

SPORTS

Is university hockey biased against Central Canada?

(CUP)

ACADIA 12 TORONTO 1. THE SCORE read more like a misprint than the final score in the national university hockey championship game last spring between the Acadia Axemen and the University of Toronto Varsity Blues.

How could Acadia, with a mere three thousand students, put together a hockey team which could demolish a school twenty times its size? Why did Acadia have such a large number of top-rated players on its roster? How could a championship game be so one-sided?

During a post-game interview, Varsity Blues coach Paul Titanic stirred the rumor mill. He raised the question of fairness within the CIAU (Canadian Inter-university Athletic Association) and claimed that the system makes Ontario schools unable to compete with their counterparts in other regions.

"Obviously, there is not a level playing field in CIAU hockey," Titanic said. "Scholarships are allowed in other parts of the country while Ontario schools are not allowed to give any assistance."

Titanic's complaints about scholarships were only the tip of the iceberg.

Some CIAU teams are accused of "buying" quality players, and east coast universities are frequently rumored to be giving under-the-table financial incentives to athletes. The allegations include everything from players receiving cash in envelopes and plane tickets home at Christmas to the involvement of booster clubs, all of which contravene the CIAU rules.

The Globe and Mail published an editorial last March 19 saying the game "pointed to the dilemma of Canadian university sport." The article went on to explain that Ontario schools aren't allowed to offer athletic scholarships. But eastern and western universities can offer financial incentives to players-- drawing many star players out of central Canada.

Titanic stands by his comments after last year's championships. He points to higher academic standings required by Ontario schools.

According to Titanic, the junior hockey system is partially at fault. He contends the rigorous schedule of Junior A hockey makes it difficult for players to achieve a high enough academic average to be accepted into Ontario universities.

Jason Corrigan, a University of Ottawa forward and economics major, disagrees. Though Corrigan, who played Junior with the

North bay Centennials, spent an extra year in high school to complete his university entrance courses, he says it is possible for Junior A players to attain grades that will allow them into Ontario universities. He also feels the university practice schedule is just as rigorous as junior hockey.

Acadia Axemen hockey coach Tom Coolen also disputes the validity of the lack of academics among junior hockey players. Acadia has several players named to the Academic All-Canadian team. He also scoffs at the inference that a serious hockey player cannot be a good student.

He notes that no one questioned the level of the playing field when Toronto won several championships under Tom Watt and Mike Keenan.

On a closer examination, the scholarship imbalance isn't as extreme as its Ontario critics contend.

Universities in the East and the West can grant scholarships of up to \$1,500 to players. However, money in subsequent years cannot be guaranteed.

University of Manitoba Bisons coach Mike Sirant explains that a \$1,500 scholarship would only pay for the lowest tuition rate in Manitoba. "Moving from Toronto, it is not financially all that appealing," he says.

John McConachie, director of marketing and communication for the CIAU, says his league has no restrictions on scholarships by junior clubs and adds that he is surprised by the allegations of scholarships being used to entice hockey players from one region to the other. "There haven't been too many cases of this type, but if there is a complaint in writing, [CIAU] would investigate. There are a number of different penalties outlined running the gamut from fines to suspension from play in the sport for a period of time."

Still, Ontario coaches, including Toronto's Titanic, have regularly complained that the best talent is drained from Ontario.

There is one major demographic fact underlying this-- Ontario has the largest number of Junior A players to draw from. According to Canadian Amateur Hockey Association statistics for 1992-93, Nova Scotia had 121 players in four major Junior and Junior A teams, while the Ontario Hockey Federation had 672 players on 32 teams the same year.

By these figures alone, Acadia coach Tom Coolen says it is necessary for his team and the four other teams in Nova Scotia to recruit from outside their local population.

"Recruitment-wise, the coaches work

harder than the next guy to get players," says Coolen. He adds that if it were possible to compile a team exclusively of Wolfville, Nova Scotia natives, he would.

Coolen also points out that there were just as many Junior A players on his championship team as Guelph, Ottawa and Waterloo. He also makes an important observation -- Junior A players are not necessarily the best players on the team. Four of the six all-stars at last year's championship were former Tier II Junior A players.

The question remains, if the academics and financial incentives are so overwhelming, why do any junior players stay in Ontario?

One reason players may choose one school over another may be due to what players want in an educational institution.

Guelph Gryphons coach Marlin Muylaart says there are three attractions to Guelph: a good hockey program with its own rink, solid academic programs in science and other areas, and a good social life.

"A good number of players are looking for the complete package," says Muylaart.

Muylaart also claims there is "more to going out east than just scholarships," and the real story is the involvement of booster clubs.

But Acadia's Coolen says this implication is "really a reflection of ignorance. All we do is play by the rules outlined by the CIAU."

"Acadia has a lot to offer," adds Coolen.

"We were number three in the MacLean's survey for undergraduate study. We have a great facility with an Olympic-size rink and the community supports the team like in the States."

Ottawa Gee Gees coach Mickey Goulet admits he has lost three to five recruits due to money.

"We try to stress to the players the quality of the education," says Goulet.

Manitoba coach Sirant stresses his campus places equal emphasis on academics and athletics. All but four of the players on their current roster are from Manitoba and four of last year's players made the Canadian Academic All-Stars.

"We offer the best of both worlds-- a high-calibre program and education."

As for players, Brad Woods, originally from Saskatchewan, chose to play for the University of Manitoba, not for financial reasons, but on the recommendation of his Junior A coach, Phil Comptois, Ottawa's All-Canadian goalie, feels that although better players may be attracted to leave Ontario, there is "still great hockey in Ontario. We can still compete but Acadia had a very powerful team last year."

The general consensus on the Canadian university scene is that Ontario teams remain competitive and players are looking for more than money. They want an education as well as top-calibre play.

Hockey Panthers headed for the playoffs

BY TODD PETRIE

THE UPEI HOCKEY PANTHERS HAVE once again made the playoffs. There were times over the year when it looked like the Panther's decade-long streak of making the playoffs would be broken. Fortunately, inspired play since the Christmas break, as well as continued poor play by the last-place Mt. Allison Mounties have ensured that UPEI will once again be represented in this year's playoffs. The final post-season position was clinched on Sunday, January 30th with a 4-1 win over the Moncton Blue Eagles. The victory, which saw the Panthers play their best defensive game of the season, coupled with Mt. A's 5-0 loss to St. Thomas, gave UPEI an unsurmountable lead of

11 points over the Mounties.

UPEI's current unbeaten streak, now at four games heading into last weekend's play, also brings UPEI within striking distance of third-place Moncton; however, the Blue Eagles have one game in hand.

The Panthers will face either St. Thomas or UNB in the first round of the playoffs. UNB was the team that eliminated UPEI in the first round last year, and this year UPEI is 0-4 against St. Thomas.

The Panthers, who completed their home schedule last weekend against UNB, finish their season this weekend on the road. They play Dalhousie on Friday night and the Mounties on Saturday afternoon.