

“A Manly Nation Requires Manly Games”:

Hockey Violence and the 1905 Manslaughter Trial of Allan Loney

Stacy L. Lorenz
Geraint B. Osborne
Augustana Campus, University of Alberta

Since the late nineteenth century, violence in hockey has generally been accepted “as just part of the game.”¹ Lawrence Scanlan writes, “My overwhelming impression from reading the literature, from hearing the testimony of players from the early to mid-1900s, and from poring over news clippings, is that early hockey was very much like war. The blood flowed freely.”² For example, on 20 January 1894, Lady Aberdeen, president of the National Council of Women of Canada and the International Council of Women, witnessed her very first hockey game, which she considered to be “a most fascinating one [that] they get wildly excited about.” She then listed the litany of broken noses, destroyed teeth, and head injuries that she observed. Within two weeks, she had come to the conclusion that the “more I see of hockey, the less I like it – it presents too fierce a temptation for roughness & unfairness” – although she also suggested that it did take one’s mind off the winter.³ In 1904, Ontario Hockey Association president John Ross Robertson warned, “We must call a halt to slashing and slugging, and insist upon clean hockey...before we have to call in a coroner to visit our rinks.”⁴ One year later, a coroner was indeed called in when an Ontario player, Alexandria’s Alcide Laurin, died as a result of a stick to the head from Maxville’s Allan Loney.

This case study of violence in Canadian hockey examines media coverage of the 1905 manslaughter trial of Allan Loney, following the death of Alcide Laurin as a result of injuries

sustained during a hockey game in Maxville, Ontario. Loney, a member of the Maxville team, was arrested for striking Laurin, a member of the Alexandria Crescents, in the head with his stick, following an altercation between the two players. Newspaper accounts of this event offer valuable insight into the cultural narratives surrounding hockey violence in early twentieth-century Canada.⁵ The historical examination of such cases is also important because the justifications for – and criticisms of – hockey violence that were articulated in the context of the death of Alcide Laurin continue to be voiced in contemporary discussions of this issue.

This preliminary investigation of the 1905 Loney case builds upon our previous studies of hockey violence during this period – in particular, newspaper reports of matches involving the Ottawa Silver Seven and the Montreal Wanderers, as well as the 1907 death of Owen “Bud” McCourt of the Cornwall Hockey Club following a chaotic on-ice melee.⁶ During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, newspaper readers were exposed to a number of different perspectives on hockey violence. By 1900, descriptions of slashing, tripping, hacking, hard checking, brawls, cuts, broken noses, and other injuries were regular features of hockey reporting.⁷ Through accounts of fast, skilled, rugged, hard-hitting hockey, newspapers created narratives that combined elements of “brutal butchery” and “strenuous spectacle.”⁸ Hockey as “brutal butchery” expressed outrage and concern, while, at the same time, revealing a degree of popular fascination with the game’s violent possibilities. On the other hand, hockey as “strenuous spectacle” represented the sport as a stirring public display of masculine force and aggression. Elements of physical struggle and violent action in hockey helped to counter the fear that over-civilization was making men weak, effeminate, and over-sophisticated. In addition, the cross-class appeal of an aggressive masculinity based on force and danger helps to explain the popularity of “strenuous,” even “brutal,” hockey among both working- and middle-class players

and spectators.⁹ By evaluating key issues surrounding violence and manhood in early hockey, this research addresses important gaps in the study of Canadian sport history and the analysis of hockey and Canadian popular culture.¹⁰ In particular, this paper responds to the need for careful, focused case studies that examine hockey violence in a historical context.

On February 24, the *Cornwall Freeholder* reported that the Ontario Hockey Association senior championship finals between Smith Falls and Toronto had been “marked by disgraceful brutality” with players being “deliberately knocked out” and “carried off the ice.” The referee sent several players off to prevent “the battle from becoming a massacre.”¹¹ Later that very evening, just down the road from Cornwall in Maxville, Ontario, 24-year-old Alcide Laurin, rover and captain of the Alexandria Crescents, was killed instantly by a blow to the head from a stick wielded by Allan Loney, a 19-year-old point-man playing for the rival Maxville team.¹² Although there were contradictory accounts of what led to the clash, it was clear that Loney had delivered the fatal blow with considerable force after a sequence of events involving Laurin. From the drop of the puck that night, the game was “fast, furious and rough,” the roughest referee Bernard O’Connor had ever seen, with sticks “flying round lively.”¹³ Approximately 25 minutes into the contest, Laurin skated up the ice, skilfully swerving between two or three opponents before coming face-to-face with the quickly advancing, and much larger, Loney. The two met in a violent collision. Loney stole the puck and as he began to move up the ice, Laurin broke his stick in two as he slashed at the back of Loney’s legs and his stick. Loney spun around, words were exchanged, and Laurin struck Loney in the face two or three times with his fist, breaking Loney’s nose. The crowd erupted, but the shouts of “go for him” were apparently voiced “only by young kids.”¹⁴ Loney, “dazed and stunned,” blood running down his face, retaliated by raising his stick over his shoulders and delivering a “swift blow” to Laurin’s toque-

covered head. Some witnesses stated that Loney's skate had become caught in the poor ice during the mix-up, causing him to trip and fall forward, accidentally bringing his stick down on Laurin's head. Whatever the case, Laurin "collapsed as though paralyzed."¹⁵ At this point, Laurin's brother, Leo, skated across the ice and felled Loney with a single swing of his stick. The officials then stepped in, stopping the fight and ending the game.

The inquiry into Laurin's death began the day after the game and was held in the Alexandria town hall. According to the post mortem examination, a portion of Laurin's skull above the left ear had been broken into five pieces, leaving a depression about half an inch wide and two inches long. The cause of death was shock to the nervous system from the blow, which shattered the skull and forced pieces into the brain.¹⁶ After hearing all the evidence, the inquest jury announced that they were "of the opinion that Alcide Laurin came to his death by his being hit by a hockey stick in the hands of Allan Loney, of Maxville, and, moreover, from the evidence, we are of the opinion that the blow was given deliberately and not in self-defence."¹⁷

Loney was arrested and initially charged with murder, but the charges were reduced to manslaughter by Crown prosecutors James Dingwall and F.J. French. The trial was held in Cornwall, Ontario from March 27 to March 29, but, as French noted in his opening remarks, "[t]he whole of Canada is watching this case. Not only is the prisoner at the bar on trial, but the game of hockey itself is on trial."¹⁸ After three days of testimony and cross-examination, the jury took approximately four hours of deliberation to deliver a verdict of not guilty. Loney was then released to "hundreds of friends and citizens" whose celebrations "kept up for several hours around town."¹⁹ According to Justice Teetzel, Loney had a "very close call" and was fortunate that the jury had taken a "merciful view" of the case. He closed by adding that he hoped the case

would serve as a warning, not just to Loney, “but to every other young man in this country, never to do violence to anyone.”²⁰

The Loney/Laurin incident was subjected to intense public scrutiny, generating so much interest that the *Montreal Star* reported being “overwhelmed with expressions of opinion about the evils of rough and murderous hockey.”²¹ Newspaper accounts generated several important narratives relating to violence in early twentieth-century hockey, including debate over the causes of increasing rough play in hockey, concern over the negative impact violent hockey would have on young people and the integrity of the nation, and suggestions as to what could be done to reduce or prevent this impact. Throughout these narratives, the nature and role of masculinity remained an underlying theme.

Despite the seemingly obvious level of deliberate brutality in this particular game, one key media narrative interpreted the episode as a “tragic accident.”²² According to this view, the events that occurred during the Alexandria-Maxville match were certainly “unfortunate”; however, in the context of hockey culture, such “accidents” were understandable, and perhaps even inevitable. For instance, according to Superintendent Arthy of Montreal, Loney “had no intention of killing his opponent” – he “was merely more unfortunate than other participants in Canadian sports, many of whom have been known to act with even greater brutality.” Arthy did not think Loney should “be made to atone for all the vicious practices of the past” because within the sport of hockey, putting “your capable opponents out of business as rapidly as possible” had become “recognized as almost the proper thing to do.”²³ Witnesses in the Loney case also testified that such stick attacks were not unusual, and one admitted that he “had on three or four occasions seen men knocked down and out with a hockey stick.”²⁴ Similarly, Loney’s lawyer,

Mr. R.A. Pringle, referred to the right of self-defence and argued that Loney had been “hard pressed and acted as any other man would have under the circumstances.... he would be less than human if he had not repelled this assailant.”²⁵

On the other hand, other observers believed that such tragic events on the ice were not isolated accidents. According to this view, serious injuries and deaths would continue to have a detrimental impact on Canadian youth, with notable consequences for God, King and country. It is worth remembering that turn-of-the-century Canada was characterized by a great deal of discussion about the merits of “social gospel” and moral reform, as religious and educational leaders asserted a more active role in dealing with the various ills associated with an urbanizing industrial society.²⁶ Amateur sportsmen, social reformers, and muscular Christians regarded hockey as a “manly” sport that instilled moral virtue and developed valuable character traits.²⁷ Moreover, Victorian child savers were particularly concerned about the welfare of children (as well as the newly discovered “adolescent”), and they pressured governments to enact laws, juvenile justice systems, and social policies designed to curb immorality and protect young people from the harmful influences associated with modern, urban centres.²⁸

It is no surprise, therefore, to find alongside other public commentators, several religious leaders offering their views on the consequences of hockey violence for Canadian youth.²⁹ For example, the Reverend Dr. Harkness, in reference to the Loney case, was adamant that rough play in sports would eventually corrupt the young men and women exposed to it.

Our boys are growing up imbibing the spirit of brutality, which will be manifested in after days. Our girls and young women who witness such scenes are losing their modesty, the grandness adornment of the female sex. Including both schools and churches, there are few forces in this part of the country having more influence on the rising generation than hockey and lacrosse are having. These

games are striking at the very life of our country and unfitting the rising generation for actual and serious duties.³⁰

Similarly, for Reverend N.H. McGillivray, the Loney case illustrated that “roughness and ungentlemanly tactics” were becoming all too common in hockey, so much so that abolishing the game was a distinct possibility. For him, this was unfortunate since hockey, that “manly invigorating pastime of our Canadian winter,” contributed to the spiritual betterment of Canadian youth and the nation as a whole:

Godliness is to be admired wherever found, but nowhere is it to be more admired than when seen in the well-built, manly youths, with bright eyes, clear skin and elastic step, who look the picture of health and know how to race and row and climb and play, and fight if occasion requires... Let us as young men remember that the stability of games and sports, as well as the stability of institutions and nations, depends upon the stability of character.... It is character which makes games as well as nations, and as with nations so with sports, the character is seen by the conduct of its exponents.³¹

In addition, this social reform was buttressed by a curious blend of prevailing ideas such as social Darwinism, imperialism, nationalism and militarism. Indeed, the era’s Darwinian obsession with struggle and emerging interest in gender was reinforced by its passion for athletics and combative sports.³² It was widely believed that games and vigorous outdoor pursuits taught perseverance and competitiveness among young men, all of which could be applied to the battlefield. As a result, “manly sports” were regarded as essential to nation-building, imperial service, and when necessary, colonial war.³³ For instance, Pringle referred to the “beneficial results of manly sports,” reminding the court that “a manly nation requires manly games,” and that “the battles of the British Empire were won on the playgrounds of Great Britain.” Pringle also urged the court to remember “with great pride the splendid record made by the young Canadians who had served the Empire recently in South Africa,” and whose

“remarkable strength and endurance ... was developed in the manly sports of this country, such as hockey and lacrosse.” He added, “when a life was lost by misadventure in manly sports it was excusable homicide.”³⁴ The South African War had ended in 1902, and the successes of the Canadian troops were frequently attributed to the cold northern climate and rigorous outdoor pastimes, which enabled young Canadian recruits to be hardy “half-soldiers by their upbringing.”³⁵ Similarly, *Saturday Night* magazine noted:

There is little doubt that many of the qualities that have made the Anglo-Saxon race the world force that it is have been developed on the playground. It would be folly and contrary to the teachings of the past to recommend the abandonment or discouragement of strenuously contested games of athletic sport. It would be almost a national calamity if Canadian youth should discard their hockey and lacrosse sticks and puncture their footballs and grow deeply interested in croquet and “button, button, who’s got the button.”³⁶

The death of Alcide Laurin also produced considerable debate over a perceived trend toward increasingly rough hockey. While some regarded these deaths as rare accidents, others identified overzealous spectators, a sensationalistic press, lenient referees, indifferent hockey associations, an ineffective legal system, and increasing professionalization – with its emphasis on winning at all costs – as key contributors to the increasing brutality in hockey. For one editor, it was the fans and press who were to blame:

It is a regrettable fact that a great deal of the rough play in hockey is incited by spectators who lose their heads and urge the players to deeds of violence. It is a common occurrence at a hockey match to hear even staid law-abiding citizens, church going citizens shouting to their favorites to “Give it to him,” “Smash him,” “Sock him,” “Don’t let him pass you”, and similar advice, which is hardly conducive to clean, gentlemanly hockey.... The press is not altogether blameless, for every day some paper or other is making itself ridiculous by trying to cover the dirty play of its townsmen, and laying all kinds of charges against the other fellows and the referee.³⁷

This latter point was shared by the jury in the Loney case, who stated in their written report that,

We cannot too strongly condemn the growing tendency of introducing brutal methods and rough-house tactics into the games of lacrosse and hockey, which frequently end in painful and permanent injuries to the participants and sometimes in death.... We are of the opinion that the press, in giving so much space and prominence to these contests, is largely responsible, morally, for these results as they unquestionably affect the imagination of some of the less level-headed spectators, who by voice and manner encourage and incite the heated player to deeds of violence towards an opponent. It has come to such a pass that rough, brutal players are lionized by these hero worshippers for their misdeeds, instead of being treated with the contempt their conduct so richly deserves.

The jury added that “unless these growing tendencies can be effectively and permanently eliminated,” then “they should be prohibited by Legislature, and put on a par with bull fights and cocking mains.”³⁸

An editorial in the *Toronto Star*, reprinted in the *Cornwall Freeholder*, suggested that the violence was a result of the weaker player who must resort to foul play to compensate for his lack of skills:

When a man hears a great deal about hockey and goes to see a match ... he sees the most expert players doing the least violence and the outclassed man in seeking revenge or striving for victory, resorting to rough play that will either disable or intimidate the better players on the opposite side....In lacrosse and hockey, rough play pays. That is the root of the whole evil. [When] a team can win a game by rough play that it could not win in a contest of pure skill, rough play will continue. The authorities who have control of the games should invest the officials who have control of matches with the fullest power to suspend players, and should let it be fully understood that the acts of these officials will be sustained in every case.³⁹

Similarly, the Reverend N.H. McGillivray argued that it was the players that were to blame because they “thought more about the laws and rules of the Ontario Hockey Association or the

Federal League Association than they do about the laws of God or the rules of Christian Brotherhood.” As such, he added that something needed to be done to instil the “Golden Rule”:

What is needed nowadays is more conscience, more heart, more soul, more man and less animal, to place our Canadian sports of lacrosse, football and hockey on the high plane which is theirs by right..... When a game ceases to esteem and practice the virtues of true manliness, then it deserves to die.... Young men, in the Master’s name, rise in the strength of your vigorous buoyant, Christian manhood and stand to a man for all that is straightforward and honest in sport.⁴⁰

For Principal Peterson of McGill University, the primary cause of hockey violence was the increasing emphasis placed on winning.

I take the severest view possible of certain features of hockey, and also football, as it is sometimes played....there are some things about Canadian hockey ... that might be held to put it outside the pale of civilized games. The amount of foul play that is indulged in by some players is a great blot upon the whole game. And it is not only the foul play; it is the spirit of the thing that should call for public reproof.....Both sides go on the ice in the spirit of combatants, and with some at least of the players, part of their object is to evade the regulations....The whole idea at present is not the game, but the winning of the game. That is really at the root of the evil.⁴¹

In conclusion, we hope that this historical analysis helps us to understand more clearly some of the long-standing debates around violence in hockey. The media reports examined in this case study suggest that stick-swinging incidents and “furious and rough” play have been regarded as ordinary – even “proper” – aspects of “strenuous hockey” for at least a century. Even death from a deliberate stick attack could be rationalized as an unfortunate accident. A number of early twentieth-century hockey players used their sticks or fists to inflict severe, intentional blows on their opponents - yet, within the conventions of hockey, these players could credibly claim that they had not acted “maliciously,” and that they had merely “acted as any other man would have under the circumstances.”

Imperialism and militarism were important backdrops to these early discussions of Canadian hockey and manliness. For many educators and religious leaders, strenuous team sports such as hockey were seen as contributing to the moral and physical development of young men and, consequently, crucial to the growth of the nation and maintenance of empire. Too much strenuous play, or rough hockey, was perceived to be detrimental to this moral development, but a complete absence of strenuous, physical activity was equally dangerous given the negative consequences associated with industrialization, urbanization, and their associated “over-civilizing” tendencies.⁴²

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---. "Hockey Player Killed," 3 March, 1905, 4.

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---. "Loney Acquitted," 31 March 1905, 6.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 135. For a useful analysis of key issues surrounding violence and masculinity in hockey, both historically and in the present, see Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 175-196.

² Scanlan, *Grace Under Fire*, 30. See also Lorenz, “On-ice violence has been a part of hockey for almost 100 years.”

³ Downie, Robertson and Errington, *Early Voices*, 21.

⁴ MacGregor, “Canada’s troubled game suffers yet another blow,” A1.

⁵ Mitchell, “Case and Situational Analysis”; Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*; Yin, *Case Study Research*; Gomm, Hammersley and Foster, *Case Study and Method*; Scott, *A Matter of Evidence*.

⁶ Lorenz and Osborne, “Talk About Strenuous Hockey”; Lorenz and Osborne, “Brutal Butchery, Strenuous Spectacle.”

⁷ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns To Play*, 69; Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 41-42.

⁸ Lorenz and Osborne, “Brutal Butchery, Strenuous Spectacle: Hockey Violence, Manhood, and the 1907 Season.” This paper draws upon ideas and methods utilized in other historical studies of sports media narratives. See, for example, Oriard, *Reading Football*; Oriard, *King Football*; Welky, “Viking Girls, Mermaids, and Little Brown Men,” Welky, “Culture, Media and Sport;” Dyreson, *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*; Grundy, *Learning to Win*.

⁹ See also Lorenz and Osborne, “Talk About Strenuous Hockey,” 125-156.

¹⁰ Studies of hockey prior to the First World War include Morrow, “The Little Men of Iron,” 51-65; Mott, “Flawed Games, Splendid Ceremonies,” 169-187; Vigneault, “La diffusion du Hockey a Montreal, 1895-1910,” 60-74; Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 61-73, 168-172; Barnes, “Two Cases of Hockey Homicide,” Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game”; Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 31-92; Mason and Schrodt, “Hockey’s First Professional Team,” 49-71; Mason, “The International Hockey League and the Professionalization of Ice Hockey, 1904-1907,” 1-17; Robidoux, “Imagining a Canadian Identity through Sport,” 209-225; Mason and Duquette, “Newspaper Coverage of Early Professional Ice Hockey,” 157-173; Wilson, “Skating to Armageddon,” 315-343; Wong, *Lords of the Rinks*. Surprisingly, there is very little published, scholarly work on the history of violence in hockey.

¹¹ “O.H.A. Championship,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 24 February 1905, 8.

¹² “Another Hockey Fatality,” *Cornwall Standard*, 3 March 1905, 4.

¹³ “Loney Acquitted” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 6.

¹⁴ “Loney Acquitted” *Cornwall Standard*, 31 March 1905, 1.

¹⁵ “Another Hockey Fatality,” *Cornwall Standard*, 3 March 1905, 4.

¹⁶ “Loney Acquitted” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 6.

¹⁷ “Hockey Player Killed,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 3 March 1905, 4.

¹⁸ “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 6; “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Standard*, 31 March 1905, 1.

¹⁹ “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 8; “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Standard*, 31 March 1905, 3.

²⁰ “Hockey Player Killed,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 3 March 1905, 4; “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 6; “Another Hockey Fatality,” *Cornwall Standard*, 3 March 1905, 4; “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Standard*, 31 March 1905, 1; “Allan Loney on the Stand,” *Montreal Star*, 29 March, 1905, 6.

²¹ “Premier, Prominent Clergyman, Great Football Referee and Hockey Experts on Hockey Slaughter,” *Montreal Star*, 13 March 1905, 2.

²² Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 128.

²³ “Accidental Homicide,” *Cornwall Standard*, 24 March 1905, 4.

²⁴ “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March 1905, 6.

²⁵ Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 110.

²⁶ Allen, *The Social Passion*; Cook, *The Regenerators*; Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*; Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*.

²⁷ Metcalfe, *Canada Learns To Play*, 10, 13, 61-73, 96-98; Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 31-56, 193-196; Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 13-14, 18-31, 73-75; Mason and Duquette, “Newspaper Coverage of Early Professional Ice Hockey,” 158-159.

²⁸ Platt, *The Child Savers*; Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society*; Savage, *Teenage*.

²⁹ “Premier, Prominent Clergyman, Great Football Referee and Hockey Experts on Hockey Slaughter,” *Montreal Star*, 13 March 1905, 2.

³⁰ “The Power of Popular Sentiment,” *Cornwall Standard*, 7 April 1905, 1.

³¹ “Morals of Athletics,” *Cornwall Standard*, 7 April 1905, 1.

³² Berger, *The Sense of Power*; Miller, *Painting the Map Red*; Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Riess, “Sport and Middle-Class Masculinity”; Burstyn, *The Rites of Men*; Mangan, “Social Darwinism and Upper-Class Education in Late Victorian and Edwardian England”; McLaren, *Our Own Master Race*.

³³ Mangan, *The Game Ethic and Imperialism*; Mrozek, “The Habit of Victory: The American Military and the Cult of Manliness”; McDevitt, “*May the Best Man Win*”; Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*.

³⁴ “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March, 1905, 6; Seglins, “Just Part Of The Game,” 109-110.

³⁵ Miller, *Painting the Map Red*, 8-9, 436-440. See also Berger, “The True North Strong and Free”; Berger, *The Sense of Power*; Brown, “The Northern Character Theme and Sport in Nineteenth-Century Canada.”

³⁶ *Saturday Night*, 1 April 1905, 1.

³⁷ “Sport vs, Slaughter,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 10 March 1905, 7.

³⁸ “Loney Acquitted,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 31 March, 1905, 8.

³⁹ “Brute Force in Sports,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 7 April 1905, 7.

⁴⁰ “Morals of Athletics,” *Cornwall Standard*, 7 April 1905, 1.

⁴¹ “Sport vs. Brutality,” *Cornwall Freeholder*, 24 March 1905, 4.

⁴² See Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 187-189, 192-193; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 239-240, 248-252, 257-262; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 78-79, 100-101, 185-186; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 81-122, 137-141, 157-181.