

# **“A Firm Referee That Will Make Both Sides Adhere By The Rules”: Gentlemanly Status And Hockey Referees In Edmonton Alberta, 1893-1907<sup>1</sup>**

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The history of hockey in Alberta predates the creation of the province. Reports of hockey games appeared in the *Calgary Herald* dating as far back as 1893, while games in Edmonton drew crowds of over 2000 by 1905.<sup>2</sup> In these early matches, two competing teams, usually from different communities, attempted to defeat each other in a fair gentlemanly way.<sup>3</sup> The games required strict non-biased regulation to allow for even competition; the people who administered the rules on the ice were therefore as important as the rules themselves.<sup>4</sup> As an early commentator noted after a match between Edmonton and Ft. Saskatchewan, “[i]t is in the interest of the game that in future a firm referee who will make both side [sic] adhere strictly to the rules, be appointed.”<sup>5</sup> In this

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<sup>2</sup> *Calgary Herald* 4 January 1893, Gary W. Zeman, *Alberta on Ice The History of Hockey in Alberta from 1893* (Edmonton: Westweb Press, 1985); John E. Reid, “Sports and Games in Alberta Before 1900” (University of Alberta: Unpublished Masters Thesis, 1969), 72-76; Terence O’Riordan, “The Puck-Eaters’: Hockey as a Unifying Experience in Edmonton and Strathcona, 1894-1905,” *Alberta History* (Spring, 2001), 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1896. For more information regarding these early matches, see O’Riordan, “The Puck-Eaters.”

<sup>4</sup> Ronald C. Watson and Gregory D. Rickwood “Stewards of Ice Hockey’: A Historical Review of Safety Rules in Canadian Amateur Ice Hockey,” *Sport History Review*, 30 (1999): 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 January 1904.

essay I will analyze the gentlemanly system that authorized hockey referees “to make both sides adhere by the rules,” focusing on Edmonton, Alberta from 1893 until the founding of the Alberta Amateur Hockey Association in 1907 while also paying some attention to the development of refereeing since the 1970s.

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By at least the mid-nineteenth century Canadians were playing ball and stick games with skates on ice, and by the 1870s “hockey” teams were beginning to organize and compete in the Montreal area.<sup>6</sup> Ronald Watson and Gregory Rickwood believe the *Montreal Gazette* published the first “seven rudimentary hockey rules” in 1878, based largely on English field hockey. The rules were modified within two years and borrowed extensively from a second sport, rugby, making standard for ice hockey “physical contact, on-sides and no forward passing.”<sup>7</sup> The Amateur Hockey Association of Canada formed in the Montreal area in 1886 and hockey for the first time was institutionalized.<sup>8</sup>

Hockey referees were likely soon part of the game, and an 1895 spectator, J. Macdonald Oxley, provides a description of the role of the early hockey referee; on-ice officials, he writes, were

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Simpson, “Hockey” in Don Morrow et al., *A Concise History of Sport in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 169-173. See also Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities, and Cultural Politics* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1993), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Watson and Rickwood, “Stewards of Ice Hockey,” 29. See also, Gregory D. Rickwood, “Evolution of Safety Rules in Canadian Amateur Ice Hockey 1946-1996: An Historical Perspective,” (Masters Thesis: University of Western Ontario, 1996), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 40. See also Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807-1914* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1983), 63 and Simpson, “Hockey,” 174.

introduced “for the control of the game.” Three officials regulated the game Oxley attended, “a referee, who follows [the play] about as does the referee in football, and two umpires, one at either goal, the sole business of the latter being to decide whether or not the puck has passed between the posts, and not above the flags.”<sup>9</sup>

Although referees played a role in the game from the beginning— the earliest codified rules included referees in their descriptions<sup>10</sup>— historians have done little to expand on Oxley’s early description. Wayne Simpson reports that referees were added to the game to “adjudicate the process of play and to police ‘bullying’ or aggressive physical contact” and Colin Howell adds only that “fans were known to pelt the ice with refuse when displeased by a referee’s call.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly Morris Mott, describing refereeing at the turn of the century in Manitoba, argues that officials were often blamed by defeated teams for losses and treated

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<sup>9</sup> J. Macdonald Oxley, *My Strange Rescue and Other Stories of Sport and Adventure in Canada* (London; Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1895), 343. In this period, players were not allowed to score goals by raising the puck off the ice. As described by Wilfrid Roche: “The goal posts were crudely anchored in the ice, and a goal judge, wearing no skates and holding a flag stood on the ice directly behind the posts and goaltender. . . if the puck went through the goal posts below their tops, the judge waved his flag high to signal that a goal had been scored. Wilfrid Roche, *The Hockey Book: The Great Hockey Stories of All Time* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1953), 2. Interestingly goal posts in Strathcona and likely Edmonton were anchored and netted by 1902; this was done to “simplify the duties of the referee, the goal umpires and the goal keepers as well as preventing to a great extent disputes about scoring.” The *Strathcona Plaindealer*, N.D. January 1902, reprinted in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, 20 January 1902. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate early copies of the *Strathcona Plaindealer*, with the specific years 1900-1912 missing. Fortunately, parts of the *Plaindealer* were reprinted in the *Edmonton Journal*.

<sup>10</sup> *Montreal Gazette*, 27 February 1877 cited in Rickwood, “Evolution of Safety Rules,” 6-7. See also Dick Irvin, *Tough Calls: NHL Referees and Linesmen Tell Their Story* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc, 1997), esp. 6-11.

<sup>11</sup> Colin D. Howell, *Blood, Sweat and Cheers: Sport and the Making of Modern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 44-45; Simpson, “Hockey”, 172.

to verbal and even physical abuse by unruly spectators.<sup>12</sup> Dick Irvin, in his popular history of professional referees, writes that “the earliest games mention the referee and two goal umpires,” and that “photographs and drawings from that era show referees on skates, wearing overcoats over their normal business suits and using a bell rather than a whistle.”<sup>13</sup> Irvin goes on to chronicle “several incidents. . . involving officials,” most of which include violence and disputed “calls.” Former professional referees have followed suit in their memoirs, relating the various “incidents” from their own careers. With titles such as *Black and White and Never Right*, the former officials have narrowly focused on personal moments and remembrances, giving little consideration to their own professional development, let alone the historical development of referees in the sport.<sup>14</sup>

Alan Metcalfe provides perhaps the most insightful analysis of the role of referees in early ice hockey, suggesting that from the earliest days conflicts between referees, players, and fans influenced the development of the sport. He notes that before the First World War “officiating was a national concern” and that the sport had a two-faceted “referee problem.” The first part of the problem was philosophic and “related to the fundamental ideals of amateurism where the referee was there only to arbitrate disagreements between two captains who, by definition, were

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<sup>12</sup> Morris Mott, “‘An Immense Hold in the Public Estimation:’ The First Quarter Century of Hockey in Manitoba, 1886-1911” *Manitoba History*, Number 43, Spring/Summer 2002: 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Irvin, *Tough Calls*, 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> Vern Buffey, *Black and White and Never Right: A Hockey Referee* as told to Robert Soucie and Michael Monty (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Canada Limited, 1980). See also, King Clancy, *Clancy: The Kings Story* as told to Brian McFarlane, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Company of Canada Limited: 1968), 102-105; Bruce Hood with Murray Townsend, *Calling the Shots: Memoirs of an NHL Referee* (Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co. Limited, 1988).

gentlemen.” The second facet involved “the increasing importance of a referee in a situation where the emphasis on victory was increasing.” Of the two problems, he sees the first as more substantial and a primer for the professionalization of the game. The second problem, Metcalf feels, was never “seriously addressed, although recognized” by the early organizers of the game.<sup>15</sup> With these two facets in mind, I will analyze the role of hockey officials in Alberta making clear the importance of the gentlemanly code of conduct that authorized their regulation of competitive matches.

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## II

Hockey began in the territory that was to become Alberta in the 1890s and by the early 1900s the sport was organized and relatively standardized with teams competing for civic, provincial, and even national prizes.<sup>16</sup> The first recorded game occurred in Calgary 4 January 1893 with the “town boys” besting the “tailors” 4-1.<sup>17</sup> Before the province was even formed, newspaper writers highlighted a desire for referees to exert fairness, control, and safe play during hockey matches. Reporting a contest between Golden, B.C. and the Calgary Fire Brigade in 1895, the *Calgary Herald* commended the referee for warning the teams that “rough players” needed to abide by the rules and that no one would be allowed to “act as battering rams” when they proceeded down the ice.<sup>18</sup> After a particularly rough game in Edmonton, the *Bulletin*

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<sup>15</sup> Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Simpson, “Hockey” in Don Morrow et al., *A Concise History of Sport in Canada*, (Toronto: Oxford University Press), 176-177. See also Zeman, *Alberta On Ice*, 1-19; O’Riordan, “The Puck-Eaters,” 2-12.

<sup>17</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 4 January 1893. John E. Reid, “Sports and Games in Alberta Before 1900” (Masters Thesis: University of Alberta, 1969), 72.

<sup>18</sup> *Calgary Herald*, 1895 as cited in Zeman, *Alberta on Ice*, 2.

reporter cited in the introduction lamented “[i]t is too bad if a good game like hockey, which is becoming very popular. . . is to be spoiled by rough playing.” He continued by stating that officials should be chosen who could make teams “strictly adhere to the rules.”<sup>19</sup>

6 | Unfortunately, the newspaper reports spent little time commenting on what made a referee either commendable or lamentable and the standard comment was most usually, “the referee had satisfactorily completed his difficult duties”<sup>20</sup> or the like. The lack of information contained in contemporary newspaper reports makes tracing the referees’ role in the early matches difficult because reporters only described the referees when they felt the officials had been unsatisfactory.<sup>21</sup> Forced to depend on these moments of discontinuity recorded in period newspapers, the historian must defend against over-generalizing the “referee problem” described by Alan Metcalf.<sup>22</sup> With a guarded textual analysis, however, these moments of disjuncture reveal a great deal about the role of referees in pre1907 Alberta hockey matches.<sup>23</sup> This

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<sup>19</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1896.

<sup>20</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 January 1900.

<sup>21</sup> For example, between the years 1896 and 1906 hockey is the subject of about 800 articles in the *Edmonton Bulletin*. Within that same period, hockey referees are referenced about 200 times and only about 10 to 20 articles comment on the official’s positive or negative impact on the game. Roughly, 5-10 comments are positive but usually extremely short (less than one line) and about 5-10 of the articles reference referees in a negative way, with 2-3 of those being the subject the whole column. Although this broad scan has not been scientifically verified, the raw data demonstrates the difficulty in locating material concerning early referees and the difficulty understanding the role of referees in early hockey matches. See database *Paper of Record* <http://ualberta.paperofrecord.com>: *Edmonton Bulletin* search fields “hockey” and “hockey referee.”

<sup>22</sup> Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 70.

<sup>23</sup> As noted by Alan Metcalfe regarding negative reports on hockey games “for every bad report there were 100 reports of the friendly relations between the two teams” though it was those negative reports that gained the headlines in the newspapers. Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 70.

analysis will therefore focus on such descriptions to develop an understanding of the role that gentlemanly codes of conduct had in defining the authority of referees in Alberta.

### III

When Albertan newspaper articles occasionally commented on the ability of hockey referees, it is clear that they desired them to regulate matches fairly, but what they leave unclear is the system through which they expected the referees' to carry out that regulation. The officials of the era, as pointed out by Gary Zeman, had no official training in standardized interpretation and viewed refereeing as part of their "civic duty."<sup>24</sup> This point echoes David Q. Voigt's analysis of umpires in early American baseball. American umpires before 1900 "varied in dress, dedication, and decision making" and their interpretations of everything from positioning to the calling of "unseen plays" (some umpires would even ask "gentlemanly" spectators for their objective interpretation of a disputed play) varied from town to town, individual to individual, and situation to situation; "[i]nconsistency in umpiring," Voigt emphasizes "was a *leitmotiv*" of baseball before 1900.<sup>25</sup>

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What the baseball umpires had in common with one another was their gentlemanly status and desire to translate that status into authority on the playing field. The gentlemanly ability to "control masculine passions through strong character and powerful will" was central to the development of turn-of-the-

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<sup>24</sup> Zeman, *Alberta on Ice*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> David Q. Voigt, "America's Manufactured Villain - The Baseball Umpire," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 4 (Summer, 1970) 1: 2-3.

century sporting culture in North America<sup>26</sup> and would prove vital to the choosing of sporting officials. As pointed out by Henry Chadwick—a period baseball organizer, rules-maker, and leading reporter—a late nineteenth century gentleman could have “no higher complement” than to be selected “to act as umpire in a first-class contest” where organizers, spectators, and players placed “confidence in his knowledge of the rules [...] and in his ability to enforce them resolutely.”<sup>27</sup> Baseball umpires embodied the attributes of the ideal sportsman, acting as “gentlemanly experts,” who were looked upon for fairness and guidance by those participating in the sport.<sup>28</sup>

A similar pattern for choosing officials seems to have developed in Alberta hockey at the turn of the century. Hockey referees, like baseball umpires, held the higher positions in society and then translated status from those positions into authority on the ice. For example, Rev. D'Easum was one of the earliest referees in Edmonton, calling games in the early 1890s while W.T. Henry was a referee in Edmonton in the period between 1896 and 1900 and also the owner of the “W.T. Henry and Co. Clothing, Boots and

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<sup>26</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11-12. See also Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001), 11; Allen Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 70-74. See also, Elliott J. Gorn, “Sports Through the Nineteenth Century” in *The New American Sport History: Recent Approaches and Perspectives* ed. S.W. Pope (Urbana and Chicago: 1997), 49-53. For links between American masculinity and Muscular Christianity applied to the Canadian and Albertan context see Howell, *Blood, Sweat, and Cheers*, 33 and Donald G. Wetherell with Irene Kemt, *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945* (Edmonton: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, 1990), 125.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Chadwick, *Chadwick's Base Ball Manual, 1870-1871*, 56-63, quoted in Voigt, “America’s Manufactured Villain,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> Voigt, “America’s Manufactured Villain,” 3.



Shoes.”<sup>29</sup> Both Dr. R.B. Sullivan in Calgary and Dr. O.F. Strong in Edmonton were referees and dentists at the turn of the century,<sup>30</sup> and Wilford Forbes was a lawyer and a hockey referee in Calgary and Wetaskiwin contemporary to Sullivan and Strong.<sup>31</sup> Cappy Smart, the eccentric Calgary Fire Chief, was also a hockey referee at the turn of the century and, on at least one occasion, a game he refereed ended in a melee with the Chief exchanging punches with members of the crowd.<sup>32</sup> All these referees were upper middle class in their communities and they likely saw refereeing as an extension and reinforcement of their status in society. | 9

A major difference between the umpires of baseball and the referees in hockey was that the latter required a set of specialized skills --most notably the ability to skate-- and this necessity limited and complicated whom organizers choose to officiate games. Referees therefore usually already held positions with their community teams as executives, coaches, or even players. W.T. Henry, when not refereeing, played in games involving Strathcona and Edmonton; Wilford Ford was actively involved in the Wetaskiwin Hockey Association first as a player then a coach; and Dr. Strong was an executive member of the Edmonton Thistles hockey club. Strangely, these dual roles rarely affected the reported perceptions of officials, with commentators only

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<sup>29</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 8 March 1897; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 March 1897; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1898.

<sup>30</sup> H.R. MacLean, *History of Dentistry in Alberta: 1880-1980* (Edmonton: Alberta Dental Association, 1987), 32-35.

<sup>31</sup> Glenbow Institute Museum and Archives, Wilford Forbes fonds. *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 March 1905.

<sup>32</sup> William M. McLennan, *Sport in Early Calgary: An Account of the Sports, Games, Personalities, Facilities and Recreation of the Pioneers in the Early Calgary Area* (Calgary: Fort Brisebois Publishing, 1983), 105.

mentioning the issue of bias sporadically if at all.<sup>33</sup> As seen in the particular example of Dr. O.F. Strong below, the ability or biases of the referee were rarely called into question with criticism instead focused on their status as gentleman.

#### IV

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Dr. Strong was born in Oshawa, Ontario in 1875 and moved to Edmonton in 1903 after graduating from Western Reserve Dental College, Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>34</sup> By 1906 he was actively involved — both professionally and socially— in the city. In 1906, Strong took an executive position with the Young Liberal Club of Alberta<sup>35</sup> and remained with the association for twenty years.<sup>36</sup> In 1906, he also participated in a dance hosted by Miss Jean McIssac and the Edmonton Cricket Club’s year-end finale.<sup>37</sup> The previous winter, Strong was a celebrity judge at the “Annual Fancy Dress Carnival,” an event that was a “huge success.”<sup>38</sup> In later years, he became a chartered member of the Kiwanis Club and ran for school trustee on a platform concerning the welfare of children’s teeth.<sup>39</sup> His participation in Edmonton’s sporting scene included at least one sailing excursion to Cooking Lake, A.B. in 1903 that took the life of his business partner, Dr. J.S. MacLean.<sup>40</sup> He was also interested in the Edmonton Cricket Club, as his attendance at the year-end dance

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<sup>33</sup> The only instance that I was able to locate was in the *Strathcona Plaindealer*, N.D. January 1904, reprinted in the *Edmonton Journal*, 12 January 1904 and the case is detailed below in section IV.

<sup>34</sup> MacLean, *History of Dentistry in Alberta*, 17. 237-238.

<sup>35</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 5 December 1906.

<sup>36</sup> MacLean, *History of Dentistry in Alberta*, 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 16 November 1906; 24 November 1906.

<sup>38</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 10 February 1906

<sup>39</sup> City of Edmonton Archives, Clipping File, O.F. Strong.

<sup>40</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 August 1904. See Also MacLean, *History of Dentistry*, 17.

in 1906 would suggest, and was an executive member of the Edmonton Thistles Hockey Club in 1904 providing his office for official meetings in 1905.<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly, there is no evidence that Strong ever played organized hockey in Edmonton. This lack of participation could in part be explained by a disability brought on by a case of typhoid fever he endured at college “which left him handicapped at times.”<sup>42</sup> Non-participation could have also been based on Strong’s lack of skill for, as Terence O’Riordan notes, in the communities of Edmonton and Strathcona “skill was placed before status” when choosing players for hockey teams.<sup>43</sup> Even though the dentist was able to skate and was interested in the sport, he may not have had opportunity to develop the skill needed to participate in the intense games played between the two communities. Regardless of the reason, Strong never played for the Thistles but began refereeing by 24 November 1903. The exhibition game between the Edmonton and Strathcona teams was “closely contested” with the latter ultimately prevailing.<sup>44</sup> The *Edmonton Bulletin* writer reported the game as fast and exciting but mentioned nothing about the officiating. Dr. Strong, in this instance, seemed able to maintain a fair and level standard that allowed the two teams to compete in an exciting and closely contested match.

Although it is unclear exactly what drew Dr. Strong to refereeing, historical speculation suggests several possible motives. Strong had recently immigrated to Edmonton and may have wanted to involve himself in the social fabric of the community at a

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<sup>41</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 30 November 1904; *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 November 1905.

<sup>42</sup> MacLean, *History of Dentistry in Alberta*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> O’Riordan, “Puck Eaters,” 6. Morris Mott makes a similar argument in the Manitoba context. See Mott, “An Immense Hold in the Public Estimation,” 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 1 December 1903.

fairly high level. It is interesting that the November game provides the first appearance of his name in the *Edmonton Bulletin*, since such status-seeking supports Richard Gruneau and David Whitson's claim that at the turn of the century amateur sports was a means for immigrants to integrate in the community.<sup>45</sup> It also belies Donald Wetherell and Irene Kemp's point that sports teams in Alberta provided necessary means for all members of communities to belong.<sup>46</sup> If Strong sought to raise his social status certainly being asked to referee would have cemented his reputation as a gentleman in the community.

Such status was likely a primary motivator for Dr. Strong who later that winter wrote a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin* defending his refereeing and reputation after the annual New Year's Hockey match between the visiting Edmonton Thistles and the home town Strathcona Shamrocks.<sup>47</sup> His rebuttal and the series of articles that both led up to and followed it demonstrate Strong's desire to maintain his upper middle-class status and offer a glimpse into the world of hockey officiating in pre-1907 Alberta.

## V

The 1904 New Year's Day game was the second exhibition match for the J.M. Morris medals. The *Edmonton Journal* felt the game between the Strathcona and Edmonton teams would be played in "the crisp weather" that was "the ideal sort for hockey;" furthermore, a

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<sup>45</sup> Gruneau and Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada*, 67.

<sup>46</sup> Wetherell with Kent, *Useful Pleasures*, 132-133.

<sup>47</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 January 1904. For a detailed analysis of the longstanding rivalry between the Strathcona and Edmonton hockey clubs, see O'Riordan, "The Puck-Eaters."

special train was organized to convey Edmonton spectators and the hockey club south across the river to Strathcona for the contest.<sup>48</sup> It is unclear why the two teams chose Dr. Strong to referee the match— he was likely a member of the Edmonton Thistles executive and had only refereed one recorded match that winter. In addition, even if he had earlier experience refereeing in Ontario, it seems highly improbable that he would have been prepared for the intensity surrounding the annual Edmonton Strathcona New Year's game, which, although it was a so-called exhibition match, drew over eighteen hundred spectators and was the most anticipated of the year.<sup>49</sup> Presumably both teams put credence in his status as a “gentleman” in Edmonton and it seems as though the Strathcona club did not feel he would be a biased official, allowing him to officiate on their home ice.

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The game itself “started out fast and furious” with both teams battling early on in an evenly contested match; the first half ended with the score being “three to two in Edmonton’s favour.”<sup>50</sup> Strathcona seven minutes into the second half evened the score at three and scored a fourth goal shortly after to give them the advantage. After the goal, the *Strathcona Plaindealer* claimed “the prospect of [Strathcona’s] winning seemed very bright for the Edmonton men were noticeably lagged and playing a losing game.” At this exact moment, the paper recorded that an Edmonton Thistles player “secured the puck and scored on what appeared to Strathcona players and many of the spectators a glaring off-side shot. Referee Strong saw no off-side and allowed the goal for

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<sup>48</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 31 December 1903.

<sup>49</sup> *Edmonton Journal* 3 January 1904. For broader context concerning the rivalry and the importance of games during the holiday season in Edmonton and Strathcona, see Terence O’Riordan, “Puck-Eaters,” 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1904.

Edmonton which evened up the score 4-4.” Captain Richards of the Strathcona team then

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disputed the ruling of the referee which he had a perfect right to do under the rules of the game, but being denied a courteous bearing which was also his right, he accused the referee of unfair treatment and was ordered to the fence [penalty area] for three minutes. He refused to obey the ruling and the referee said as he pocketed the puck that if he (Richards) would not leave the ice he (Strong) would stop the game ‘and you know what that means.’ With that and no further declaration regarding the game, Referee Strong left the ice followed by the Edmonton team.<sup>51</sup>

In contrast to the detrimental description offered by the *Plaindealer* the *Edmonton Bulletin* recorded that

[a]t this point, a dispute arose. A Strathcona player claimed the goal was scored from an off-side. Referee Dr. Strong said that if so he had not seen it. The Strathcona player repeatedly charged the referee with unfairness for which he was ordered to the fence for three minutes. He refused to go which is contrary to all hockey rules. The referee consulted with the captains and declared that if the player would not take the fence he would have to call the match. The game was then called in favor of Edmonton, score, 4-3.<sup>52</sup>

Both newspapers make arguments for and against the gentlemanly status of the referee, Dr. Strong. Significantly, the first account, coming originally from the *Strathcona Plaindealer*, was undoubtedly

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<sup>51</sup> *Strathcona Plaindealer*, N.D. January 1904, reprinted in the *Edmonton Journal*, 12 January 1904.

<sup>52</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1904.

biased toward the home club challenging the moral authority of Strong, arguing that the referee's actions were immoral, unfair and, not "courteous." With the referee's on-ice authority resting largely, if not entirely, in his gentlemanly status, the article claims that Strong denied Richards fair treatment, pocketed the puck and went home instead of acting fairly toward the captain. Strong, as portrayed by the *Plaindealer*, emerged as a blatant transgressor of the gentlemanly codes of conduct that unofficially authorized the referees' authority to officiate hockey games. Strong's on-ice actions, the newspaper suggests, were unjustifiable, though the article never questioned his affiliation with the Thistles, nor called into question his physical ability. These points of emphasis demonstrate the cultural currency that the players, officials, and spectators placed in the referee's gentlemanly status and show how his authority largely rested in that status.

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In contrast, the *Edmonton Bulletin* presents a far different picture of the referee, but again one based mainly on his gentlemanly status. In this account, the Strathcona player, Richards, fails to act as a fair sportsman and Strong rightfully punishes him. Furthermore, the *Bulletin* represents Strong as an archetypically fair gentlemanly observer in a scene much different from that described in the *Plaindealer*. In the Edmonton newspaper Strong is a fair gentlemanly adjudicator, meeting and explaining the situation to both captains<sup>53</sup> and it was only Richards' refusal to act sportsmanlike that forced the former to call the game in favour of the visiting team from Edmonton.

Dr. Strong apparently did not feel vindicated by the *Bulletin* and wrote to the editor to further explain his actions and perhaps

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<sup>53</sup> Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play*, 70.

more importantly confront challenges posed by the *Plaindealer* concerning his gentlemanly status. His rebuttal begins with him asking for space “to answer the unjust accusations of the *Strathcona Plaindealer*, in reference to the hockey match on New Year’s day on Strathcona ice.”<sup>54</sup> The dentist then addresses the complaints made by the *Plaindealer* that he had not been courteous to the Shamrock’s Captain. Strong states that after Richards came to him complaining that the play had been offside, he, as referee, was civil and clear in explaining that he had not seen the play. Strong then claims that Richards called him “‘rotten and crooked,’ which later was a courteous and gentlemanly remark; so thinks the *Plaindealer*.” Strong’s reassertion of his gentlemanly status marks and defines the drama here, as much as the games suspension.

Continuing, Strong took up the issue as to whether he had given fair treatment to Captain Richards after the call of the penalty. The dentist’s explanation, similar to that provided in the 2 January 1904 article in the *Bulletin*, states that he gave Richards every opportunity to sit his three-minute “sentence” and only when the Captain asserted he would not did Strong leave the ice. The referee emphatically makes the point that he did not “pocket the puck,” stating that he instead picked it up and handed it to the Strathcona team. Once off the ice he was approached by two Strathcona officials who acknowledged “that Captain Richards should not have said what he did” and that the dentist “was not asking any more than what was due” from the Strathcona Captain. After making these statements, on the advice of Strong, the Strathcona officials asked Richards if he would adhere to the Referee’s ruling, to which he said he would not, forcing Strong to

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<sup>54</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 January 1904.



call the game in favour of the visitors, Edmonton. In closing the article, Strong states: “I never made any official declaration other than the score of 4 to 4, and if it was published differently by the Edmonton Press, it was not on my authority.”<sup>55</sup> Again the point of debate is focused on sportsmanlike behaviour and in Strong’s version it was he who took initiative and attempted to address the situation in a fair and gentlemanly way.

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Dr. Strong’s letter to the editor emphasizes the importance of gentlemanly status in Edmonton and shows that he felt it necessary to defend that status publicly. It also shows that there was an intermingling between the referee’s on ice persona and his off ice self: Dr. Strong’s position as a gentleman in the broader society informed his authority as a referee and his reputation as a referee helped to define his status as a community gentleman. Again, what is interesting is the Strong’s choice not to address the issue of ability or bias. He readily admits that he did not see the infraction and instead focuses on the events that occurred after the disputed goal was scored. To Dr. Strong, the larger and more important issue was the attack on his character and that was what he felt he needed to defend.

## VI

The newspaper articles description of the New Year’s Day game show the importance of the gentlemanly code in authorizing referees and the immediate reactions show how Dr. Strong translated his gentlemanly authority to on-ice situations. Questions regarding the much larger issue of team bias and the long-term

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<sup>55</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 January 1904.

stability of a system based upon gentlemanly authority were not raised in the initial articles and were only partially addressed in a series of newspapers that followed the New Year's Day match. I will now trace that specific discussion and show how issues regarding bias, authority and status have remained with the sport well into the modern era.

18 |

After the game, the *Edmonton Journal* ran a series of articles concerning the Strathcona Shamrock's trust of the Edmonton Thistles in future hockey matches. Only a few days after the game the *Edmonton Journal* wrote "[u]nless Edmonton will agree to play again the disputed New Year's game for the Morris medals, Strathcona will refuse to cross sticks with the Thistle players in the future. So the rumor goes."<sup>56</sup> A newspaper report published the next day disclaimed the rumour, stating that the two sides were prepared to meet, to "settle the dispute on its merits" in a gentlemanly way with a "conference between Referee Dr. Strong, the president, and the committee."<sup>57</sup> The desire to establish a means to settle future disputes was echoed in the *Edmonton Bulletin* which felt a commission should be formed to arbitrate discrepancies based on arguments heard from "the captains of both teams and from the referee and goal umpires" and that "immediate steps should be taken to have such a committee appointed before another hockey match takes place."<sup>58</sup>

The above desire did not facilitate immediate action and the call to create a committee to arbitrate disputes fizzled over the next ten days. On 8 January 1904, the *Journal* claimed, "[t]he Morris medals will be held by the Edmonton hockey club. The Thistle team

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<sup>56</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 4 January 1904.

<sup>57</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 5 January 1904.

<sup>58</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 12 January 1904.

see no reason for taking any other stand. The accepted rule of the game is that when the referee goes onto the ice the game is in his hand and when he awards the game the decision is final”<sup>59</sup> and though the reaction of the Strathcona club is mute in the historical record, it seems that they chose not to publicly fight the issue any further. Finally, after running reports for nearly ten days straight the *Edmonton Journal* dismissed the event as yesterday’s news in a final article titled, “The Hockey Dispute.”<sup>60</sup>

| 19

A year later the issue of referee bias was raised, perhaps for the first time in Edmonton, by the treasurer of the Strathcona Shamrocks, V.T. Richards, who pulled his team from the Alberta Challenge Cup because the organizing Edmonton Thistles team proposed to have officials only from their community in the final.<sup>61</sup> In a letter to the editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin*, Richards lambasted the organizers for ignoring his call for either a neutral referee or, at worst, a referee from each town, choosing instead to assign two officials from Edmonton. Richards’ criticism focuses on the un-gentlemanly actions of the Edmonton club and he is quick to point out that it was because of those un-gentlemanly actions that he was withdrawing his team from the championship. He writes:

I think you and every true sport either in Edmonton, Strathcona, or any where throughout the west where hockey is the entertainment and only winter sport, will agree with me when I say we were not used right and sportsmanlike. . .Why did the challengers not receive word that their man or no other man from Strathcona would be chosen by the home team [to referee]? Was

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<sup>59</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 8 January 1904.

<sup>60</sup> *Edmonton Journal*, 13 January 1904.

<sup>61</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 March 1905. It seems likely that V.T. Richards could be the same “Captain Richards” who was the centre of attention the year before although I have not been able to corroborate the fact.

this justice to us? I think not. . . Where is there any honor in holding a cup under these conditions?<sup>62</sup>

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Richards questioning attacks the “sportsmanlike” character of the Edmonton organizers and the letter suggests that the Edmonton Thistles club wanted to play under such conditions only because “the Strathcona hockey team are the best hockey aggregation in the north and would have been sure cup winners” had referees been chosen in a “sportsmanlike” manner.

Obviously the inability of the two communities to establish a means for arbitrating disputes or to choose officials meant that disagreements regarding referees could derail proposed matches. After 1905 it seems that the choosing of referees was becoming an issue to be included in the larger debates surrounding bias, fairness and the ideals of amateurism that would transform the sport at the turn of the century.<sup>63</sup>

Such debates became the *sine quo non* of Alberta Amateur Hockey Association (AAHA) founded on 29 November 1907. The newly formed association’s main purpose was to “maintain control of the game and keep out professional hockey”<sup>64</sup> and therefore little time was given to the issue of standardizing the role of the on-ice officials. This situation, as described by Gary Zeman, echoes Alan Metcalfe assertion that the desire to develop competent well-trained referees was at best a secondary concern, especially when compared to the threat that increasing professionalization in

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<sup>62</sup> *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 March 1905.

<sup>63</sup> Metcalf, *Canada Learns to Play*, 70; See also Morris Mott, “The Problems of Professionalism: The Manitoba Amateur Athletic Association and the Fight Against Pro Hockey, 1904-1911” in *Winter Sports in the West*, eds. E.A. Corbet and A.W. Rasporich, (Calgary: The Historical Society of Alberta, 1990), 132-143.

<sup>64</sup> Zeman, *Alberta on Ice*, 11.

the sport of hockey posed.<sup>65</sup> The fact that there were no training programs available to referees until the 1950s and that the referees themselves initiated these programs suggests that concerns about incapable referees were minor and that the importance of referees' gentlemanly status carried well into the century.<sup>66</sup> Only into the 1960s was the problem of standardized interpretation officially recognized by the AAHA although there was still a desire to maintain a system whereby the authority of referees was largely defined by their off-ice status.

|21

The 1967 *Final Report of the Alberta Department of Youth Hockey Study Committee* provides proof of the increasing desire to provide standardized training to officials in the 1970s though it also demonstrates the continued belief that officials should hold status in the community. The report opens its section on refereeing by stating that “[t]he need for a standard interpretation of rules by well-trained men, and the shortage of these men, summarized concisely the feelings of most people” involved with the AAHA.<sup>67</sup> This said, the reports authors feared that officials with too much training could become “unionized” and “interested in little but the monetary advantage of officiating” especially in amateur hockey.<sup>68</sup> The report therefore concluded that “good men” needed to be encouraged to officiate and that they should only be paid when they were “put to considerable inconvenience and where players are being compensated.” The report continued by stressing that the

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<sup>65</sup> Metcalf, *Canada Learns to Play*, 68-72.

<sup>66</sup> Gary Zeman argues that the first attempts to train officials came in the 1950s. Bill Fletcher adds that it was the referees themselves in the 1950s who began organizing rudimentary clinics for officials. Zeman, *Alberta on Ice*, 9; Author impromptu interviews with Bill Fletcher, March 2005.

<sup>67</sup> D.L. Moore et al. “Final Report of the Alberta Department of Youth: Submitted to the Honourable Robert C. Clark, Minister of Youth” 15 November 1967, 32.

<sup>68</sup> D.L. Moore et al. “Final Report,” 33.

AAHA should “actively discourage, by whatever means possible, the payment of officials in minor hockey, where no gate-charge is made.”<sup>69</sup> Though the report fails to define what it meant by “good men,” it is likely that the authors hoped members from the upper middle class who had off-ice authority would continue to referee amateur hockey matches across the province, carrying their status onto the ice ensuring that both sides strictly adhered to the rules of the game.

## VII

The case of Dr. Strong and the New Years Day match for the Morris Metals in 1904 has demonstrated the importance of referees’ gentlemanly status in the early history of Alberta hockey. The account shows how at the turn of the century hockey referees depended on their gentlemanly status and how the desire to have well trained officials was a secondary concern especially to the Alberta Amateur Hockey Association which was formed in 1907. This attitude seems to have carried forward into the 1960s, when it was believed that minor hockey officials should be “good men” who continued to translate the unwritten gentlemanly codes onto the ice for no pay. The growth of minor hockey since that time has forced the sport to develop a system to train an increasing number of young officials<sup>70</sup> whose authority is based in standardized rule interpretation and not off-ice status. This shift may help to explain

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<sup>69</sup> D.L. Moore et al. “Final Report,” 42-43.

<sup>70</sup> The number of officials increased from 1440 in 1976-77 to 2911 in 1982-83 to 4884 in 2003-2004 in the Alberta. This increase coincides with the larger growth of the sport in general over the period and the increasing need for trained officials in minor hockey. Hockey Alberta Referee’s Council Historical Data kept between 1976-2005. Provided by Dave Ganley.

the current “referee problem” as perceived in mass media where, as outlined in a recent government report, “[t]he most consistent complaint from players and adults was about officiating—inconsistency in rule interpretation and application, inexperienced and too-young officials, disrespect for officials and a resultant inability to retain them,”<sup>71</sup> though further research will be needed to test this hypothesis. In sum, this study has opened a new field of inquiry for the history of hockey suggesting that understanding the changing role of the referee is key to understanding the historical development of the game.

| 23

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<sup>71</sup> Bernie Pascall *Eliminating Violence in Hockey* (Government of British Columbia, 2000), 5 and throughout. James Deacon, with Brenda Branswell, Susan McClelland, and Darryl Smart, “Rink Rage: Screaming, Shouting and Hitting – Abusive Parents are Spoiling their Kids’ Sports,” 114 (March 26, 2001) 13: 20-24.

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