

INTRODUCTION

HOCKEY IS PART OF LIFE IN CANADA. THOUSANDS PLAY IT, MILLIONS follow it, and millions more surely try their best to ignore it altogether. But if they do, their disregard must be purposeful, done in conscious escape, for hockey's evidences are everywhere – on television and radio, in newspapers, in playgrounds and offices, on the streets, in sights and sounds, in the feeling of the season. In Canada, hockey is one of winter's expectations.

Hockey is part sport and recreation, part entertainment, part business, part community-builder, social connector, and fantasy-maker. It is played in every province and territory and in every part of every province and territory in this country. Once a game for little boys, now little girls play hockey as well, and so do older men and women; so do the blind and the mentally and physically handicapped. And though its symmetry is far from perfect, hockey does far better than most in cutting across social division – young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural, French and English, East and West, able and disabled. It is this breadth, its reach into the past, that makes hockey such a vivid instrument through which to view Canadian life.

Its first game was played just eight years after Confederation by reluctant northerners who chose to escape winter and play it indoors. In little more than a century, hockey has moved from pickup games on rivers and sloughs to Friday nights in quonset-hut rinks, town against town, to cathedral-like arenas and *Hockey*

Night in Canada, to the spectacle of electronic scoreboards, synthesizers, and million-dollar contracts. Hockey has changed as life around it, as people in it, have changed; as Canada has changed.

This book is part of a project. About five years ago, some people at CBC asked if I was interested in adapting a previous book, *The Game*, into a television series. I thought about the