane if an adequate programme for recreational activity can be provided."⁴² Basketball play in churches is one large reason why basketball became such a dominant sport in the area of southern Alberta. By 1903, just two years after the first settlers arrived, Magrath had its own basketball team. The *Pothole Mollies*, a girls' team.⁴³ Sarah (Tracy) Anderson, a member of the Mollies explained that before gymnasiums were built, the team had to play on the prairie sod.⁴⁴ Magrath and Cardston were early rivals and in the fall of 1903, the summer of 1904, and in August 1905, they were selected to play Cardston (for the championship of the world and no fault of theirs if the world didn't know it) at Lethbridge, where we met on the old square which is now Galt Gardens.⁴⁵ From the balcony of the hotel, they "could see the Indians and cowboys and settlers . . . riding in and tying up their horses or hunting places to leave their rigs. People were

⁴¹ Hicken, Events Leading to the Settlement, v.

⁴² Cook, History of Educational Institutions, 74.

⁴³ Irrigation Builders, (Magrath, AB: Magrath and District History Association, 1974), p. 68.

⁴⁴ Irrigation Builders, 132.

⁴⁵ Irrigation Builders, 132.

coming in on foot and jamming the place."⁴⁶ Even in 1905 basketball was a popular attraction for the people of Southern Alberta as "the place was packed."⁴⁷

That crowded feeling can still be experienced. Magrath basketball games are always popular and can boast large crowds. Magrath has developed an excellent basketball program. The high school boys' team is a consistent winner in the 4A division of the Alberta Schools Athletic Association, winning the Provincial Championship in 2002-03.⁴⁸ Magrath High School is the size of a 2A school, but both the boys' and girls' high school teams play above their level. Hockey did not develop in Magrath until indoor rinks could be built. The writers of Magrath's history realized the effect of the warm westerly 'Chinook' winds on hockey in the area when they noted, "We have never done much in hockey because most winters do not have enough ice."⁴⁹ Thus there are no articles on hockey and nothing to explain if hockey was making any headway in the area. Magrath does have a hockey rink today and minor hockey is played, but not nearly to the same extent as basketball.

Stirling was settled at the same time as Magrath and claims to have been the first place to introduce basketball to Alberta in April 1903.⁵⁰ The Stirling teams were very successful and by 1914 the Stirling Giants had won the championship of Alberta. It was the 1934-35 school year that saw Stirling enter a high school basketball league with teams from Magrath, Cardston, Raymond and Lethbridge. The high school program continued to be an important part of the community and in the 1942-43 season the boys' team won the Provincial "A" Championship, which would be equivalent to the 4A boys' league of today. Stirling also became a founding

⁴⁶ Irrigation Builders, 132.

⁴⁷ Irrigation Builders, 178.

⁴⁸ <http://www.asaa.ca/pages/sports/basketball/results/results.php3>, 09 Dec 2003.

⁴⁹ Irrigation Builders, 388.

⁵⁰ Stirling, its Story and People, 1899-1980 (Stirling: Stirling Sunset Society, 1981), p. 151.

member of the Sunshine Basketball League with Coutts, Milk River, Warner and Wrentham. They went on to win the Provincial "B" Championships in 1957.⁵¹ The 1960s and 70s saw much changing in league names and teams; however Stirling maintained a domination on the basketball court, winning "B" championships, Zone championships and winning the Raymond Sugar Bowl in 1972.⁵² In recent history Stirling has dominated in 1A play on both the boys' and girls' sides. The girls team last won the 1A Provincial Championships in 1998-99, and has been the runner-up every year since then. The boys won the Championship in the 2000-01 and 2002-03 seasons.⁵³ One of the coaches of the boys' high school team commented: "Stirling School has always been relatively small to compete in intra-school athletics, but it has always been the policy of the school to encourage student activity in extra-curricular sport when possible."⁵⁴ Stirling was obviously more interested in promoting and playing basketball rather than hockey. Hockey is not mentioned at all in Stirling's history and to this day it does not have an indoor hockey rink.

Basketball is very important to people in Raymond, and always has been. Maxwell Howell notes the important role Raymond played in developing basketball in the area by calling the Mormon community "the catalyst for the growth of basketball in that area."⁵⁵ Basketball gave the people of Raymond something to share with each other and provided a way for them to identify with each other. July 1, 1903 "marked the formal beginning of the sport in the lives of Raymondites—a focus which continues to this day."⁵⁶ On that day the first basketball game took

⁵¹ Stirling, 156.

⁵² Stirling, 158.

⁵³ <http://www.asaa.ca/pages/sports/basketball/results/results.php3> 09 Dec 2003.

⁵⁴ Stirling, 157.

⁵⁵ Maxwell L Howell, and Reet A. Howell. History of Sport in Canada (Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing Company. 1985), p. 189.

⁵⁶ Bales and Bales, Raymond Remembered, 12-140.

place between Raymond and Stirling, and Stirling won. "During the early 1930s, just about the only sport that didn't lose its audience was basketball."⁵⁷ Basketball's importance to Raymond may be best signalled by the emergence of the Raymond *Union Jacks* in the 1920s. The *Union Jacks* were a men's team whose beginnings came from a group of Mormons who had attended the Knight Academy.⁵⁸ The *Union Jacks* were dominant in senior men's basketball in Alberta during the 1920s and 1930s. They were Alberta Champions for many years and eventually became Canadian Champions. They won the Provincial Championships successively in the 1921-22, 1922-23 and 1923-24 seasons. More Provincial Championships were won by the *Union Jacks* in 1926, 1927, 1928 and from 1930-38. They won their first Canadian Championship in 1924 and again in 1934.⁵⁹ Their "basketball dynasty" was responsible for putting "Raymond on the Canadian basketball map."⁶⁰

Today one can see the people of Raymond reaffirm their affinity with the sport through a huge basketball tournament every December, The Sugar Bowl, named in honour of the industry that first brought people to Raymond. This tournament is not just for the players and their families, it truly is a community affair. People have been known to wait in line for up to four hours just to get tickets to a game. Raymond is another 2A school which has chosen to play at a higher level of competition. The boys play 4A and were last finalists in Provincials in the 1996-1997 season. The girls play 3A and have not won any Provincial Championships in the last seven years, although they were the finalists in the 1996-97 season.⁶¹ It is an accomplishment to be able to maintain a competitive level of play against teams from schools with double the population of

⁵⁷ Bales and Bales, *Raymond Remembered*, 12-139.

⁵⁸ Howell and Howell, *History of Sport in Canada*, 251.

⁵⁹ Bales and Bales, *Raymond Remembered*, 12-145.

⁶⁰ Bales and Bales, *Raymond Remembered*, 12-140.

⁶¹ <http://www.asaa.ca/pages/sports/basketball/results/results.php3> 09 December 2003.

your high school. Many people in the community have a desire to attend the games and take part in what defines their community.

Raymond did not have a hockey team until 1927, long after basketball had already been established. Organized minor hockey started in 1975 in Raymond. The Chinook League began in 1978 with teams from Cardston, Fort Macleod and Kainai. The league then expanded to include teams from Brooks, Taber, Crowsnest Pass and Great Falls, Montana.⁶² The distance between the eastern and western most places is 191 kilometres. The distance between the northern and southern most places in that league is 388 kilometres. To need that large of an area just to have enough players for a league does not happen in many other places in Canada. This confirms that "hockey is one of the least publicized sports in town."⁶³

Basketball was introduced to areas of Southern Alberta through the Mormon settlers. It came to the non-Mormon communities through the American settlers who came to those places, but basketball also developed in those communities because of the need to compete. The communities in Southern Alberta that are not primarily Mormon also share the common denominator of basketball so they can compete with those around them. As a result, basketball becomes popular in the smaller, non-Mormon communities such as Milk River, Coutts and Masinasin.

Milk River began as a hockey-playing community, sometime during the 1920s on the flooded tennis courts, or on the frozen river.⁶⁴ This changed once basketball became popular. By 1938, Milk River had a real skating rink and at least three teams: one from the school, one

⁶² Bales and Bales, Raymond Remembered, 12-151.

⁶³ Bales and Bales, Raymond Remembered, 12-152.

⁶⁴ Grace Snow, ed. Under Eight Flags: Milk River and District, (Milk River, AB: Milk River Historical Society, 1989) pp. 101-102.

community team and a men's team.⁶⁵ As time went on the school team, the Peewees, progressed and hockey became more of a staple in the community. In the 1940s a league was formed with teams from the Blood Reserve, Stirling, Taber, and Aden, and teams also played games in Great Falls, Montana.⁶⁶ It was not until 1955 that a motion was made to build an indoor ice rink in town for hockey and curling. Once the rink was built however, the Alberta Wheat Pool used it for grain storage and the building was not used for its intended purpose until the 1960s.⁶⁷

By 1979 this building had again received a new role in the community. The ice was removed and a wooden floor inserted. Milk River said goodbye to hockey in town.⁶⁸ Legend has it that Milk River gave up the ice rink because they received a swimming pool that year, and Warner, the next town to the north, would now be the home of the ice rink. This had an impact on the sport in Milk River. It became more convenient for children to play basketball in Milk River than to take them to Warner for hockey. Beardsley tells us that "in hundreds of small towns throughout this country on ice, the local hockey rink is still the centre of the community. It is the place you still hurry to get to. . . ."⁶⁹ In Milk River, the local hockey rink is still an important part of the community, however there is no longer ice there. The only skating that happens there is roller-skating every Friday night. The ice has been removed and a wooden floor installed with hoops at each end. In this community basketball has replaced hockey in importance.

In the town's history, basketball is not mentioned until 1954 when the Knights of Columbus started sponsoring an annual basketball tournament in Milk River, but basketball

⁶⁵ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 177.

⁶⁶ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 238.

⁶⁷ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 281.

⁶⁸ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 448.

⁶⁹ Beardsley, Country on Ice, 33.

teams had been organized in the 1920s.⁷⁰ The 1958 men's team attended the "B" playoffs in Calgary, but lost the provincial title. The first team from Milk River to win a provincial championship was the boy's team from 1961. This same year the girl's team won their Sunshine League, but did not make it past the Zone playoffs.⁷¹ Basketball was left out of the history book until the 1986-87 season when the high school Comets went undefeated in league play.⁷² One of the most important years for the Comets basketball program came in 1988-89 when the boys brought home the 2A provincial title. This team marked an achievement that many teams would try to follow. The provincial banner that the 1988-89 boys team brought home was hung in prominence in the high school gymnasium with all the player's signatures on it. It was the last time a boy's team from Milk River won a provincial championship and seeing the banner reminds current teams of what they are striving for. Basketball in Milk River today is truly a community affair. Basketball fever sweeps the whole town and one can't help but get caught up in it, even if they are not directly involved with any of the teams. The gym is packed on game night with many people coming out to support the program. Milk River hosts two annual basketball tournaments, the Lloyd Bellew Memorial Tournament for the boys and the Pauline Bowen Memorial Tournament for the girls. These tournaments would not be possible without the huge volunteer effort put forth by the citizens of Milk River who share a love of basketball.

Coutts is the last town in Alberta on Highway Four before crossing into the United States. This proximity to the United States makes it very susceptible to American influence. This is part of the reason why basketball developed to the extent that it did in the early twentieth century. Basketball formally started in Coutts in 1929-30 when the first gym was built in the new school.

⁷⁰ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 102.

⁷¹ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 283-284.

⁷² Snow, Under Eight Flags, 457-58.

To promote the use of the new gym an exhibition game was played in December 1929 between Raymond and a team from Browning, Montana.⁷³ Raymond, approximately seventy-five kilometres northwest of Coutts, was the nearest school with a gym; therefore Coutts did not play much competitive basketball in Canada at this time. If the team did play competitive basketball in Canada, it was against Raymond or Magrath.⁷⁴ More often than not, the Coutts teams would play against American teams. In the 1941-42 season, boys from Coutts joined with boys from Sweetgrass, Montana to form the Monalta boy's team. They played in Montana against teams from Kevin, Oilmont and Sunburst. They were forced to go to the States because there still were no facilities in Milk River or Warner.⁷⁵ In 1949, the Coutts girl's team also played in Montana, beating the teams in Sweetgrass, Sunburst and Oilmont.⁷⁶ Coutts High School teams were successful from the 1930s through to the 1950s. The girl's team won the High School Class "B" District tournament in 1938 and again in 1959.⁷⁷ The boy's teams were successful in the 1950s, going undefeated in league play two seasons in a row. They also won the District Championship in those two seasons, 1954 and 1955.⁷⁸ These wins show great success for a school from a village with less than 500 residents.

Hockey developed in Coutts after basketball. The rink was built in 1931-32. The village was able to support two teams: a men's and a high school team.⁷⁹ The teams played against Great Falls, Lethbridge, Warner, Magrath, Milk River and Raymond. but by the late 1930s the rink was

⁷³ The History of the Border Country of Coutts 1890-1965, (Lethbridge: Southern Printing Co, 1965), p. 244.

⁷⁴ Coutts, 244.

⁷⁵ Coutts, 246.

⁷⁶ Coutts, 249.

⁷⁷ Coutts, 245.

⁷⁸ Coutts, 249.

⁷⁹ Coutts, 217.

closed due to the Great Depression, which also caused the closing of the refineries in town.⁸⁰ Hockey players would have to go to Milk River or Great Falls to play hockey. This made it hard to maintain support for the sport in the area. As time went on, the population of the village of Coutts dwindled. The High School was closed after the 1958-59 school year, and from then on high school students were bussed to Milk River to finish their education.⁸¹ The kids from Coutts brought with them a love for basketball that added to the Milk River basketball program.

Masinasin is a rural community located approximately thirty-two kilometres east of Milk River. The high school was closed at the same time as the Coutts high school and the students were also bussed to Milk River to finish their education. Before the high school closed, the students were active participants in the sport that was becoming increasingly popular in the region. The game was not introduced to the school until 1945, however the kids were so eager for it, they would play every recess and at noon. They played in an old building across from the school with their winter coats on until a furnace was installed for them.⁸² The first school basketball team was a girl's team formed in 1948. The boy's team soon followed and became champions in 1953-54.⁸³ Basketball became increasingly more important than hockey in this area. The Masinasin history book does not give any explanation for this, but it does have fifteen pictures of winning basketball teams and only one picture of a hockey team. There is no mention of hockey being played at this time in this area.

One reason that basketball became so successful was due to the support of the parents. It really was a community activity and many people would come to support their team: "it was not

⁸⁰ Coutts, 217-18.

⁸¹ Joanne Hummel and Marlene Herbst, eds. Milk River High School Milky Way '59-'60 Yearbook, (Milk River, AB: Milk River High School, 1960), p 1.

⁸² From Sandstone to Settlers: Writing-On-Stone District 1900-1983, (Milk River, AB: Masinasin Historical Society, 1983), p. 188.

⁸³ Sandstone to Settlers, 187. The book does not say what they were champions of.

uncommon for the Masinasin fans to outnumber the home team fans at many games."⁸⁴ The parents and community members brought this love for the game and the support with the children as they entered the Milk River program. To this day people will drive more than fifty kilometres to Milk River to watch the children from that rural area compete in a basketball game. Masinasin is interesting because it is a community without a town. The only building is the now abandoned school, but the people who live in that area still unify themselves through basketball. The feeling that these people share is unexplainable. They still identify themselves as being from Masinasin, even when the only building left to physically identify them is abandoned. They still use basketball to create that sense of community, as everyone goes into Milk River to support the local kids and share in a physical representation of the community they cannot necessarily take part in everyday.

As Canadians we are eager to latch onto anything that defines us as a nation separate from the United States, so when basketball became popular in the United States it was hard to accept in Canada. We "typically like to think of ourselves as a culturally distinct society, and cultural forms like hockey reaffirm our sense of Canadian-ness."⁸⁵ This explains why we subscribe to the theory that hockey defines Canada. It is a nice theory that allows us to feel a part of something bigger. However, hockey does not define all of Canada. There is more to small-town Southern Alberta life than hockey. These communities identify themselves through basketball. Colin Howell says, "The Canadian origins of [basketball] have become part of our national sporting folklore."⁸⁶ This statement is false based on the folklore of hockey that we have created. The only Canadian part of basketball is James Naismith and he is not enough of a

⁸⁴ Sandstone to Settlers, 190.

⁸⁵ Hall et al, Sport in Canadian Society, 39.

⁸⁶ Colin D. Howell, Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 34.

connection to make basketball a Canadian game. Today it is generally thought to be an American game because it has been firmly entrenched in American culture. If we were to claim it as a defining feature of Canadian society, we would be acknowledging our similarity to the United States. This presents a problem to the people who will look for any way to define themselves against the United States.

It was difficult for Canadians to accept the American settlers into Southern Alberta because of their origins. Charles Card prompted those early settlers to quickly become Canadian citizens and to always take part in Dominion Day activities in order to affirm their allegiance to their new country.⁸⁷ As Americans, they were constantly challenged to prove they belonged in Canada. The fact that the Mormons played basketball, an American sport, was another strike against them and to show that they belonged, they named one of their teams the Raymond Union Jacks.

The proximity of this area to the United States had an effect on what happened in these communities. In the borderlands it is hard to maintain a culture independent of the United States. A writer in Milk River noted: "Despite a purpose of the CBC to develop a Canadian identity, we identified with the fads, customs and dress of our neighbour to the south."⁸⁸ People who live around the border make frequent trips across the border, some just to check their mailboxes in the United States. With this kind of cross-border activity it was easy for sports to become popular on both sides. It gave the people on each side of the border something to share. But it also makes it hard for Canadians to maintain a distinct identity in this area. Hockey is the image Canada wants to send to the world. Southern Alberta is characterized by basketball, not by

⁸⁷ A. James Hudson, Charles Ora Card: Pioneer and Colonizer (Cardston: A. James Hudson, 1963), p. 127.

⁸⁸ Snow, Under Eight Flags, 170.

hockey. Basketball cannot be the image Canada sends to the world because it is not seen as exclusive to Canada. Basketball has ties to the United States and American culture. If Canada were to recognize the huge participation in basketball across the country as part of our national identity, that would just add further evidence to a link to the United States. Canada uses hockey to differentiate itself from the United States, so basketball is not seen as having any distinctly Canadian characteristics, and yet, basketball is what defines Southern Alberta. Rural areas had to rely on themselves for so long that a strong sense of isolation developed. Through this isolation a strong sense of community developed which led to using basketball as an identifier. Perhaps for those in Southern Alberta a sense of local community is more important than subscribing to a national identity. It was a dark, chilly Wednesday night in January....

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VIDEO: NC State head basketball coach Mark Gottfried talks about the Wolfpack's loss to Notre Dame Fighting Irishi at PNC Arena in Raleigh, NC Saturday, Feb. 18, 2017, and coaching his kids after being fired. By. Would a coach want to work in an environment where his work is valued in a way that it simply wouldn't be in just about every other part of the country? The UNC-Duke rivalry is special not only because of how good those programs are, but because of how geographically close they are. If N.C. State ever becomes nationally relevant again, it would only enhance what's already the nation's best college basketball market.