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RETURN TO THE MOTHERLAND: RUSSIAN MIGRANTS IN HOCKEY'S CHANGING WORLD SYSTEM

By

PAUL RICHARD COOK

B.A., McGill University, 2004

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Human Kinetics

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ABSTRACT

Since 2000, Russian players are increasingly absent from the National Hockey League. This project explores the relationship between changes in the political economy of Russian hockey and the factors that shape the migratory decisions of Russian players. In using Wallerstein's World Systems Theory, it is argued that specific events relating to a nation's place within an economic and/or cultural relationship can significantly alter patterns of migration. Russia's newfound economic strength and confidence on the world stage is evident in the support for the country's new Kontinental Hockey League. The resulting changes in the political economy of Russian hockey, coupled with the restrictive nature of the National Hockey League's salary cap have led to a tremendous decrease in the number of Russian players in the NHL.

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This thesis is the result of over two years of academic work, yet it could not have been completed without the support and patience of a number of individuals to whom I must express my sincerest gratitude.

First and foremost I must thank my wife, Rachel Goulet, for her undying support. The decision to pursue this path was initially not an easy one, but it was ultimately incredibly rewarding; I could not have made it without you. Thank you for reminding me that the pursuit of happiness is itself a reward.

Secondly, for his careful guidance of my work and his magnificent editing skills, I must thank my advisor, Dr. Jean Harvey. If I can compare this project to a puzzle, I strew the pieces on a table (and sometimes all at once!) and your steady hand put them together. Though you sometimes wouldn't hear from me for months, it was always a pleasure to be welcomed into your office and to see that the excitement I felt toward this project's subject matter was shared.

The comments I received through the course of the work from Dr. Michael Robidoux and Dr. Marc Lavoie are also to be acknowledged. Marc, your initial input led to the use of secondary statistical data in this project, and I believe that it helps to illustrate some of the main points very succinctly. Michael, thank you for allowing me to share portions of my work with your class – it's always encouraging to be seen as somewhat of an expert in one's field.

Finally, I would like to thank Coach Dave Leger of the University of Ottawa Gee-Gees Men's Hockey Program. Dave, thank you for the opportunity to prove myself. There's no chance that I'd be where I am today (both figuratively and geographically!) without your help and wisdom. Paradoxically, I especially enjoyed our chats about things other than hockey – they provided some welcome relief from academia and sport. You're a great friend and colleague.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AHL	American Hockey League
CBA	Collective Bargaining Agreement
IIHF	International Ice Hockey Federation
KHL	Continental Hockey League (*Kontinentalnaya Hockeynaya Liga*)
MHL	Interstate Hockey League (*Mezhnatsionalnaya Hockeynaya Liga*)
MLB	Major League Baseball
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NHL	National Hockey League
NHLPA	NHL Players' Association
QMJHL	Quebec Major Junior Hockey League
RHF	Russian Hockey Federation
RHL	Russian Hockey League
RSL	Russian Superleague
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WHA	World Hockey Association

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Justification

This project explores the relationship between changes in the political economy of Russian hockey and the factors that shape the migratory decisions of Russian players. The demographic makeup of the National Hockey League (NHL) since the beginning of the decade has changed dramatically; changes in the participation of players from certain areas are highly visible. Among the notable patterns, American-born players now make up almost 25% of the league, their population nearly doubling over the selected timeframe. Positive changes have also been seen for players born in Sweden and Finland. Conversely, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have seen their participation in the league drop slightly, while Russian players, since 2000, are increasingly absent from the league.

Figure 1. NHL Players by Country – All Regions (National Hockey League, 2008)

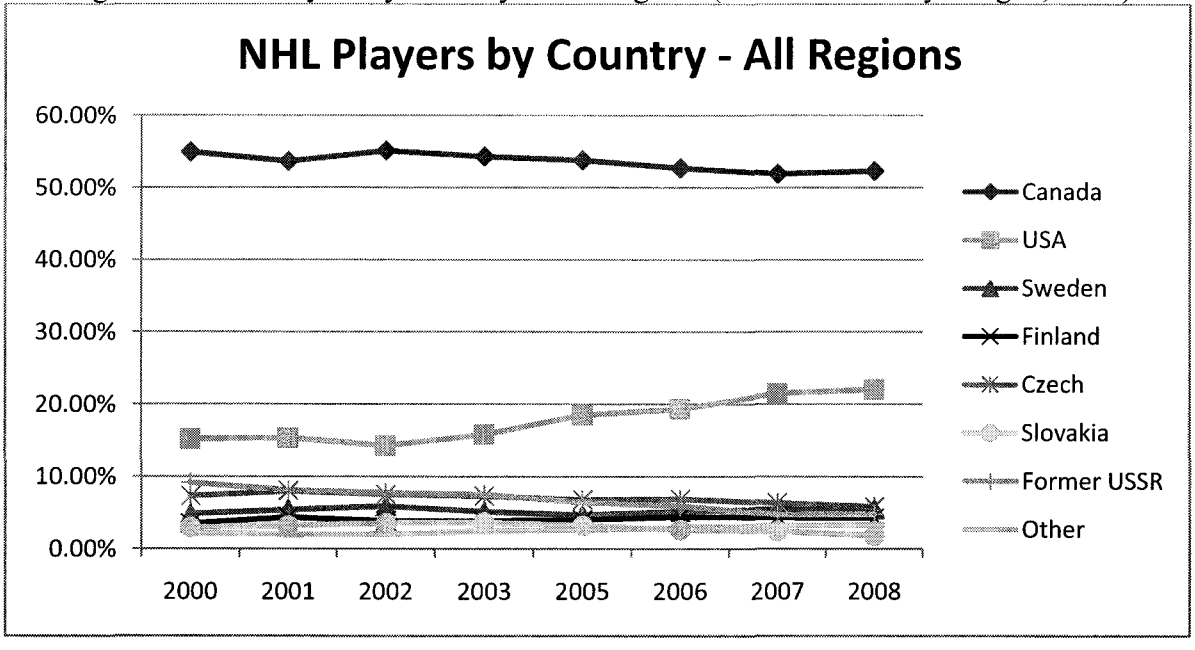
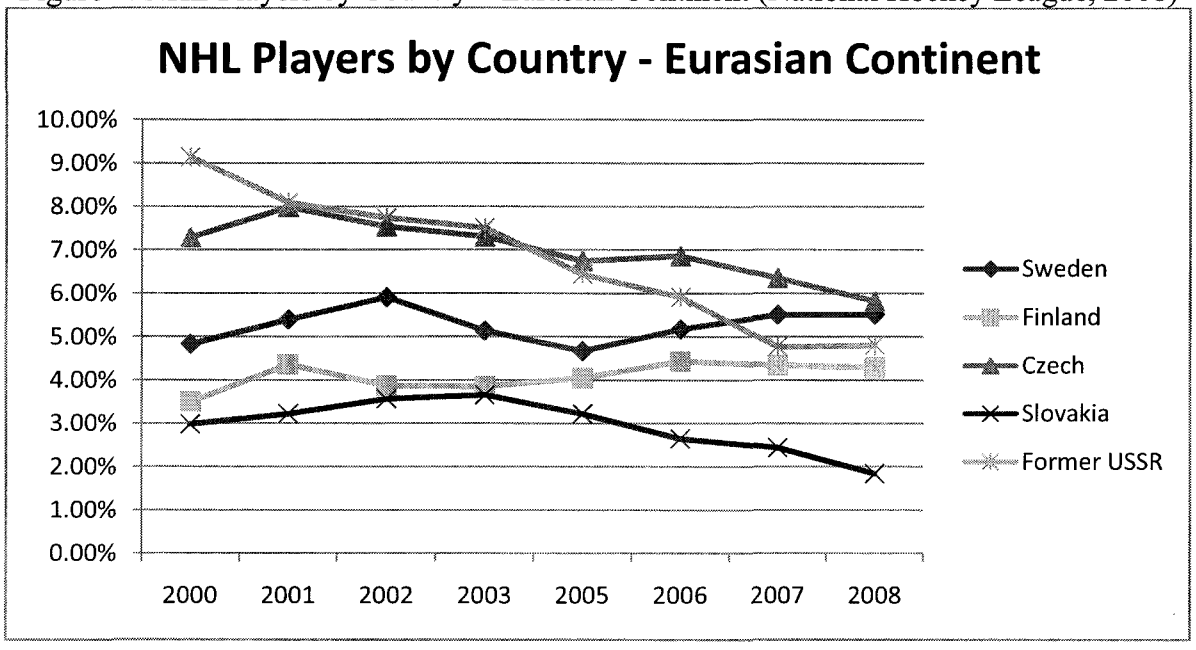


Figure 2. NHL Players by Country – Eurasian Continent (National Hockey League, 2008)



From 1989[i] to 2008, a total of 211 Russian-born players (see Appendix II) have played at least one game at the NHL level, with 150 of these players having played since the beginning of the 2000-01 season. In 2000-01, a total of 89 players from Russia[ii] saw NHL action; comparatively, during the 2007-08 season, only 45 Russian players had played in an NHL game, a decrease of nearly 50% (National Hockey League, 2008) (see Figure 3), the greatest decline of any nation. The net loss of Russians from the NHL since 2000 was 42 players, with peaks of fifteen players entering the league in 2003-04 and 22 exiting the league. Since 2000-01, the number of Russian players exiting the league has been greater than the number of those entering in all but one season (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. NHL Players by Country – Former USSR (1989-2008) (National Hockey League, 2008)

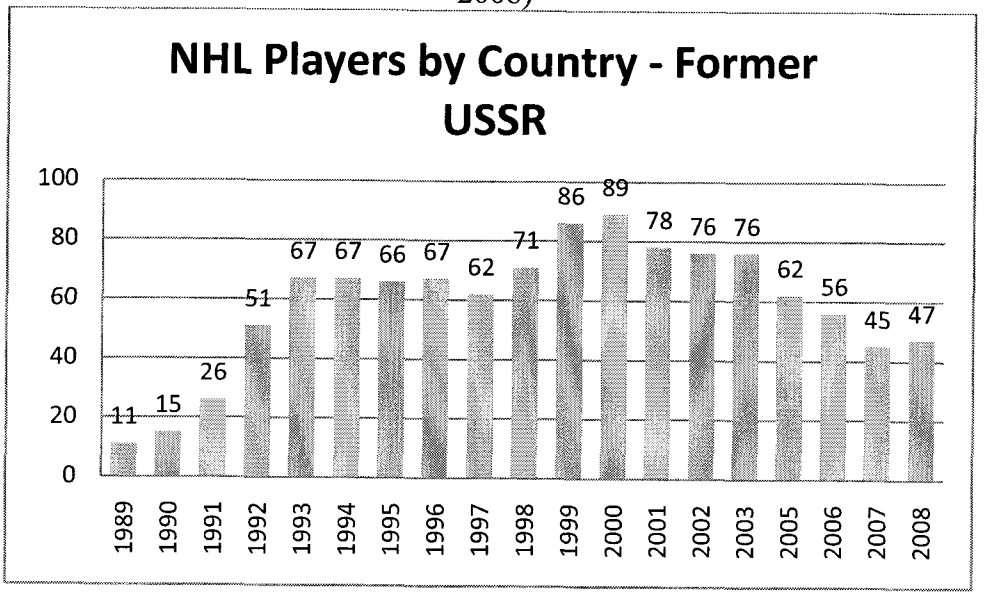
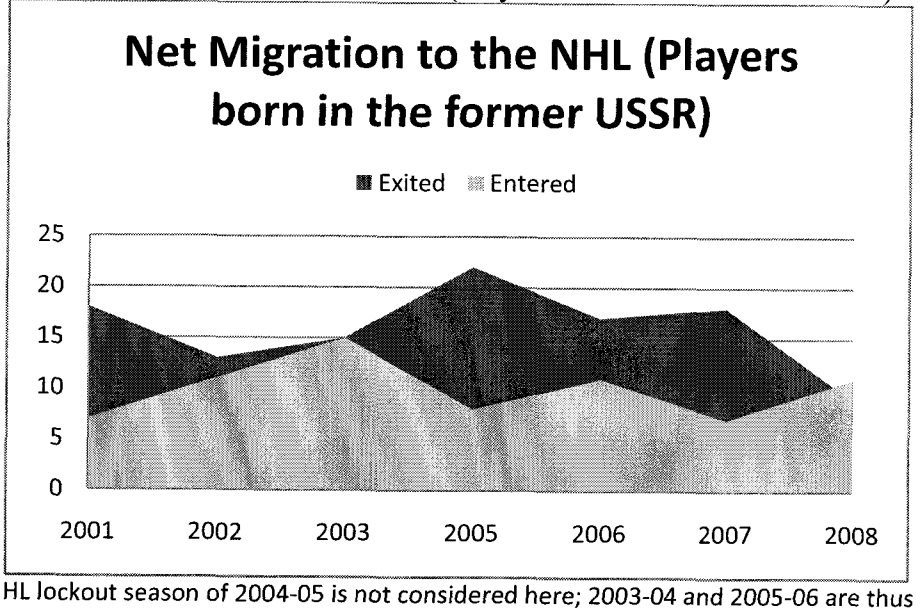


Figure 4. Migration to the NHL (Players born in the former USSR)

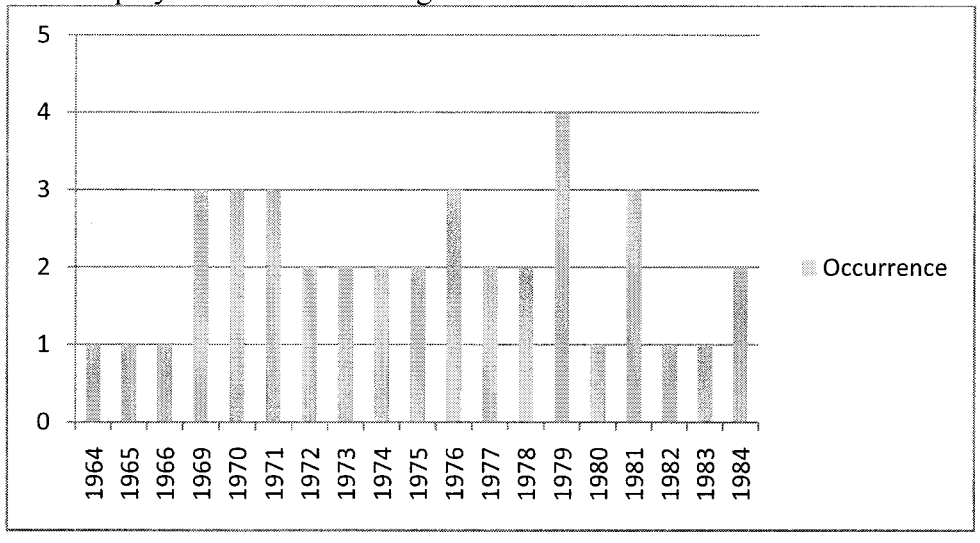


Note: The NHL lockout season of 2004-05 is not considered here; 2003-04 and 2005-06 are thus considered consecutive seasons.

The NHL lockout season of 2004-05 had a profound impact on the number of Russian players in the league. Eighty-two Russians with NHL experience returned to play in the Russian Superleague (RSL). This had a lasting impact; of the 119 Russian players who played in the NHL between the 2000-01 and 2003-04 seasons, 67 would play in the RSL following the lockout

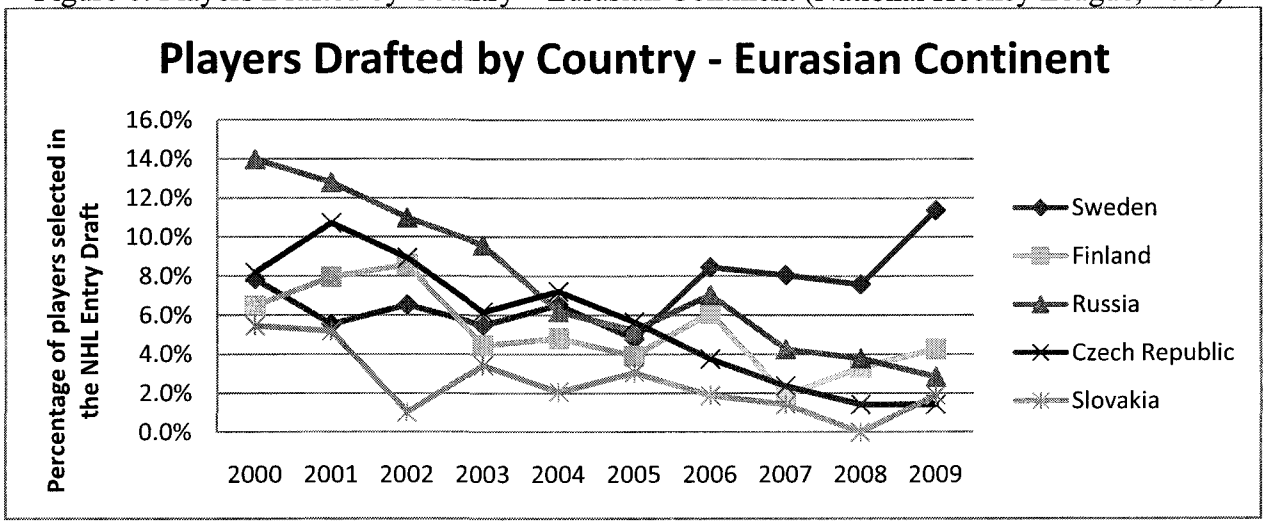
season. Of those players, only five would attempt a return to the NHL, with only one (Alexander Semin) choosing to remain in the league at the beginning of the 2007-08 season. While some of the 67 returnees would likely be considered borderline NHL talents, 39 had played at least 82 regular season games in the league, suggesting they were at least semi-regular players. Additionally, though some players might be considered past their prime, the data suggests an equal distribution of returning players across three age groupings (players born 1971 or earlier; players born 1972-1978; players born 1979 or later), indicating that the RSL had become an option for players on all points of the career arc (young players having recently entered the league; players at the peaks of their careers; older players nearing retirement) (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Year of birth of players with 82+ games of pre-lockout NHL experience who returned to play in Russia following the NHL lockout season of 2004-05



Similarly, a decline has been seen in the numbers of new Russian players entering the league. In 2000, Russians accounted for 15% of players drafted; by 2009 this had dwindled to only 3%, with a decrease seen nearly each year of the selected timeframe (National Hockey League, 2009) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Players Drafted by Country – Eurasian Continent (National Hockey League, 2009)



Russia is also distinct in that it seems to have taken an active role in retaining its players. The Russian Hockey Federation (RHF) has limited the participation of foreign players in the RSL and has specifically targeted the goaltending position; a luxury tax of 6 million rubles (approximately $250,000 in 2008 Canadian dollars) per season per foreign goaltender, and 1.5 million rubles ($62,500) per season per foreign position player is imposed on teams (Meltzer, 2006). The rule is intended to increase the number of professional opportunities for Russian players in their homeland. Russia has also been at the forefront of discussions regarding the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) transfer agreement with the NHL. Under the most recent agreement[iii], NHL teams were able to sign players under contract in European leagues with the stipulation that the national federations would be compensated with a payment of $200,000 USD (to be distributed to its member clubs) for each player signed. While the RHF considered signing the 2007-2011 agreement, ultimately they did not (Russia had similarly rejected the 2005-2007 agreement), citing pressure from Superleague team owners (Eurosport, 2007). This rejection of the transfer agreement and its compensation meant that players in the RSL could no longer sign with NHL clubs while under contract to their Russian teams without repercussions from the IIHF, limiting their opportunities to migrate. Players such as Evgeni

Malkin have had to take advantage of legal loopholes in order to play professionally in North America.

The case of Russia – declining immigration from one of the leading hockey nations and the country's active role in maintaining its talent – may force the NHL, as the world's premier league, to take conciliatory actions as it negotiates its hegemonic position in the world of professional hockey. Unable to access a fully international labour pool, the NHL is no longer in a virtually sole position to secure the world's elite talent. The situation is also problematic for some of the league's most basic operations. With the absence of a transfer agreement between Russia and the NHL, player contracts can no longer be guaranteed; NHL teams have no recourse through the IIHF to mount a challenge to Russian players rejecting their NHL contracts and returning to play in the RSL (the IIHF can decide to investigate player contracts and suspend players from international play, but cannot return players to their original teams); likewise those players wishing to play in North America are now limited in their migratory opportunities. Also notable is the impact on the NHL entry draft, in which players are selected without having to submit their names for consideration, with the *de facto* assumption that these players will wish to play professionally in North America. Draft choices might now be considered wasted if players instead choose to play in their home country.

1.1.1 Four Stories

While the raw statistics of the situation might not be common knowledge to most, stories surrounding certain high-profile Russian players have received wide coverage in the press. The following four examples help to illustrate the current nature of player migration between Russia and North America.

1.1.1.1 Evgeni Malkin – An Elite Player Heading to the NHL

Because of both his ability as a player and the circumstances under which he came to North America, Evgeni Malkin's story is perhaps the best known of any of the young Russian players in the NHL. Malkin was selected second overall in the 2004 NHL entry draft by the Pittsburgh Penguins and quickly made an impact on the league, winning the Calder Memorial Trophy (awarded to the league's top rookie) in 2006-07 after having made history by scoring a goal in each of his first six games, a feat not accomplished since the league's inaugural season in 1917-18. Malkin's sophomore season was equally illustrious. He finished second in scoring only to fellow countryman Alexander Ovechkin, resulting in nominations for both the Hart Memorial Trophy (awarded to the player judged to be the most valuable to his team) and Lester B. Pearson Award (awarded by the National Hockey League Players' Association to the individual judged to be the "most outstanding player" in the league) (National Hockey League, 2008). Malkin's third season would see his team win the Stanley Cup, with the young Russian claiming the Conn Smythe trophy (as the playoffs' most valuable player) (Morreale, 2009).

Despite the ease with which Malkin accumulated accolades, his initial entry to the league was beset by obstacles. After spending the 2005-06 season playing for Metallurg Magnitogorsk, his local RSL team and through whose youth development system he had progressed (and from which he had been drafted by the Penguins), Malkin unexpectedly re-signed with the team, despite expectations that he would make the transition to North America for the following season (King, 2007). Those expectations were not without merit however. In a complete reversal of apparent intentions, after landing at the airport in Helsinki for an early season exhibition tournament with Magnitogorsk, Malkin unexpectedly, and unbeknownst to the team, left the team. Malkin would meet with agent J.P. Barry, subsequently spending five days in a hotel (with

his whereabouts unknown to the outside world) waiting for the required American visa paperwork such that he could pursue a career in the NHL (Associated Press, 2006).

Utilizing a loophole in Russian labour laws, Malkin was able to leave his Russian team without legal repercussion despite being under contract simply by submitting a letter of resignation (Associated Press, 2006). Still, Malkin's status was the subject of much debate, with the RHF arbitration committee ruling that he could not play for Pittsburgh because of his contract with Metallurg, and the Russian team filing an injunction against the NHL and the Penguins in U.S. federal court (Anderson, 2006). The arbitration committee's decision had no standing outside of Russia however, and Metallurg's case was ultimately dismissed (TSN.ca, 2007).

Malkin's story highlights two important issues – firstly, the lack of a transfer agreement between Russia and the NHL, allowing players to leave for the NHL with no financial recourse available to their Russian teams, and secondly, the loophole in Russian law, which has since been closed by the Russian Duma (Eurosport, 2007).

1.1.1.2 Alexander Perezhogin – A Young Player Returning to Russia

Drafted in the first round of the 2001 entry draft by the Montreal Canadiens, Alexander Perezhogin lasted only 128 games in the NHL (National Hockey League, 2008). Despite showing signs of offensive potential and leading the team in the plus/minus statistic in 2006-07 (National Hockey League, 2008), Perezhogin only saw limited ice time and was relegated to a checking role (Hickey, 2006) for much of his time with the team (Hickey, 2005).

At the end of the 2006-07 season, Perezhogin opted to sign with Salavat Yulaev Ufa of the RSL for a reported $1.7 million (Hickey, 2007); he had been making $627,000 per year with the Canadiens (Canadian Press, 2006). There had been earlier reports that Perezhogin had been

negotiating with Avangard Omsk, the club with which he had played most of his career in Russia before coming to the NHL (Hickey, 2007). Perezhogin, upon his return to the RSL, led the Ufa team in scoring for the 2007-08 season, accumulating 41 points in 50 games (TSN.ca, 2008).

Perezhogin's story is far from unique; a number of young players having experienced North American hockey are returning to play in the RSL for more money and playing opportunity than they would be offered in the NHL. Further examples of young players returning include Alexander Kaigorodov (Ottawa Senators), Alexander Svitov (Columbus Blue Jackets), Aleksey Morozov (Pittsburgh Penguins), Stanislav Chistov (Boston Bruins), and Konstantin Koltsov (Pittsburgh Penguins) (Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum, 2008).

1.1.1.3 Alexei Yashin – A Veteran Player Returning to Russia

Drafted second overall in 1992 by the Ottawa Senators, Alexei Yashin's story is notable in that he accumulated 781 points in 850 NHL games – he is a veteran player who at one time might have been considered one of the league's stars, scoring 94 points in the 1998-99 season and serving as captain of both the Senators and the New York Islanders (National Hockey League, 2008).

At one time the highest paid player in the NHL, Yashin's $87.5 million contract over 10 years was ultimately too much for the New York Islanders. The team bought him out after the 2006-07 season with only six of those years having been fulfilled; his contract had become a burden under the NHL's recently imposed salary cap (MacGregor, 2007).

Instead of agreeing to contract offers from NHL teams, with which he and his agent were not happy (The Ottawa Citizen, 2007), Yashin ultimately decided to sign with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl of the RSL (Canadian Press, 2007).

While Yashin may be the most prominent former NHL player to play the later stages of his career in Russia, he is not the only one. Veterans such as Dimitri Yushkevich (786 NHL games), Oleg Tverdovsky (713 NHL games), Andrei Nikolishin (628 NHL games), Andrei Kovalenko (620 NHL games), and Igor Korolev (795 NHL games) have extended their professional playing careers by returning to Russia.

1.1.1.4 Alexei Emelin – Drafted, but Unsigned

Drafted by Montreal in the third round of the 2004 entry draft, Alexei Emelin has yet to make an appearance with the Canadiens or any of the club's farm teams (National Hockey League, 2008). Emelin is widely regarded as one of the best defencemen in Russia and was named to the country's national team for the 2007 IIHF World Championship (Hickey, 2007).

The Canadiens assumed that Emelin would join the team for the 2007-08 season (Hickey, 2007), after the original plans for his move to North America a year earlier were scuttled in the wake of the Evgeni Malkin controversy as a result of the changes to Russian labour laws that would prevent athletes from terminating their contracts (Hickey, 2006). Instead of choosing the NHL upon becoming a free agent after fulfilling his contractual obligations toward Lada Togliatti however, Emelin, instead signed with Ak-Bars Kazan (Hickey, 2007).

The Emelin situation represents a dilemma for NHL clubs as the lack of a transfer agreement with Russia means that they can no longer guarantee the professional rights to their draft picks or control their development. Similar stories have been heard in Ottawa and Calgary, with Senators draft pick Ruslan Bashkirov leaving his Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL) team also to play for the Kazan club (Johnston, 2007) and Flames draftee Andrei Taratukhin signing with Salavat Yulaev Ufa (Sportak, 2007).

1.2 Research Question and Hypothesis

This project seeks to explore the relationship between changes in the political economy of Russian hockey and the factors that shape the migratory decisions of Russian players. In using World Systems Theory, it is argued that specific events relating to a nation's place within an economic and/or cultural relationship can significantly alter patterns of migration.

Although increased player immigration is sometimes seen as inevitable as a professional league seeks to draw elite talent, the decline of Russian talent in the NHL counters this notion. The Russian example can be examined through the study of distinct events that have changed the way hockey is operated as a business within both North America and Russia. This project explores the hypothesis that the decline in Russian talent in the NHL can be seen as the result of a combination of factors: increased salary restrictions on players in the NHL; the continued development of professional hockey in Russia with the RSL and the new Continental Hockey League (KHL); an attempt to re-establish hockey as a symbol of Russian national pride. The latter two factors could be construed as a rejection of Russia's current position as a "semi-periphery" nation in what might be considered hockey's World System, the country seeking transformation through a strategy of self-reliance.

This project utilizes a mixed methods approach using both semi-structured in-depth interviews with player agents and other key informants and content analysis of press releases issued by the NHL and the IIHF as well as major periodicals. A number of themes are explored; these include the integration of the players into their North American environment, the circumstances surrounding players' decisions to migrate, the Russian player development system and the players' perceptions of the KHL and the now-defunct RSL as an alternative to the

NHL. Specific events that have taken place over the selected timeframe will also be touched upon.

In using Immanuel Wallerstein's (1976) World Systems Theory, the uneasy power relationship between the "Core" and the "Semi-Periphery" is documented. In basic terms, the theory is one that establishes the place of nations within an unequal relationship of power. These relationships can be localized; the role of a nation state can change when examining particular contexts (the "World System" of a particular sport may differ from the "World System" of general economy). Wallerstein's theory is well suited to the discussion of migration as one of the elements of this theory is that skilled labourers are drawn away from the periphery nations in order to consolidate power to the core states. Within discussion of the theory, a number of key elements are addressed, including the basic framework that Wallerstein establishes and the catalysts for change within this framework.

It is argued here that hockey's World System is comprised of a distinctly North American, and distinctly NHL-centered, core, comprising Canada and the United States, with Russia and the European hockey nations (Sweden, Finland, the Czech Republic and to a lesser extent Germany, Slovakia, and Switzerland) forming the semi-periphery. Along with maintaining established professional leagues, these nations represent nine of the top ten nations in men's ice hockey according to the IIHF 2008 rankings (IIHF, 2008), and routinely see their best players leaving for the NHL.

Consideration is also given to the migrant typology developed by Maguire (1996) and adapted for use with professional team sport by Magee and Sugden (2002). This typology guides the interview process as it explores the migratory decisions of the players.

1.3 Definition of Terms and Concepts

1.3.1 World System

Wallerstein (1976) conceptualizes the World System as "a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rules of legitimation, and coherence. Its life is made up of the conflicting forces which hold it together by tension and tear it apart as each group seeks eternally to remold it to its advantage" (p. 229).

Under capitalism, this social system is defined primarily in terms of economic organization and relationships of power between nation states. The basic premise of this modern World System is that states that are economically advantaged are able to exert their influence over states that are economically disadvantaged. This is realized through what Wallerstein (1976) characterizes as an exploitative international division of labour, a process by which surplus is capitalized by the more powerful states.

The general framework established by Wallerstein includes four broad categories within which states may fall (listed in descending order by their ability to exert influence over other states): (a) the core, (b) the semi-periphery, (c) the periphery, and (d) the external arena.

1.3.2 Core, Periphery, Semi-Periphery, External Arena

"Core" states are those that are able to exert their influence over all other states (with the exception of those that are equally advantaged), and internally display "a strong state machinery coupled with a national culture, [an integration that serves] both as a mechanism to protect disparities that have arisen within the world-system, and as an ideological mask and justification for the maintenance of these disparities" (Wallerstein, 1976, p. 230).

"Periphery" states are those that are disadvantaged in comparison to the core states and that display weak state machinery. These are areas that are exploited for their raw labour, with economic surplus extracted by the core.

"Semi-periphery" states are those that fall into a middle ground between the core and the periphery. While they are able to exert their influence over periphery states, they are often beholden to the core. This category represents an important element of World Systems Theory, as transformative possibilities are limited; periphery states must first become semi-periphery states before they can transition to being core states.

"External arena" states are those which do not take part in the World System. While these are not found in the modern World System defined strictly in terms of the general economy, they are visible in the re-conceptualization of the theory to other areas.

1.4 Limitations and Delimitations

Within the content analysis portion of this study, the materials consist solely of English- and French-language sources due to the limited availability of Russian-language sources and practical considerations related to translation. Likewise, interviews were performed in English, as this is the working language of the NHL.

1.5 Significance of this Study

This study adds to the growing body of literature on patterns of migration in sport, addressing certain gaps in the literature and furthering the understanding of the topic using World Systems Theory.

Specifically, this project addresses what is seen as an underrepresentation of professional ice hockey in the literature. While work has been done on the dispersion of North American talent into Europe (see Maguire, 1996; Cantelon, 2006), very little research has been conducted

on the NHL, the world's premier professional hockey league, and its ability to draw international talent.

Additionally, this study contributes greatly to the understanding of sport migration using World Systems Theory. Previous research (see Magee and Sugden, 2002; McGovern, 2000) has identified trends in migration as being illustrative of international power dynamics and geographic disparities in sport. These studies have utilized a static understanding of the theory, with the roles of states concretized into the categories outlined by Wallerstein (1976). The present study explores the transformative possibilities (toward greater power and influence) of states within hockey's World System, understanding that over time the roles of states can be dynamic within the theory.

A greater understanding of migratory processes within sport will ultimately help professional leagues adapt to unforeseen changes in the labour pools from which they draw talent, and maintain their competitive advantages over other leagues.

1.6 The Organization of this Document

Chapter II of this study outlines previous research that has been conducted on the subject of migration within sport. Themes that are explored include globalization, the player decision and changes in political economy.

Chapter III provides discussions of Wallerstein's (1976) World Systems Theory as well as the migrant typology developed by Maguire (1996). Examples from sport are provided for each theory. A short discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the application of these theories is also included.

Chapter IV presents the methodology used, and includes discussion of the data collection processes undertaken. Specificities with regard to the data collection and analysis processes for both document analysis and semi-structured interviews are presented.

Results from the document analysis and interviews, and discussion of these results, are presented in Chapter V and Chapter VI respectively.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This project explores the relationship between changes in the political economy of Russian hockey and the migratory patterns and decisions of Russian players. In undertaking this literature review, a number of key concepts and theories were identified. In this chapter, we first review works which posit that the patterns of migration within sport are shaped by economic globalization (and more specifically, transnational capitalism). Secondly, those competing theories that explore the issues of organizational structure and discrete political events on migration patterns are discussed. Thirdly, we examine the ways in which the question of agency has been addressed, followed by a treatment of concepts of nationalism and national identity and how they shape perceptions of the host and origin countries. Finally, we explore the experiences of the athletes themselves as migrants.

2.1 The Influence of Globalization

Discussions of globalization are particularly relevant to the discussion of migration in sports, but can be seen from a number of different angles. Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield, and Bradley (2002) introduced the idea that migration in sport can be seen along the same lines of other global processes, including the establishment of international communications networks, and is a markedly late-20th-century phenomenon. For these authors, the process of migration is inherently tied to transnational capitalism and theories of exploitation (including dependency theory and World Systems Theory, with both of these theories touching upon the underdevelopment of economically weaker states by those that are economically stronger).

Examples of such processes include the recruitment of inexpensive young talent from Third World nations into the European football league development systems and the

establishment of American baseball academies in Latin America. It has also been noted that Africa is now the primary origin for football players under the age of twenty in France, with Andreff (2007) arguing that this is because these players are ultimately less expensive to sign than their European counterparts. Similarly, Klein (1994) posits that the baseball academies that have been set up in countries like the Dominican Republic serve to evaluate and inexpensively secure young talent for Major League Baseball (MLB) farm systems with the alluring possibility of one day signing a lucrative contract. Additional examples from football include Magee and Sugden (2002) and McGovern (2000). Magee and Sugden, in their study of English football, note that a country's ability to draw talent is inherently tied to its economic strength. Likewise, McGovern in his treatment of 'brawn drain' in the sport, points to the uneven development of professional leagues between England and Ireland as having relegated the latter's clubs into a position of subordination, reliant on the financial injections received from English clubs in exchange for Irish talent.

Capitalist motivation on the part of teams and leagues is a notion shared by Maguire (Bale & Maguire, 1994) in earlier works, with exploitation framed as part of the overall commodification of sport within a capitalist world economy. A complementary viewpoint is expressed by Andreff (2007) who notes that these processes of exploitation might serve a functional approach, with the recruitment of foreign players seen as attempts to broaden the reach of team sponsors and increase television revenues in foreign markets. That economic globalization can solely explain the movement of athletes across borders has been challenged by a number of authors who point to political and organizational changes as the prime catalysts for migration.

2.2 Political Economic Factors

Political and organizational factors have heavily influenced the transnational movement of athletes, with specific events having incredible impacts on migration patterns. These factors, which may be entirely domestic, put into question the simplicity and inevitability of the globalization approach. Examples of political economy as the driving force of change have been noted in cases exploring Japanese footballers, with Yoshio and Horne (2004) arguing that the transfers and loans of players between clubs and leagues facilitate future migration opportunities, and Russian athletes, with Duke (1994) highlighting their increased mobility after the economic liberalization of *perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hockey served as a notable example of this. Despite the Soviets dominating international play during the previous decades, the first Soviet player in the NHL did not arrive until 1989 due to the closed nature of the country's political system (Cantelon, 2006). The liberalization of migration in Russia then accelerated migration to North American professional hockey leagues (Genest, 1994). Organizational examples include the formation of a greater number of professional leagues around the world. Cantelon (2006) suggests that the World Hockey Association (WHA) opened up new career opportunities for Europeans who were not able to secure employment with the NHL, while Yoshio and Horne (2004) make a similar argument that the J. League allowed Japanese footballers to pursue professional opportunities domestically.

Changes in labour negotiation practices, including the increased use of player agents, the liberalization of player movement through free agency, highlighted by the Bosman judgment in European football that declared nationality-based quotas to be counter to EU law (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Rosentraub, 2006; Yoshio & Horne, 2004), also had an impact on the migration patterns of athletes in several sports. A simple approach of global "core

vs. periphery" thus does not fully explain migration's "pull" factors; rather, political and institutional factors internal to states have considerable influence in the migratory patterns of athletes.

2.3 Player Decisions

Economic globalization theories that put emphasis on political economic factors are also sometimes criticized for not taking into account the "push" aspects that drive athletes from their countries of origin. The lack of agency in these theories can certainly be highlighted as a weakness. In exploring agency in migration, Magee and Sugden (2002) further develop a framework of typologies for players originally devised by Maguire (1996) that characterized them with such terms as "mercenary," "ambitionist" and "nomadic cosmopolitan." The typologies used are important, as they underscore the fact that not all athletes can be seen through a lens of economic determinism as exploited labourers or participants in capitalism – some are choosing to leave their countries of origin for reasons that are other than economic, a view that is echoed in Stead and Maguire (2000) who suggest that self-improvement might be the primary reasoning behind Nordic footballers' decisions to migrate to England. Likewise, as was the case with the Japanese national team in football, playing in a foreign league can be seen as an opportunity to increase player skill (Yoshio & Horne, 2004). Cantelon (2006) similarly suggests that the NHL is regarded as a proving ground for players. As these examples demonstrate, there can be a great number of reasons players leave their countries of origin.

2.4 Nationalism and Identity

Along with any discussion of migration and globalization, we must touch on concepts of nationalism, as it is deeply entwined with the development of not only an athlete's identity, but also that of the host and country of origin (Klein, 1991; Arbena, 1995). In this discussion there

are two contrasting themes: first, there is a decreasing importance on identification with nation states; second, that sports reinforce cultural differences.

With regards to the former, Poli (2007) discusses the "progressive disconnection" between the athlete and their geographical origin due to the increase of transnational professional leagues such as the Champion's League in European football. The term "borderless athlete" has also been used to describe the phenomenon, with migrant athletes transcending ethnicity and national borders, instead assimilating into their country of play (Chiba, Ebihara, & Morino, 2001), or with regard to athletes generating income from endorsement deals with transnational corporations, their marketability being more important than their playing ability (Mason & Duquette, 2005).

The second argument is contrary to the first in that it is based on the idea that sports reinforce one's national identity. Pooley (1981) posits that sport can serve as a symbol of identification with one's cultural heritage. This cultural identification would not only be evident in the athlete's self-identity, but also in the identity that is ascribed by others. While Cantelon (2006) acknowledges cultural differentiation as key in creating identity, it can also reveal itself in unfortunate ways, most notably the stereotyping of players based on the nationality. Lanfranchi (1994) notes that regional stereotypes are prevalent in the recruitment of players in football – Germans being strong defenders as an example, while negative stereotyping has been seen as present in hockey – the first European to play a full season in the NHL did so only in 1972-73, with early migrants being derided for their "lack of fortitude," (Cantelon, 2006, p. 224). This notion seems to express itself even in the negotiations of identity between English and French Canada when it comes to hockey, as evidenced by Lavoie's (1998) idea of the "intangible

deficiency" (pp. 62-65), with French Canadian players in the NHL facing salary discrimination that is not supported through statistical analysis of their performance.

Questions of national identity often play out in the sports arena. Mason (2002) argues that US television broadcasts of hockey, a sport seen as "Canada's game," led to a greater discussion of the cultural influence that the US has on Canada. Likewise, Klein (1994) explores the notion that baseball competitiveness serves to level the cultural playing field between the Dominican Republic and the United States. For Arbena (1994), this is part of an understandable question of national pride – athletes may be regarded as sports heroes representing the countries they left behind, but there could also be a feeling within the country that it was robbed of its own "human and recreational resources," (p. 103). Interestingly, Klein (2002) expanded on this notion, suggesting that sports is an arena for greater political discussion and that these feelings of nationalism are fluid and can often take on very different characteristics, arguing that nationalism (opposition to another nation) and patriotism (pride in one's nation) be regarded separately. It is unclear, however, if these notions of patriotism and nationalism influence athletes' professional decisions.

2.5 State Involvement

In matters of nationalism, the role of the state in the political economy of sport is important and multifaceted. Though Miller, Rowe, McKay and Lawrence (2003) make the argument that the nature of modern sport, with its global competitions and the rise of transnational corporations, has severely weakened the role of the state in sport, Wilson (1994) suggests that the state is still quite heavily involved. Rather than having been weakened, the state has simply taken on different priorities, and now finds itself heavily tied to the commercialization of sport. Traditionally, the role of the state has been seen as one concerned

with the promotion of health and physical activity as well as national prestige in amateur sport (Harvey & Proulx, 1988; Harvey, 2007); we can now add to this list the protection of symbolic commercial interests such as institutional prestige, whether it be the primacy of a league or the importance of being a "major league" city (Wilson, 1994; Gorman & Calhoun, 1994). These issues are often raised in discussions of protectionism and cultural diffusion, and are highly relevant to the goals of this project as policy decisions can heavily influence migration patterns (Magee & Sugden, 2002).

2.6 Integration

The prevalence of national identity in sport also extends to the experiences of the players themselves. While matters of integration and acceptance are evident for many immigrants (Massey, 2002), they may be more pertinent for migrant athletes as ultimately they are often only temporary residents in the host country, a characteristic which may engender resentment (Portes, 2003). Not only do the issues of stereotypes and potentially hostile hosts possibly preclude, or at least dissuade, athletes from migrating, the issue is perhaps magnified in the experiences of those players who have been able to play abroad. As Yoshio and Horne (2004) have discussed, the experiences of former foreign players play an important role in the decision to migrate, both in terms of serving as role models and cautionary tales. In arguing that stereotyping in hockey originally stifled the playing opportunities of Europeans, Cantelon (2006) recounts the abruptly cancelled North American career of Sven Johansson, the first European player to attend an NHL training camp. Johansson was ridiculed for uncharacteristic behaviour – wearing a helmet – and became a "marked man." Johansson would never play a regular season game. Similarly, Japanese football player Nakata admitted his style of play had to become more aggressive, as his European teammates were hesitant to pass him the ball (Yoshio & Horne, 2004). Another

player, Nobuyuki, recounted the unfriendliness he encountered, noting that Japanese footballers were held in low regard in Italy and Croatia (Yoshio & Horne, 2004). Work that has been done on junior-level hockey in Canada supports this position, noting that non-North Americans were often subject to harassment (Allain, 2005). The characterization of the foreign player is not universally negative however, as was seen in the case of the Japanese football player Nobuhiro, who relished the opportunity to be an outsider and the opportunities it provided for entertainment (Yoshio & Horne, 2004). Without a doubt, we can see that even in Nobuhiro's case, complete integration does not seem to take place; there exist "problems of intercultural communication" (Maguire, Jarvie, Mansfield, & Bradley, 2002).

The issue of player migration is a complex one, rife with contradiction and disagreement. Much of the work done thus far on the subject has looked at quantitative data, documenting migration patterns, but little has been done to support the framework of migrant decision-making from the athlete's perspective. This project engages this issue, taking a qualitative approach with a specific regard to the experiences of Russian hockey players in North America, exploring the extent to which incentives or barriers exist and as to how these may influence any future decisions with regard to their playing careers.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 World Systems Theory

Within his World Systems Theory, Wallerstein specifically points to political and economic relationships based in capitalist ideology and the notion of division of labour. As the theory attempts to explain the relationships between nation states, the concept of division of labour is one that is necessarily geographical and hierarchical, expanding on a Marxist notion of exploitation. For Wallerstein (1983), in his notion of the commodity chain, just as manufacturing labour would be exploited such that the surplus capital of goods was consolidated by factory owners, nation states are able to extract surplus from others. As with Marx (1992), the ability to extract surplus from others was driven by advances in technology – the cross-border trading of goods that were once equal in terms of productive input became unequal once one area was able to increase efficiency (Wallerstein, 1983). With the concentration of surplus within a geographic region, these exploitative processes are legitimized by the key groups, ultimately resulting in cultural homogenization and cohesive political power within that region (Wallerstein, 1976). For Wallerstein, these exploitative processes demonstrate that the development of a "strong state machinery…serves both as a mechanism to protect disparities that have arisen within the world-system, and as an ideological mask and justification for the maintenance of those disparities" (1976, p. 231). Over time, as these exploited nations seek to equalize the power relationships, they look to emulate the technological advances made by the stronger states. As these weaker regions cannot compete on a grand scale, this often realizes itself in specialization. Here, stronger states often provide the necessary technologies to those weaker states such that their populations serve solely as labour, the value-added mechanisms

(those controlling the pricing and compensation for the labour) remaining within the stronger state. Weaker regions then enter into a relationship of dependency. If they resist the stronger states they risk losing the investment income that keeps their labour market afloat. The weaker states are in a continual "scramble to keep from 'falling' down in the hierarchy" (Sonnenfeld, 1999).

3.1.1 The Framework: Core, Periphery, Semi-Periphery, External Arena

In using a very basic model of the modern world, Wallerstein (1976) outlines a categorization of nation states along lines of political and economic power. Those in positions of privilege, that can express sovereignty and political control over economic processes, and to whom capital surplus would flow, are identified as "core" states. These are placed in opposition to what are identified as "periphery" areas; regions that are in a disadvantaged position in terms of political and economic power. These periphery areas (Wallerstein hesitates to identify them as states, citing often weak political cohesion) are then exploited and underdeveloped by the core states in the interest of further consolidating economic power and sustaining their positions of privilege. To complete his model, Wallerstein also identified "semi-periphery" states as those that had the means to exploit the periphery, but themselves could be targeted by the core states, and finally, those countries that are not included in a particular relationship are identified as "the external arena."

3.1.2 Transformative Possibilities

The role of a state within this hierarchy is not stable. As already touched upon briefly, the disparity in the power relationships between regions is greatly affected by the strength of the state apparatus. While Wallerstein focused primarily on the intersection of the state machinery and economics, internal social forces also have a role to play in the paradox that brings about

change. As Wallerstein (1976) explains, "the social system is built on having a multiplicity of value systems within it, reflecting the specific functions groups and areas play in the world division of labor" (p. 233).

Reflecting on the status of core states, these values are often contradictory, and for Wallerstein (1991), "it follows that every historical system will undermine its own ability to survive" (p. 105). Those who benefit primarily from the strong state machinery often lead to its dismantling; modern capitalism associates itself with conservative political ideals of a smaller, less interfering, government, ultimately reducing the strength of the state machinery that supports it (Wallerstein, 1995). As ideas become legitimized, they become resistant to change. As Chase-Dunn (1989) states, "once a national economy becomes organized in a certain way there is a tendency to crystallization around patterns which are then not easy to change" (1989, p. 177). This resistance then leads to vulnerability in the face of technological change. Just as the capitalist elites within a population might call for political change, so is the political system by which a nation state operates susceptible to change from its population, the majority interests of which may not align with those of its elite.

The ability of a periphery or semi-periphery region to improve its standing within the World System is less certain and markedly more difficult. While "the world's working strata are not simple objects of manipulation by dominant forces, but active agents of resistance" (Wallerstein, 1995, p. 10), this resistance is difficult to organize in the face of hegemonic status of the core states. As such, transformation is possible from periphery to semi-periphery, and from semi-periphery to core, but direct transformation from periphery to core according to the theory is impossible. While opportunities for shifts in the balance of power do arise in the decline of core states, the ways in which regions make the transformation are not identical; a

number of avenues exist for obtaining more advantageous status. Wallerstein (1974) outlines three strategies for change: seizing the chance; promotion by invitation; self-reliance.

The first possibility specifically relates to the decline of the core states, or rather the potential weakness of a core state in a time of crisis. Wars or other disruptions can significantly alter import-export markets and consequently put the strength of national currencies in peril such that its ability to extract surplus from the periphery is greatly diminished. Periphery regions can take advantage of these more favorable economic conditions to improve their output and capitalize on the weaknesses of the core states.

The second possibility is also admittedly rooted in chance and also relates to a potential weakness of a core state. Here it is posited that lower strata regions are courted with more egalitarian trade agreements such to expand the market of a core state's product. As the core has heavily invested in technologies for certain products, they have an interest in maintaining the demand for such products. In times when local demand diminishes (due to economic cycles), the state has to look elsewhere. One qualification that exists within this strategy is that the periphery state has to be sufficiently large in order to garner the attention of the core state as a possible ally. Additionally, having been in a disadvantaged position within the world economy, while the populations of periphery states might put forward the necessary demand, they might not have the required resources to purchase the goods and services the core wishes to promote; as such, the core also has an interest in developing the economy of the periphery state. This sort of action does serve to threaten the position of the core state in the long run, but protects its more immediate investments.

The final possibility is if the periphery or semi-periphery rejects their place within an international market – which is to say they must remove themselves from the power

relationships. In contrast to the possibilities for improvement already discussed, this strategy does not rely on the weakening of the core state. Rather, the periphery or semi-periphery state looks inward to rise to the level of the core. For Wallerstein (1974) this has been shown through the nationalization or socialization of industries and essentially closing one's borders and engaging in protectionism. Within closed borders a region no longer has to worry about competition and is able to focus its efforts on satisfying the needs of its citizens – not only through a protected market for locally-produced goods, but also through investments in education and local human resources – thus strengthening its local economy and encouraging technological innovation. As the economy of a region stabilizes, it slowly opens up, allowing for the privatization of certain industries and, later, trade across borders. As local competition develops, so do the pressures of efficiency and profit maximization, returning to the Marxist (1992) model of the development of capitalism. Through technological innovation, certain firms are able to extend their reach outside of their regions' borders and re-enter the world economy. As Chase-Dunn (1999) puts it, "capitalism spurs socialism, which spurs capitalism, which spurs socialism again in a wheel that turns and turns" (p. 203). The primary difficulty in enacting such as socialist system is that the core states have a vested interest in maintaining existing hierarchies. As a result, Chase-Dunn (1999) notes, "democratic socialist movements that take state power in the periphery are soon beset by powerful external forces which either overthrow them or force them to abandon most of their socialist program" (p. 207). Because of this, this strategy has typically only met with success within relatively strong semi-periphery regions.

3.1.3 Using Wallerstein's Model: Examples from Professional Sport

In developing our model of hockey's "World System" we draw upon the criteria that were used by Magee and Sugden (2002) in their study of English football, namely the place of

origin of the sport and that region's ability to formalize its position of authority. These criteria mirror Wallerstein's notion of technological innovation and the strength of state apparatus. These criteria can also be used to demonstrate Alan Klein's (1989) study of baseball in the Dominican Republic. These two examples bring very different, yet complementary, perspectives from the core and the periphery.

3.1.3.1 The Football World System: Europe as Core

Magee and Sugden (2002) identify Europe (and specifically England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain) as the core of football's World System. Here, the dominance of these countries followed both their historical relationship to the sport and their ability to invest capital. England, as the origin of the sport and the country in which it had first developed a governing body, for a time essentially monopolized elite foreign talent through its first-mover advantage, being the first country to establish the necessary infrastructure to support a professional league (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001). The commercial aspect of the sport followed its ability to draw spectators; with the popularity of the game in England, its teams were able to offer the most lucrative contracts. That the sport was able to blossom from a simple village pastime into an organized spectator sport necessitated investment from elites; playing grounds with grandstands would need to be built. The mobility of these elites, along with the industrial modernization of the rest of Europe which saw the nascency of new elites, facilitated the spread of the sport across the continent (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001). As such, while England's first league championship was held in 1888, Italy's inaugural event was held only 11 years later. The concretization of the European continent as the core of the football world was greatly facilitated by the fact that the world governing body, FIFA, founded in 1904, originally consisted solely of European nations. Over 100 years later this same core remains.

Completing the model, Magee and Sugden (2002) identify the African continent as serving as the periphery, South and Central America as the semi-periphery, and Asia and North America as the external arena. The roles of Africa as the periphery and South and Central America as the semi-periphery follow patterns of migration rooted in political disruption and linked to the past colonial tendencies of the European nations.

In the case of Central and South America, when Italy moved toward fascism in the early 1920s, the United States banned immigration from that country; as such, many Italians found home in more southerly locations as an alternative, supplementing a population that had already become fascinated with the game following promotional tours conducted by some of the European clubs (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001). That a great number of these migrants returned to play professionally in Italy was as a result of a combination of factors. Firstly, the Italians, for nationalistic reasons, were keen to improve their national team in any way that they could, and so facilitated the returns of those whose families had left. Secondly, the ability of the Italian clubs to handsomely compensate the players for their services was an incredible attraction, even for those who had left to escape the political landscape (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001). This established link, along with the development of similar and compatible playing styles between Italy and such countries as Argentina and Brazil, laid the groundwork for a pipeline of talent across the Atlantic. While resistance was encountered from the countries of origin, the lack of a football federation as powerful as that of Italy prevented any restrictions on player movement.

The case of Africa is quite simple. As Lanfranchi and Taylor (2001) state, "the organizational weakness and the fragility of the professional sporting economy at home has precluded any alternative to the emigration of the best performers" (p. 167). The only opportunities to make a career as a football player exist in the core or semi-periphery countries.

The lack of cohesive organization structure is one of Wallerstein's (1976) requirements for a periphery region, as it puts it in a disadvantaged position in any power relationship. As Andreff (2007) has pointed out, Africa is now the primary place of origin of players under the age of twenty in France. Part of the reason for this is that France maintained special relationships with some of its colonies. As an example, Algerian citizens in 1947 were granted French citizenship, which saw immigration from the northern African country to the European mainland increase three-fold within two years (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001). Within this migration surge, and those that have followed since, the best Algerian footballers were able to easily gain a place within French football.

That economically powerful regions such as North American and Asia are not included in the core underscores the importance of the historical context of the sport's development (Magee & Sugden, 2002). The sport of football traditionally has not been seen as culturally important in these areas, and is only now gaining relevancy. Magee and Sugden (2002) do seem to allow for the possibility of North America and Japan entering into the football World System within a few years however. Substantial growth with regard to participation in the sport, along with the recent establishment of professional leagues would certainly increase the regions' standing in world football.

In their application of Wallerstein's (1976) theory, Magee and Sugden (2002) point to the incredible number of foreign-born players in the England – "during 1998-1999, more than 500 overseas players were playing in English leagues, and in the English Premier Division foreigners accounted for 45% of squad players" (p. 421). The authors attribute this to a number of factors that serve as evidence of England's role as part of the core, most notably including the high levels of economic reward offered by English leagues made possible by the increasing amounts

of revenue from media and sponsorship, signs that England has been able to consolidate the riches of the game and, in turn, the power to draw foreign talent. The economic growth of the sport in the core has allowed teams to increase scouting efforts internationally, into the "hinterlands" (to use the authors' colloquialism). Additionally, the effects of media can be felt in more than just economics – the hegemony of European football worldwide has been reinforced by television broadcasts, with young players often wishing to play for the teams that are prominently featured. As Armstrong and Giulianotti (2001) discuss as an example, the English club Manchester United has 25 supporters' clubs located outside of the United Kingdom. The draw of English football now extends far beyond the British Isles.

3.1.3.2 The Baseball World System: The Dominican Republic as Periphery

Further empirical support for a number of the concepts that are present in Wallerstein's (1976) theory is presented by Alan Klein (1989) in his study of the political economy of baseball in the Dominican Republic.[iv] Klein's example is a more focused look at the sport – the distinction here between the core and the periphery is quite evident. In Klein's view, the MLB teams of the United States are engaging in what can be best described as the internationalization of the division of labor, ultimately underdeveloping the island's own baseball economy.

Klein's (1989) portrayal of the relationship between countries follows along the same lines as the example that Magee and Sugden (2002) provide of football – notably, advantage is based heavily in the historical origins of the sport. While its exact origins are uncertain, the sport of baseball is seen as having been codified in the United States. Resultantly, the sport's prevalence in the Caribbean can be traced to American influence in the region and has arguably always been subordinate to outside interests. In addition to its larger market, the United States had a considerable first-mover advantage in the establishment of professional leagues, having

organized in the 1860s. The spread of the game to the islands took place over a number of decades – the Dominican Republic would first see the sport only in 1891. Cuba was the first of the islands to adopt the game, with it having been brought over by American sailors after the sport had gained a foothold on the mainland. The country's leagues developed as a result of sponsorship from American-owned sugar refineries that would support teams of their workers during the winter months in which production was idle. Even these though, were semi-professional – they were more of a subsidized pastime than organized sporting events. The organization of strictly professional leagues in the Caribbean would not take place until the 1950s, when MLB began to exert its influence and demonstrate a desire for players from the region (the game's "colour barrier" in the United States was not broken until 1947, meaning that roster spots were not available for Afro-Caribbean players). While the Dominican Republic was eventually able to organize its own professional league, not surprisingly it has always been dwarfed by its American counterparts and has accepted this role willingly – the established American leagues were the model of professional sports for the Dominicans; they were something to aspire to, not compete against. From its inception, the Dominican league established formal ties with the American leagues. Like the semi-professional Cuban teams that preceded them, the Dominican teams would play during the winter months (during which the Americans were on seasonal hiatus) and would serve as developmental opportunities for major league prospects, from both within the country and the American mainland. The Dominican Republic thus developed into a labour supply market for the American teams.

While the island has provided a wealth of talent, the underdevelopment of the Dominican leagues did not come into full effect until the 1980s, when the rise in salaries in MLB greatly accelerated due to free agency. The local players of the Dominican Republic were not only of

interest to the American teams because of their talent, but also as Klein notes, "young Dominicans could be signed at a fraction of the cost of American talent" (p. 98). Teams thus increased their scouting and recruitment efforts on the island, with a number of them establishing baseball academies – "the baseball counterpart of the colonial outpost" (Klein A. , 1989, p. 103). At these academies, players would ostensibly sign up with an American team for training to further develop their skills. In effect, what was happening was that the American teams were seeking exclusive rights to scouting – if they could find a player and sign him before he became a top talent (Klein relates that some were signed to contracts at the age of 13) they would not have to compete for his services. Previously those same players would develop naturally, possibly reaching the level of the Dominican professional league, where there they might catch the eyes of American scouts. The academies "undercut the traditional reliance of U.S. teams on Dominican professional teams" (Klein A. , 1989, p. 104), robbing the local leagues of potential marquee players. The acceleration in salaries also meant that positions in the United States were more coveted and protected than ever before, and so while players might have played both in the United States and the Dominican Republic (with the seasons offset) previously, this pattern was altered. The number of top players who would play in the local Dominican league during the winter months eventually slowed to a trickle. This was due mainly to a fear that injuries might jeopardize their career opportunities; as Klein puts it, players became "reluctant to risk future earnings" (p. 100). The rise of baseball as a business thus resulted in the loss of both young and established talent in the Dominican leagues.

3.1.4 Strengths and Weaknesses

The choice of World Systems Theory in this study is due to its applicability to macro-level units of analysis and its compatibility with political economy models as have been

demonstrated in previous work. This project ultimately examines the role of the state and professional leagues in hockey and in migratory patterns, attempting to construct a model of hockey's World System in which Russia currently exists as a semi-periphery region in opposition to North America serving as the core. The primary units of analysis will be the NHL and the RSL/KHL, with supporting evidence provided through investigation of the IIHF and the RHF. As has been discussed, the World Systems and underdevelopment approaches to the study of professional leagues and associations has been undertaken by a number of authors, including Magee and Sugden (2002) and Klein (1989) but also McGovern (2000) in his study of Irish football and Bale and Sang (1994) in their treatment of Kenyan athletics. Wallerstein's (1976) original formulation of the theory was one of the trading of commodities; in modern sports, athletes are arguably the commodities. It would thus seem that its application to this case is ideal.

The primary strength of World Systems Theory is that, rather than furthering a notion that globalization is simple modernization and diffusion or pure domination by certain states (e.g., "Americanization"), the theory recognizes that there are distinct relationships of power that are historically based. States do not operate independently of the rest of the world. As has been presented, the theory brings together complementary ideas of neo-imperialism and underdevelopment. The migration of athletic talent then is not inevitable or equally distributed, but manifests itself through specific channels and is shaped by changes to the political economy of a sport and the countries in which that sport operates. The formulation of these relationships into distinct categories meanwhile, though it may be construed as an oversimplification, is useful in that it facilitates the task of comparative analysis.

The primary weakness of the theory is undoubtedly one of agency. Wallerstein paints a fairly bleak picture of global processes in which individuals are essentially at the mercy of a state which may not even be their own. Immigration is solely a "natural consequence of economic globalization and market penetration across national boundaries" (Massey et al, 1993, p. 432). In placing so much emphasis on the power of the core states, the theory "[ignores] proactive efforts of inhabitants of peripheral regions" (Hall, 1999, p. 5) to enact change and develop alternatives to the exploitative economies. Similarly, the role of elites in enacting change is unclear. While we can acknowledge the seeming lack of agency as a potential problem in certain studies, applying World Systems Theory is very much a process of bringing together historical data and looking for patterns; in doing so, the individual is often aggregated. If the goal is to look for patterns, then individual agency is not of great concern.

3.1.5 Establishing Hockey's World System

The relationship between North America and Russia in the World System of professional hockey holds many similarities to the examples provided. In discussing World Systems Theory and football, Magee and Sugden (2002) suggest that England was able to monopolize the early game and gain core status because of three specific characteristics – an historical relationship to the sport, the ability to invest capital, and a first-mover advantage in the establishment of a professional infrastructure. Likewise, in baseball, Klein (1989) suggests that with a similar advantage, the United States was able to set up an exploitative labour market in the Dominican Republic. The World System of hockey mirrors these examples in a number of ways. Two of the characteristics outlined by Magee and Sugden (2002) are readily evident in the hockey systems in Russia and North America, though with North America ultimately able to claim core status and Russia relegated to the semi-periphery.

While modern historians such as McKinley (2000) promote the idea that the development of the sport took place in Canada (highlighted by the documented codification at the Victoria Skating Rink in 1875), it has early Russian ties, taking its ancestry from bandy, popular in Russia and Scandinavia. Bandy shares a number of commonalities with hockey, with both sports being played on ice with skates, and whose object is to score on a net using a stick, though the former is played on a larger surface and with a ball instead of a puck. With the evolution of rules over the course of a century, bandy is arguably as close to modern hockey as the game played in Montreal by James Creighton and his band of players from McGill University. Bandy would even become colloquially known as "Russian hockey." Adoption of the smaller ice surface and rules of "Canadian hockey" in the Soviet Union would not take place until 1946 (Martin, 1990).

Both Canada and Russia invested heavily in the sport, with hockey leagues (utilizing the "Canadian hockey" rules) developing in North America (the NHL and its precursor leagues) and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, herein referred to as the Soviet Union; the Soviet hockey leagues were comprised of labour union and military teams). Here however, there is a marked split in the ways in which the two systems operated, as the North American game quickly developed from being played by amateur athletics associations to a professional game (McKinley, 2000); the Soviet League was an extension of military and labour pursuits and was government-operated. The NHL was thus able to claim first-mover advantage, setting up infrastructure and developing a paying fan base while the Soviet Union would sometimes see its hockey come subject to military spending restrictions (as an example, the construction of indoor arenas was often delayed for other priorities). Because of the political climate in the Soviet Union, the notion of professional hockey was shunned; players were to compete for their country, a situation that would have a lasting impact.

As the NHL draws the world's elite talent, the semi-periphery thus consists of those nations that are able to draw lesser talent. Although Russia lost many of its top players to the NHL starting in the late 1980s, the Russian professional leagues became a choice for many of the players from former Soviet republics such as Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus (and have at various points included teams from these countries). A similar situation was seen across Europe beginning in the 1970s as clubs were unable to retain domestically developed talent. A weak professional system characterizes Russia's position within the semi-periphery (in Russia's case because of delayed development), a situation shared by nations such as Sweden, Finland, and the Czech Republic. These nations are unable to compete on a salary basis with the NHL (see Table 1). As a result, players that have left for the NHL make up a good part of the national teams for these countries (see Table 2; the assumption here is that national teams are comprised of a country's best players) in international competition.

Table 1. An Overview of Hockey's World System (IIHF World Ranking – Top 10)

	IIHF Rank[1]	Registered Hockey Players[1]	Players in the NHL[2]	Top Domestic Professional League	Average Salary in Top Domestic Professional League
Canada	1	545,363	490	NHL	1,906,793[3]
Russia*	2	82,967	30	KHL	400,000[4]
Sweden	3	63,927	52	Elitserien	200,000[4]
Finland	4	62,850	41	SM-Liiga	105,000[5]
Czech Republic	5	95,782	60	Extraliga	100,000[4]
United States	6	450,958	203	NHL	1,906,793[3]
Slovakia	7	10,167	23	Slovnaft Extraleague	75,000[4]
Switzerland	8	25,227	6	Nationalliga A	170,000[4]
Belarus	9	3,160	3	KHL	400,000[4]
Germany	10	29,494	9	Deutsch Eishockey-Liga	150,000[4]

1. (IIHF, 2008)
2. (National Hockey League, 2008)
3. (TSN.ca, 2008)
4. (Campbell, 2007) – Estimated figures
5. (Helsingin Sanomat, 2007)

*Figures for Russia do not include former Soviet Republics (e.g., Belarus, Kazahkstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine)

Table 2. National Teams – NHL Players in the Winter Olympic Games (IIHF World Ranking – Top 10)

	2006[1]	2002[1]	1998[2]
Canada	23	23	23
Russia	16	22	22
Sweden	18	20	19
Finland	16	20	14
Czech Republic	21	20	13
United States	23	23	23
Slovakia	18	11	7
Switzerland	3	2	DNP
Belarus	DNP	1	1
Germany	5	1	4

1. (IIHF, 2008)
2. (Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum, 2008)

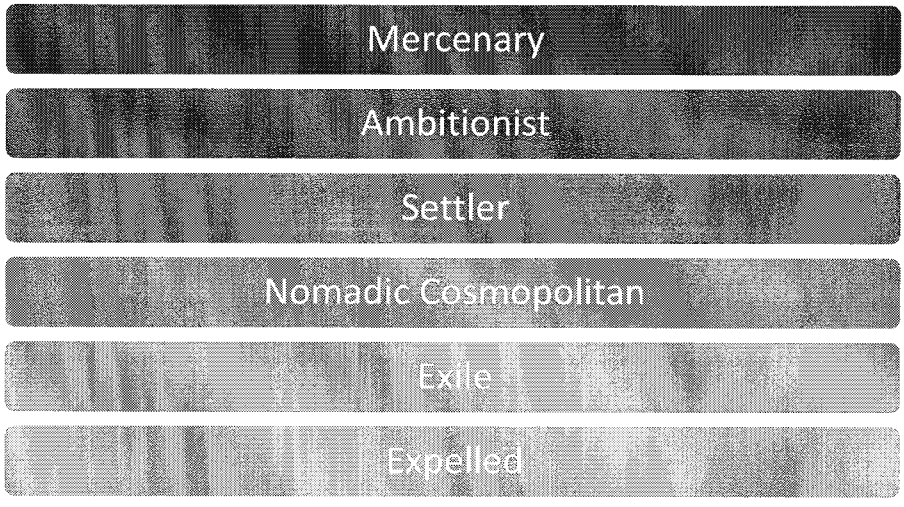
3.2 The Migrant Typology

The question of agency within migratory patterns is addressed by the migrant typology developed by Maguire (1996) and later refined for professional team sports by Magee and Sugden (2002).

Maguire (1996) introduced the typology in the introduction of his study of Canadian hockey migrants. It was a broad categorization of athletes based on their intent to migrate, included both amateur and professional athletes, and encompassed reasons that were not specific to sport. The categories included in the typology were Pioneers (those who initially spread the game from its origin), Settlers (in which athletes would permanently migrate for reasons that were not explicitly for sport), Returnees (athletes who typically complete a circuit of international events while maintaining permanent residence in their country of origin), Mercenaries (athletes who migrate to follow professional opportunities), and Nomadic Cosmopolitans (athletes wishing to experience life in another country on a temporary basis).

While a basic version of this typology was used by Lanfranchi and Taylor (2001), the reformulation of the typology by Magee and Sugden (2002) is of greater applicability here. Magee and Sugden refine the categories to better represent the current situation of professional team sports. In doing so, both the Pioneers and the Returnees have been jettisoned from this adaptation. The authors borrow the Settler, Mercenary, and Nomadic Cosmopolitan categories, but also include Ambitionist (an athlete migrating with the goal of playing against better competition), Expelled (an athlete forced to migrate due to a suspension or ban from play within a country or league), and Exile (an athlete forced to migrate due to the lack of employment opportunities within their country of origin).

Figure 7. A Typology of Sports Labour Migration (adapted from Magee and Sugden, 2002)



3.2.1 Using the Typology: Examples from Professional Sport

In their study of professional football, Magee and Sugden (2002) highlight that over 500 non-local (non-English) players were employed in the English Premier League during the 1998-99 season, accounting for 45% of the league. Similarly high figures were found in Italy, Spain, France, and Germany.

In applying the typology, Magee and Sugden (2002) found that a hierarchy exists. With a multitude of professional leagues from which to choose, players had to weigh various factors in their decisions. In studying the players' decisions, the Mercenary was by far the most common category identified, with players wishing to maximize their earning potential, cognizant of the typically short duration of a professional career in the sport. Secondary categories included the Settler and the Ambitionist, with few examples representing the remaining categories.

3.2.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

Both the greatest strength and greatest weakness of the typology is its simplification of the decisions behind migration. While the authors do acknowledge that these categories overlap to a certain extent, the possible contradictions and subtleties of the relationships between categories are not discussed. A related criticism is as to whether those categories for which little data has been found should be included. Magee and Sugden (2002) admittedly recognize that they themselves did not interview any players who might be considered Expelled.

While there are a number of critiques that can be made of Magee and Sugden (2002), their work has already shown to be useful. The typology has been applied to the migration of Japanese footballers by Yoshio and Horne (2004) and Maguire (2004) himself has acknowledged the benefits offered by the expansion of his original categories.

This typology is used here to guide the interview process, providing a basic framework from which the migratory decisions of players can be understood as potentially evolving with changes in political economy.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

It is clear from the literature that the issue of player migration is complex. As such, this project utilizes a case study approach, drawing on various sources to provide a better understanding of the current situation of Russian migrants in hockey's changing World System.

4.1 Case Studies

Yin (1994) defines a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context [...]" (p. 13). He further notes that case studies rely on multiple sources of evidence and benefit from "the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis" (p. 13). Yin is not alone in his definition of a case study. Gilham (2000) relates that a case can be defined as anything from an individual to an entire community or institution that is embedded in the real world and cannot be fully extracted from its context. Case studies thus account for the complexity of an issue by exploring its many facets, and purposely not limiting the study to one data gathering method.

The case study is an ideal method for this study, as it aligns itself with a constructionist epistemology. Additionally, as a study of political economy concerns itself with the organizational structure of state apparatuses and macro-level perspectives, it necessarily looks at the greater context of events. Historical information and an understanding of the relationships between institutions are crucial. Other methodologies that would focus solely on the population under study might prove insufficient.

Case study methodology has been used successfully by a number of authors. In football, Magee and Sugden (2002) examined the case of England after the Bosman ruling of 1995 which outlawed quotas on the numbers of foreign players. Chiba, Ebihara and Morino (2001) took a

similar approach in their study of Japan's professional players within the context of a developing Japanese professional football league. Perhaps most pertinent is Maguire's (1996) case study of Canadian hockey player migration, in which he utilized interviews along with official records of the IIHF and media reports. The successful use of case studies to examine sport migration provides justification for a case study design for this project.

Perhaps the main problem of case studies is that they can be nearly impossible to undertake with any degree of completeness or information neutrality. As Stake (2005) plainly states, "Documenting the unusual and the ordinary takes lots of time" (p. 453). As a multitude of data gathering techniques is often employed, the expertise of the researcher can be stretched thin. With larger cases, "no one individual can handle the complexity" (Stake, 2005, p. 453), necessitating teams of researchers. The wealth of information that is used in a case study also brings about further questions. In using a variety of data collection methods, the researcher is left to put together the pieces of the puzzle. Over- or under-emphasis of certain facets of the problem may occur. The presentation of the final case is always going to be skewed by how the researcher understood and interpreted the findings of the study. In Stake's (2005) words, "the whole story exceeds anyone's knowing and anyone's telling" (p. 453). It is acknowledged that this project cannot offer a complete picture of the situation. The limitation of this project to the selected methods is admittedly one of practicality. Because of limitations in data collection pertaining to language and the availability of source material, this project represents what can perhaps be identified as a North American perspective of the situation. A final limitation is with specific regard to the time period; it is believed that a nine-year period provides sufficient breadth and depth. In acknowledging and accepting these limitations, this project strives for a localized completeness.

Another consideration for researchers is generalization. As the focus is on the case and its particular context, applicability to another context is difficult. For Stake (2005), "How we learn from the singular case is related to how the case is like and unlike other cases" (p. 454), yet he sees "formally designed comparison as actually competing with learning about and from the particular case" (p. 457), which would place the task of comparison to the reader. For the reader to be able to compare, they would require valid points of comparison, which, with each case representing its researchers own interpretations and presentation, could prove troublesome – what may have been of particular importance in one study may not have been given treatment in another that would be satisfactory for comparative purposes. Though it is acknowledged that each case is unique, a case study nonetheless can provide important new data to a subject area. Uniqueness does not fully prevent the ability to compare between studies; details may be context-specific, but frameworks that are developed from the data might certainly be applicable to other situations. A case study on the migration of football players is not altogether different from a study on the migration of hockey players, as there can be common ground and this must be acknowledged.

In summary, the complexity of case studies is both their greatest benefit and greatest downfall. While taking into account the context of an event, and methodically gathering data from a multitude of sources provides a wealth of information, the interpretation and presentation of this information is left to the researcher. While managing the amount of data and their complexities is a daunting task, it is perfectly suited to a study of the political economy of sports migration.

4.2 Data Collection Methods

This project utilizes a mixed methods approach of interviews and document analysis, as well as supportive descriptive statistical analysis. Interviews have been used by a number of authors in this area, including Magee and Sugden (2002) in their study of foreign professional football players in England and Joseph Maguire (1996) in his work on the migration of Canadian ice hockey players across Europe. Likewise, Maguire also utilized basic document analysis in his study, drawing on European hockey periodicals to explore such issues as the acceptance of a Canadian style of play.

The mixed methods approach works well here, as we can be afforded not only an inside look at player experience, a micro-level perspective, but also an external view, a macro-level perspective from key organizations. The use of two of our methods (interviews and document analysis) within the literature informs the use of methods in this present study. It was decided that for the sake of comparison and contrast with similar studies across sport that these methods would be adopted. Furthermore, the combination of these three methods of data collection provides a form of triangulation that provides strength and depth to the analysis and discussion of results.

4.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In a special issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*, Mark Benney and Everett Hughes (1956) claimed that sociology had become "the science of the interview" (p. 137). Further expanding on this notion, they relate that the purpose of sociology is to study not only the lived lives of populations, but their interactions. As the interview produces data that is both biographical and a reflection of the collaborative nature of the process between the interviewer

and the interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2005), it is easy to see how Benney and Hughes (p. 453) come to this conclusion.

Interviews help us to understand not only basic biographical information in the recollection of events, but also the emotional and contextual characteristics that help to form what Benney and Hughes (1956) termed social rhetoric. As Perakyla (2005) states, "by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes" (p. 869). Not only do we uncover basic information, but we are also able to gain insight into the inconsistencies and contradictions of one's everyday life (Amis, 2005). Indeed it is both this richness and the accessibility of interview data that are its most shining features. Gaps in information that may result from using other types of data can be bridged simply by asking a question. In our case, interviews provided confirmation of the data collected through the document search.

This project used semi-structured in-depth interviews in an attempt to balance the directed nature of structured interviewing with the breadth and depth of knowledge that can be gleaned from unstructured interviewing. As Fontana and Frey (2005) note, "there is very little flexibility in the way in which questions are asked or answered in the structured interview setting" (p. 702). At the other end of the spectrum, while unstructured interviews may provide richer data, these are difficult to undertake in any practical sense as key matters may escape the natural flow of the interview. The semi-structured setting thus allows the researcher to guide the interview in a certain manner in order to explore key themes, but also allows the subject an opportunity to express their experiences in fairly unhindered fashion, moving beyond the simple unemotional rational responses of structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005), yet remaining focused on particular issues (Amis, 2005).

Themes that this project explored included the players' decisions to migrate, possible changes to these decisions in light of changes to the political economy of the sport in Russia, the integration of the players into their North American environment, the Russian player development system and the players' perceptions of the RSL/KHL as an alternative to the NHL. Specific events that have taken place over the last 5-10 years were touched upon during the interviews. The migrant typology as used by Magee and Sugden (2002) is used to guide the understanding of player decisions. The interview guide used is included in Appendix I.

The primary problems encountered with this research design were practical matters. Apart from language issues, matters of access and scheduling – a problem that was shared by Magee and Sugden (2002) – presented challenges. Although the working language of hockey in North America is English, it was foreseen that Russian players in the NHL or the American Hockey League (AHL; which serves mainly as a developmental league for NHL prospects), as second-language English speakers, may have had difficulties with comprehension of interview questions and may have experienced stress and discomfort in attempting to communicate outside of their native language. In addition to the issue of language, access to NHL players (and Russian players in the NHL or its developmental leagues specifically) as interview subjects presented an obstacle. During the winter months, players are subject to their team schedules and are constantly moving from city to city; in the summer months, players often return to their permanent residences (which in this case, may be in Russia).

Understanding these concerns, interviews were instead sought with player agents and other key informants (e.g., journalists covering the sport who may have regular access and discussions with NHL executives as well as player agents). In all, four interviews took place, with both hockey media and player agents included. Interviews took place in person (where

possible) and over the telephone, with subjects recruited through sponsors who provided introductions between the subjects and the student researcher. Additional contact was made with individuals within NHL franchises as well as players and coaches with professional experience in Russia (either the RSL or the KHL), though as foreseen, no interviews could be scheduled.

The individuals who consented to participate in interviews are: Derek Holmes, Former Director of Hockey Canada, IIHF Hall of Fame Inductee – Builder, and European player agent; Rolland Hedges, NHLPA-certified player agent; William Houston, Journalist – Sports Business, The Globe and Mail; Ken Warren, Journalist – Hockey, The Ottawa Citizen. Interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Content analysis of the interviews was performed with regard to the characterizations held of the North American and Russian playing environments, and as to how those characterizations may have taken shape over the course of the period under study. Attempts are made to triangulate specific mentions of influencing factors (specific events or individuals) with documentation.

As the content of the interviews was analyzed both syntactically (the words used) and semantically (how those words are used), additional notes on emphasis and tone were taken during the sessions in order to supplement the transcriptions. After an initial review of the transcripts, broad themes were identified and a coding mechanism developed. Coding was subsequently performed both vertically and transversally for purposes of contrast and comparison between the interviews. NVivo software was used throughout the coding process.

Much has been written about the role of the interviewer in the collection and presentation of data. Fontana and Frey (2005) mention that while the researcher can attempt to neutralize the sense of hierarchy created with the researcher/subject relationship, in most studies it is ultimately

the researcher who "cuts and pastes the narrative" (p. 697). While this argument is understood, attempts were made during the interviews to assure the comfort of the subject, to build rapport (personal experience as a hockey player and knowledge of the draft process and Russian hockey history were used to this effect), and to remain value neutral; as such, it is not anticipated that any sense of hierarchy in these instances has negatively affected the data collection or presentation.

4.2.2 Document Analysis

While interviews arguably provide the most direct form of investigation of a subject, texts can equally be used to exploration; as Bauer (2000) presents, texts are "sometimes more telling than their authors realize" (p. 37). Though we should be cautious not to assume causality between media and its assumed effects (Plymire, 2005), we can nonetheless recognize the potential influence that certain publications may hold. Various forms of media have been used successfully throughout history for such things as propaganda, advertising, and entertainment (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998). Understanding the power dynamics and the role of public communications is thus crucial for researchers. Along these lines, as Budd, Thorp, and Donohew (1967) relate, "content analysis is a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling – it is a tool for observing and analyzing the overt communication behavior of selected communicators" (p. 2), further explaining that it is the researcher's role to explain a phenomenon through the subtleties of the text. The researcher then is more than a simple re-distributor of texts.

Among the benefits of document analysis are that it is nonreactive (the subjects under study are unaware of the researcher), it provides access to subjects who may be otherwise unavailable, and it lends itself quite naturally to longitudinal studies (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

This longitudinal aspect is seen as a primary strength within the context of this project, as a nine-year period will be examined. Indeed, while interviews may suffer from problems of memory and recency, documents provide a permanent record of an event or situation (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998), allowing us to construct a historical timeline of trends as they evolve. Thus, document analysis is conducted to further enhance the study for a number of complementary reasons.

Lest we presume that media artifacts provide an objective truth, we have to understand that they are not immune to a certain amount of subjectivity in their authorship. In relating the concept that news is manufactured, Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998) state that "individual news stories are the consequence of reporter news judgments, interactions with both purposive and nonpurposive sources, and decisions about style, structure, emphasis, and language, to name a few" (p. 7). Riffe, Lacy and Fico (1998) further elaborate, introducing ideas of the structure and competitive position of a media organization amongst its peers and issues of censorship, either within the organization itself or by the state. This subjectivity, however, is not seen as detrimental to the goals of this research; rather, as we are examining documents qualitatively, this presents an excellent opportunity to explore various themes and perspectives.

Document analysis is utilized in this project to provide an understanding and chronology of the changes to the political economy of hockey in Russia. Document analysis relied primarily on periodical databases, with Canadian sources (both French and English-language) available through Canadian Newsstand and Biblio Branchée (now Eureka.cc). Newspapers used in the search included the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, *The Globe and Mail*, *La Presse* (Montreal), the *Leader Post* (Regina), the *Montreal Gazette*, the *National Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, *The Province* (Vancouver), the *Telegraph Journal* (Saint John), *Times-Colonist*

(Victoria), the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Windsor Star*. Databases were searched for the terms "Russia" or "Russian" and "hockey" (for French-language sources, "Russe" and "hockey" were used as search terms) and limited to the period under study. As this initial search returned an overwhelming number of results, many of which were duplicated among the various sources due to syndication, a decision was made to focus mainly on those newspapers with widespread circulation (*The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*) along with French-language daily *La Presse*. The local newspapers were consulted to provide additional details for specific items.

Additionally, a review of *The New York Times* and *The Hockey News* archives was performed to provide supplementary content from American sources. Similarly, a review of the *RIA Novosti*, *Russia Today*, and *Sport Express Daily* archives provided content from English-language Russian sources.

Articles were organized into a searchable database of titles, authors, publication and dates. In an initial review, those articles not applicable to the specific subject matter of the research (e.g., field hockey, TV listings) and those articles that may have included the search terms, but which were not specifically relevant to this project (e.g., Brett Hull recalling playing a charity game in Russia) were filtered out of the database. Those articles with unique and relevant content comprise the final version of the database and provide the basis for the analysis. Keywords were added to each entry in the database to facilitate data analysis. The final database comprised a total of 828 articles.

As Plymire (2005) relates, most qualitative studies and their coding standards are based in preliminary quantitative analysis; themes have to be identified before systematic coding can take place. This project utilized syntactic and semantic procedures in order to analyze the ways

in which the NHL, the IIHF and the RSL/KHL are characterized in the literature. Attention was paid to the ways in which the organizations were criticized or applauded, along with the frequency of sentiments expressed. Documents were then contextualized with the various formats that are represented (editorial, interview, etc.).

4.2.3 Statistical Data

The final data collection tool used in this study is descriptive statistical data. Mainly these data are presented in the form of tables and figures that provide supporting information for the results from both the interviews and the document analysis. In providing supporting evidence, they also serve to triangulate our results.

Results from this case study, combining our three data collection methods – semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and supportive descriptive statistics – along with discussion of these results in light of World Systems Theory are presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of data collection. Within the data, a number of themes became evident during the course of analysis. Broadly, these can be grouped into two categories: "Russian Hockey" and "The Player Decision." More specifically, the Russian Hockey category includes themes of international performance, government intervention, infrastructure expenditures, professional hockey in Russia (the RSL/KHL) and Russia's relationships to hockey organizations internationally. The Player Decision category includes themes of migration from Russia to North America, adaptation to North America, and migration from North America to Russia.

Results of the data collection are presented according to these themes. Each thematic section presents results from documents and interviews, and includes supportive descriptive statistical data where applicable. The presentation of the three data collection methods together provides triangulation of the data and allows for a better representation of the results. Where possible, direct quotes from players and other key informants are used to illustrate the ideas presented.

5.1 Russian Hockey – International Performance; from glory to embarrassment

Russian hockey over the course of the last two decades has undergone incredible transformation, nowhere more evident than in the country's performance in international competition, where success gave way to embarrassing failure.

Articles on the subject of international performance tended to appear in the dates that surrounded major sporting events such as the Olympics, the IIHF World Championships, and the IIHF World Junior Championships. Many of the articles focused on the traditional rivalries of

Canada vs. USSR/Russia, characterized by the 1972 Summit Series, and USA vs. USSR/Russia, characterized by the "Miracle on Ice" at the 1980 Lake Placid Olympics. Representatives from all three nations agreed that the rivalries were important. The rivalries are described as "historic" and "mythical," and take on metaphors that demonstrate the cultural value of the sport.

> "I've got lots of respect for Canadians... For them, hockey is a religion. It's the same here in Russia. I travelled a lot around the country last summer and I see people who love hockey."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, November 3) in Fetisov pitching patriotism. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S4.
> [Olympic Team General Manager, Russia]

> "Folklore is probably the word for it."
> Quinn, P. (2004, September 4) in Rivalry renewed. *National Post*, p. S1.
> [Head Coach, Canada]

For players, the situation is one whereby they are able to participate in living history, connecting the legacies of past teams with their own involvement.

> "Every time we put on a Canadian sweater, you can't help but think about the history of Canadian hockey and playing the Russians... There is so much hockey history between the two countries, and that makes these games special."
> Draper, K. (2005, May 14) in Showdown revives old rivalry. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.
> [Player, Canada]

For some, the more notable encounters between Russia and its North American counterparts serve as a model for future competitions.

> "It was the most important event in hockey history between our hockey superpowers, Russia and Canada... A new series could prolong the tradition of 1972."
> Tretiak, V. (2007, March 29) in Dryden, Harper onside with new series. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S4.
> [RHF President]

> "Russia/Canada all the time very interesting. You remember the last Olympics. Who was the best game [sic]; Canada/Russia. Unbelievable game. Sweden/Finland (was) OK. Not the best. Because Canada/Russia (compete) whole life. It's very interesting. I would like more emotion, more Canada/Russia. It was beautiful game."
> Tretiak, V. (2008, May 18) in Gold final worth the wait; First Canada-Russia clash at worlds shapes up as classic. *Calgary Herald*, p. F1.
> [RHF President]

These rivalries are also acknowledged throughout the hockey world. In celebrating its centennial, the IIHF compiled a list of the 100 top stories in international hockey since the federation's inception; "Miracle on Ice" claimed the top spot, with events from the Summit

Series coming in second and third. That such defeats of the Soviets (another defeat of the Soviets, by Czechoslovakia in the 1972 World Championships was the fifth entry) were so compellingly rare served to cement the team's legacy as one of unparalleled success. Completing the top five was the Soviet victory over Canada in the 1954 World Championships – the first time that the Soviets had competed in the tournament. (IIHF, 2008)

Mirroring Cold War tensions, these rivalries together created a lasting notion of competition between Russia and the North American countries for hockey dominance. Of note however, these classic rivalries have been somewhat downplayed in more recent years. The argument has been made that the rivalry lacks political significance and has been diluted by the ascension of other teams in international competition.

> "Every world championship, every Olympics, there are six or eight contenders for the gold medal, and I don't know if you can just go with two countries. And so much of (the 1972 series) had to do with the history and the politics of that time. That was part of the appeal of the series. Relations right now between Canada and the Russians are pretty good, so I don't know if it would be the same."
> Heatley, D. (2007, March 29) in No time to take chances; Senators being cautious with injuries. *Ottawa Citizen*, p. B3.
> [Player, Canada]

Some have remarked that the main rivalries in hockey for Canada and the USA have been with each other, rather than Russia.

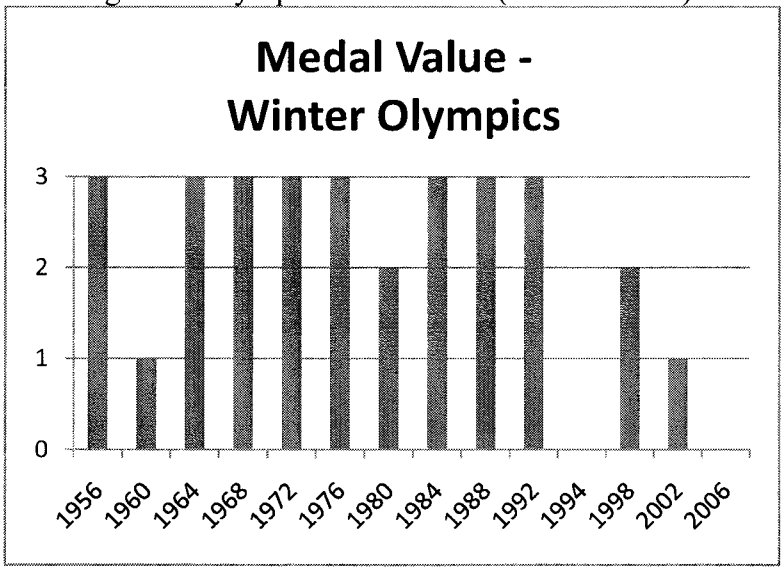
> "I'm not part of that generation, the great history Canada has with the 1972 series, all those faceoffs against Russia… The rivalry for me especially has grown with U.S. players. It's always a pretty heated matchup."
> Toews, J. (2008, May 6) in The Rivalry Resumes; The Americans are coming to renew hostilities that now surpasses Summit Series. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. F1.
> [Player, Canada]

> "I think that's the rivalry for our players… Canada has been dominant in international hockey. From these kids' perspective, from what they know, the team to beat is Canada."
> Burke, B. (2008, May 6) in The Rivalry Resumes; The Americans are coming to renew hostilities that now surpasses Summit Series. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. F1.
> [National Team General Manager, USA]

That the rivalries with Russia have taken on less importance in recent years reflects Russia's declining performance internationally. The Soviet national teams dominated the

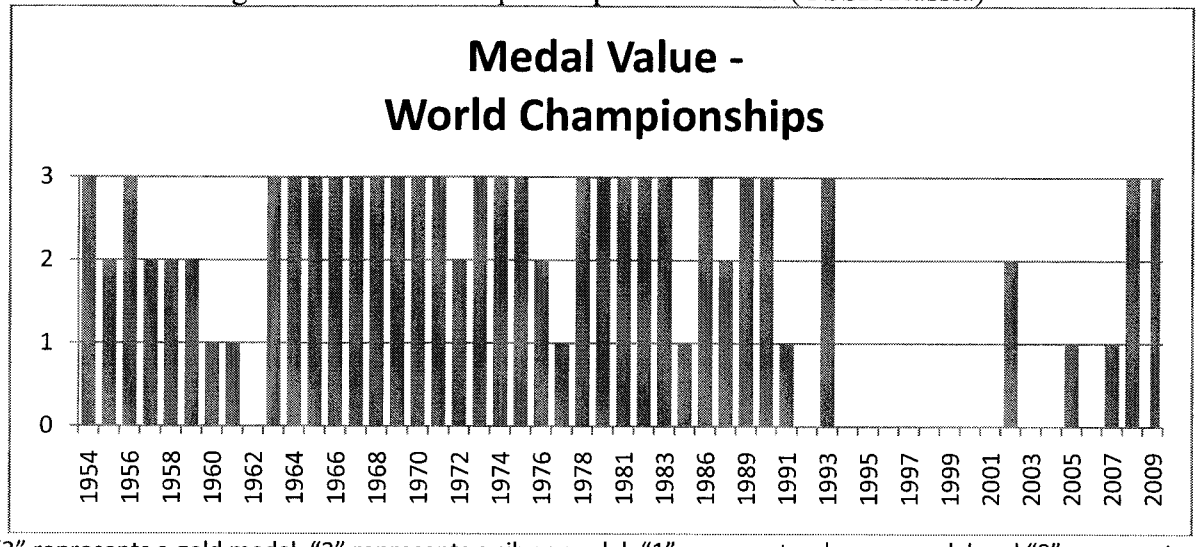
Olympics and IIHF World Championships for a period of nearly 40 years. In the ten Olympic competitions held between 1956 and 1992, the Soviet national team[v] won eight gold medals (along with one silver medal and one bronze) (see Figure 8). In World Championships the team was nearly as dominating (see Figure 9), winning gold in their first competition in 1954, and, between 1963 and 1990, winning gold in twenty of twenty-five tournaments. Since 1992 however, international success has been hard to come by for the Russians, with the country capturing gold only three times, once in 1993, and, following a fifteen-year drought, in 2008 and 2009.

Figure 8. Olympic Performance (USSR/Russia)*



* "3" represents a gold medal, "2" represents a silver medal, "1" represents a bronze medal and "0" represents a non-podium finish.

Figure 9. World Championship Performance (USSR/Russia)*



* "3" represents a gold medal, "2" represents a silver medal, "1" represents a bronze medal and "0" represents a non-podium finish.

Russia's disappointing finishes were an embarrassment to a once-proud hockey nation. The team stumbled to an eleventh place finish in the 2000 IIHF World Championships, the first major tournament to have been hosted in Russia (St. Petersburg) since the fall of the Soviet Union – its worst-ever finish in the event. The tournament had uncharacteristically included four losses (against the United States, Switzerland, Latvia and Belarus), with only one victory (against France). The players were lambasted by the Russian press and prominent politicians alike.

Alexander Shokhin, a member of the Russian parliament, took issue with the team's loss to Latvia in the second round of the tournament. Likewise, Russian publications were eagerly effusive in expressing their displeasure with the tournament's poor results.

> "[A] shame for our country… This is a national humiliation and our players had no right to lose."
> Shokhin, A. (2008, May 8) in Call it team nightmare. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S2.
> [Member of Parliament, Russia]

> "We are in pain and ashamed… All of us have been desperately searching for the long-awaited triumph of our national hockey team on our home soil. But the team, which had many NHL superstars and was named the Dream Team, stole with its pitiful play a rare moment of

> happiness in the otherwise difficult lives of our people."
> *Sovietsky Sport* (2008, May 8) in Call it team nightmare. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S2.

> "The city of St. Petersburg has not seen such a nightmare since 1917."
> *Sport-Express* (2008, May 8) in Call it team nightmare. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S2.

The harsh criticisms resulted in apologies to the team's restless supporters by both the players and head coach Alexander Yakushev.

> "I would like to apologize for the soul-suffering the fans experienced sitting in front of the television watching our giftless play… for the pain we caused them at this tournament and for the suffering they experienced watching us fail."
> Yakushev, A. (2000, May 9) in Russian coach apologizes for team's dismal play. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S6.
> [Head Coach; Russia]

The national team followed the eleventh-place showing with a sixth-place finish at the 2001 IIHF World Championships, heightening the displeasure felt by Russian fans.

> "I travelled a lot around the country last summer and I see people who love hockey. They were tired to see our team in 11th place and sixth place."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, November 3) in Fetisov pitching patriotism. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S4.
> [Olympic Team Head Coach, Russia]

Similarly, and more recently, a junior competition in 2007, the "Super Series," between Canada and Russia that was supposed to rekindle memories of the 1972 Summit Series instead ended up with lopsided results, with Canada winning all but one of the eight games, with the remaining game resulting in a tie. Again, the Russian media returned with a perhaps disproportionate response.

> "[O]ne of the most humiliating defeats in the history of national hockey."
> *Kommersant* (2007, September 25) in Russian hockey feels pain from junior Super Series. *The Vancouver Province*, p. A52.

The losses drew a sharp rebuke from Viacheslav Fetisov, who criticized the RHF for its inability to prepare its junior players.

> "There's no understanding of the demands of playing today's hockey… There's no character."
> Fetisov, V. (2007, September 25) in Russian hockey feels pain from junior Super Series. *The Vancouver Province*, p. A52.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia]

Apparent in the decline of Russia's international performance was a lack of organization within the country's hockey federation as the old Soviet model crumbled. Internal turmoil adversely affected the national team program, with persistent disputes over leadership and player participation. Some players have commented that the lack of organization has resulted in poor performances and has affected their decision to play for their country.

> "We have no chance of winning based on the current situation surrounding the preparations of our national team... I have already had a similar experience before the 1996 World Cup when there was total chaos in our organization. This time we have more of the same and frankly I don't see any point in my participation in this tournament."
> Khabibulin, N. (2004, June 16) in Sports Briefing. *New York Times.*
> [Player, Russia]

There were constant questions about the personnel who would be in charge of the team, not simply because of the individuals chosen might be unpopular, but because decisions were often made at the last minute.

> "If they invite us, our reply depends not only on our health and the shape we're in, but also on the answers to these questions: Who's going to run the team? How's the organization going to work? Will we be able to find a common language with them?"
> Kamensky, V. (2001, February 9) in Russian hockey team headed for humiliation in Games, says Fetisov: Wants to coach team: Former defenceman lobbies for change in personnel. National Post, p. B10.
> [Player, Russia]

> "I have no idea what's going on with the Russian federation... Who's the coach? Who's the general manager? Who's choosing the team?"
> Fedorov, S. (2001, March 25) in OLYMPICS; Leetch Among 10 Picked For U.S. *New York Times.*
> [Player, Russia]

> "Subsequent to the breakup of the Soviet Union there's been a lack of leadership in Russian hockey... the players don't seem to really respect the people in charge of the hockey system, perhaps for good reason. If they ever did get their act together, they would be a real force."
> Houston, W. (2009) Interview 4.

Apart from concerns over the coaching staff, there were also concerns over aspects as basic as equipment and communication with players as to their selection to the national team.

> "The Russian federation doesn't do too good of a job. I've never heard of a Swede, or a Finn, or a Czech, or an American or a Canadian saying they won't go [to the Olympics]. [The Russian federation] refused to pay for sticks, they refused to pay for everything. They didn't give us tickets."

Khavanov, A. (2005, December 22) in Khavanov has Olympic team envy. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S6.
[Player, Russia]

"Je ne peux pas commenter cette nouvelle parce qu'elle n'est pas officielle... Vous me dites que ça se retrouve sur les agences de presse, mais je n'ai pas encore reçu l'appel des dirigeants. Ce n'est pas que je veuille une carte de Noël, mais j'apprécierais un coup de téléphone."
Kovalev, A. (2005, December 24) in Kovalev et Markov ignoraient leur sélection! *La Presse*, p. S3.
[Player, Russia]

The battle lines in the disputes were readily evident, as those who maintained control during the Soviet years faced opposition from players that had experienced life in North America and the NHL. It was a generational gap between players and the management of the RHF. The coaching methods of individuals such as Boris Mikhailov, Alexander Yakushev, and legendary coach Viktor Tikhonov – who led the Soviet/Russian national team from 1978 until 1994 and who was briefly re-appointed in 2003 – were seen as outdated. Tikhonov was renowned for his strict ways, having controlled the Soviet players' regimes to the point that he could veto marriage dates (Martin, 1990, p. 6). In one famous incident, Nikolai Khabibulin was deprived of his gold medal for the Unified Team's Olympic victory in 1992, with the medal instead being taken by Tikhonov, an action that violated Olympic protocol that dictates that medals are given to the athletes themselves, and not coaches (Shoalts, 2001). Four years earlier, at the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Tikhonov had gotten into a violent physical altercation with Alexander Mogilny after critizing the player for his actions on the ice (Larionov, Taylor, & Reizer, 1990, p. 145). The authoritarian mindset did not sit well with players, many of whom had grown accustomed to the comforts provided by an NHL salary, with individuals on each side of the argument publicly airing their grievances.

Many of the players that left in the late 1980s had experienced firsthand the authoritarian ways of Tikhonov and his associates and were displeased with their continuing roles.

> "It's still the same people in charge of the federation as when I left Russia [for the NHL] 12 years ago... It's a shame. The whole thing has to be changed."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, February 9) in Russian hockey team headed for humiliation in Games, says Fetisov: Wants to coach team: Former defenceman lobbies for change in personnel. *National Post*, p. B10.

> "It's a mess as usual [...] The hard-liners are stubborn. They have to show some common sense. They did not."
> Larionov, I. (2001, March 25) in OLYMPICS; Leetch Among 10 Picked For U.S. *New York Times*.
> [Player, Russia]

> "Tikhonov continued to coach in the early 2000s like he coached 20 years before. He was a dictator."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Tikhonov and his associates were known as stubborn and inflexible; their style was overly strict, especially when compared to the modern coaching and comforts of the NHL. Players came to be hesitant to play for the national team.

> "Ils ont tout détruit: l'esprit d'équipe, le désir des joueurs de jouer pour l'équipe nationale."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, May 17) in L'histoire se répétera-t-elle? *La Presse*, p. S3.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia]

> "The players going over to North America were making so much money that they got comfortable over there... Playing for their home country no longer was important to them. It was a hassle they didn't need."
> Kasparaitis, D. (2006, February 18) in Russia's big red hockey machine revving up once more. *The Globe and Mail*, p. O6.
> [Player, Russia]

When the team experienced failure however, the blame fell on the players for their lack of preparedness.

> Russian Hockey Federation president Alexander Steblin said earlier in the tournament the Russians should have gone with national team players instead of recruiting National Hockey League stars.
> LeBrun, P. (2000, May 9) Russian coach apologizes for team's dismal play. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S6.

> "We would have been better off without them... We never got a chance to play because all the ice time was given to the NHLers, who, as it turns out, were not at all prepared to play this type of international hockey."
> Anonymous (2000, May 9) in Russian coach apologizes for team's dismal play. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S6.
> [Player, Russia]

Still, the NHL players' arguments about the coaching staff eventually led to changes in the way the national team program would be run, a change that led to a sharp rebuke from some of the hard-liners.

> "It's absurd when players elect the coach… I would never agree that just because they earn a lot of money in the NHL, they should be allowed everything."
> Mikhailov, B. (2001, August 21) in Fetisov hockey's new czar in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.
> [National Team Head Coach, Russia]

In explaining why individuals such as Tikhonov were able to maintain their positions of authority for so long, Robert Cherenkov, coach of the Soviet junior program in the late 1980s, remarked, "I'll tell you why they don't get rid of Tikhonov… [b]ecause he always wins," (Martin, 1990, p. 259). While his management and coaching methods were grating, Tikhonov's achievements were to be admired.

With the failures seen by the national team in the 1990s and 2000s, there were calls for a revamping of the Russian development model, seen by many as flawed in post-Soviet world.

> "We have to put together a plan. We don't have a system for the Russian national team. There is a Swedish system, a Czech system, a Finnish system. But there is no [Soviet] system left. There is no training system as there was before, no system of constant training so that a player joining the national team knows how to play on defence, on offence and at centre ice."
> Fetisov, V. (2002, March 6) in Fetisov urges overhaul. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S6.
> [Olympic Team Head Coach, Russia]

> "Our hockey has lost its identity."
> Fetisov, V. (2007, September 11) in And now, the skate is on other foot; Russia Facing Same Hockey Crisis Canada Had In '72. *National Post*, p. S1.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia]

5.2 Russian Hockey – Government Intervention; resurgence of support

Ultimately, Viacheslav Fetisov, one of Russia's most decorated players, at the time an assistant coach with the NHL's New Jersey Devils and a vocal opponent of the RHF's handling of the national team, would experience a brief moment of direct control over the team's fortunes. After publicly lobbying for the position, Fetisov was appointed head coach and general manager of Russia's 2002 Olympic entry, though he was limited in his abilities and would complain of

continued interference on the part of the RHF, which remained under the control of individuals loyal to the old regime and then-RHF President Alexander Steblin.[vi]

> "I think every time they hear my name, they get scared that I'm going to come back there and take over hockey."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, November 20) in Brief Hapless Habs feeling the heat ; Critics' patience wears thin after 'humiliating' loss. *Toronto Star*, p. C03.
> [Assistant Coach – New Jersey Devils]

> "Malheureusement, la fédération de hockey russe n'a pas voulu que je tienne un camp d'entrainement comme l'ont fait le Canada et les Américains. Ça veut dire que nous allons peut-être disputer le premier match du tournoi sans avoir pu tenir un seul exercice collectif."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, December 6) in La fierté, ça le connaît! *La Presse*, p. S5.
> [Olympic Team Head Coach, Russia]

Fetisov had gained the position not only by way of support from prominent NHL players, some of whom threatened to boycott the tournament, but also by making a very powerful ally in Russian President Vladimir Putin.

> Fetisov and Bure held a meeting with Putin last week to lobby for an overhaul. The Russian NHL players "can no longer suffer in silence the stuff that's going on around the national team," Fetisov told Putin, according to Russian news agencies.
> York, G. (2001, August 21) in Fetisov hockey's new czar in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.

Putin wished to revitalize the country's athletics system, with specific attention paid to efforts in hockey.

> Russian President Vladimir Putin wants the country's struggling ice hockey stars to try and bring back the glory years of the legendary all-conquering Soviet "Red Machine" era. "The Olympic Games demand full commitment. Can we assemble a team that is as committed [to hockey] as in our glory years?"
> National Post (2001, August 16) Putin pushes players to restore glory to Russian hockey. *National Post*, p. B14.

> "The leadership of our country is displeased with the hockey situation…We cannot ignore this."
> Tyagachev, L. (2001, August 21) in Fetisov hockey's new czar in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.
> [President – Russian Olympic Committee]

Though Fetisov would fall short of his goal of capturing the gold medal in Salt Lake City, his relationship with Putin would provide additional opportunities to leave a further legacy on

Russian hockey. In April of 2002 Putin appointed Fetisov as Chairman of the State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport.

> "[Putin] is concerned about sports and the health of the nation… Not to support him would have been wrong. There's an opportunity to change things in this country now."
> Fetisov, V. (2002, May 7) in HOCKEY; Fetisov's Task: Reviving Russian Sports. *New York Times*.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia]

> "I told Putin I was thinking about the N.H.L., but he said he could give me a bigger team."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, October 27) in Score Another One for Putin. *PLAY, The New York Times Sports Magazine (New York Edition)*, p. MM42.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia, on his appointment to the position in 2002 by President Vladimir Putin]

Recapturing the successes of the "Red Machine" had become a priority for the Russian hockey program. Efforts have been made to ensure that players are comfortable with organizational decisions and choices in leadership and to ensure that players feel proud to play for the national team.

> "I can promise you one thing. From now on, you won't see such a mess with the national team that you've seen before."
> Bure, P. (2005, November 2) in Can Bure emulate Gretzky's feat? *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.
> [Olympic Team General Manager, Russia]

> "We have a whole new generation of players who are proud to play for Russia… That is the way it should be. I think this is an exciting time in Russian hockey because of the talent level of the players coming up. It could be a good thing for Russian hockey for a long time to come."
> Bure, P. (2006, February 18) in Russia's big red hockey machine revving up once more. *The Globe and Mail*, p. O6.
> [Olympic Team General Manager, Russia]

> "I'm Russian… It's very important to play for your country… When you have everybody watching you and everybody see you in Russia, you want to go to ice and play for your country and try to win game."
> Ovechkin, A. (2006, February 26) in The Russians Are Coming, Eyes on the Prize. *New York Times*.
> [Player, Russia]

Facilitating the resurgence of national pride among players has been a concerted effort on the part of the Russian government to reorganize and reinvigorate the national team program. Apart from Putin's active role in appointing Fetisov to the top position in Russian sport, the

government under Putin dramatically increased both the attention paid to sport and the funding to support it. In the eyes of the players, at least some of the credit for the newfound enthusiasm can go to infrastructure improvements.

> "It's huge for our preparation for everything, for all the kids we have started building a lot of rinks… They want to improve the game, they want to win… Now they want to practise harder to maybe be one day on the national team."
> Kovalchuk, I. (2008, May 20) in Russia focus turns to 2010 Olympics; Renaissance afoot in elite hockey nation. *Calgary Herald*, p. F3.
> [Player, Russia]

> "A lot of money is being invested in the game. We start to see the result like the win (at the world championships) in Quebec."
> Radulov, A. (2008, July 17) in Tickets for Leafs pre-season game free. *Leader Post*, p. C5.
> [Player, Russia]

Facilities had fallen into disrepair and infrastructure lost; if Russia was to reclaim sporting glory it would need to invest heavily. The moves were made not solely as part of a hockey renaissance, but in order to reclaim prominence in the Olympic sphere as well.

> "Unfortunately, our sports stadiums are filled with flea markets, and thousands of youth sports schools all over Russia have been closed… Our state should be doing a lot more to build sports centres to prepare Olympic champions and athletes… Many things should be restored."
> Putin, V. (2002, January 25) in From Russia without love. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S1.
> [President, Russia]

> "The government has allocated huge support to the Olympic movement, Olympic athletes and athletics."
> Mutko, V. (2008, August 2) in Russia's Olympic renaissance; The government is using oil money to replace deteriorating training centres. *The Gazette*, p. D5.
> [Sports Minister, Russia]

Funding was allocated for new training facilities, equipment, coaches and trainers, and larger facilities for major sports such as hockey and soccer. Under Putin and Fetisov, a dramatic increase was seen in the amount of money available for sport.

> "Before, we just couldn't afford anything, salaries, equipment, maintenance… Now, the money is being found."
> Yatsunov, S. (2003,November 7) in Youth hockey on road to recovery in Russia ; More money and more kids playing Fetisov recalls the good old days. *Toronto Star*, p. E03.
> [Coach – Krylya Sovietov Hockey Academy, Russia]

> "Today we can give our athletes the opportunity to train in the best facilities… We have the means for this."

> Fetisov, V. (2008, July 29) in Major Tuneup for a Sports Machine. *New York Times.* [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, Russia]
>
> Vyacheslav Fetisov, the former National Hockey League star, is the head of Rossport, the government agency charged with overseeing Russia's athletic development. He said his budget for building up the country's athletic infrastructure had soared from a couple hundred thousand dollars when his agency was created in 2002 to $1 billion today. [...] The government plans to build 4,000 new athletic facilities in the coming years, including pools, gymnastics halls, and stadiums for soccer and hockey, Fetisov said. About 300 facilities were built last year, and another 400 are scheduled for completion this year.
> Schwirtz, M. (2008, August 2) Russia's Olympic renaissance; The government is using oil money to replace deteriorating training centres. *The Gazette*, p. D5.

Apart from simply supporting national team programs through infrastructure, there were calls from within government to ensure the development of talent in the country's professional leagues. There were calls for team owners to invest in local and regional development rather than foreign talent [with players subsequently taking their earnings abroad – a situation labeled as "painful" by Viacheslav Fetisov (RIA Novosti, 2005)], and quotas on foreign players were introduced, with RHF President Vladislav Tretiak citing an "urgent need to train Russian goaltenders and players" (RIA Novosti, 2006).

5.3 Russian Hockey – Professional Leagues; resources, rebranding, and renaissance

Along with the national team's recent fortunes, professional hockey in Russia has also experienced a renaissance. For the most part, organized hockey in Russia has been in near-constant flux since the fall of the Soviet Union, with the RHF in disarray and leagues and teams failing. The new KHL, however, has tremendous support, both financially and governmentally.

While there had existed a *de facto* professional league in the Soviet Union since 1947 – the Soviet League, consisting primarily of labour union and military teams (Howell, 2002, p. 32) – the government-organized undertaking fell apart in 1991, suffering primarily from disorganization and lack of funding following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also from a player exodus to North America.

> "Once perestroika was started, it was impossible to maintain hockey on any level…It was a terrible time for sport in this country."
> Tuzik, I. (2003, November 7) in Youth hockey on road to recovery in Russia; More money and more kids playing; Fetisov recalls the good old days. *Toronto Star*, p. E03.
> [Vice-President – RHF]

> "It was a very difficult time for hockey after the end of the Soviet Union."
> Vakhrushev, V. (2003, November 7) in Youth hockey on road to recovery in Russia; More money and more kids playing; Fetisov recalls the good old days. *Toronto Star*, p. E03.
> [Coach – Krylya Sovietov Hockey Academy, Russia]

The exodus of players had famously begun with the defections of a number of high-profile players, namely Alexander Mogilny in 1989 at the World Championships in Stockholm and Sergei Fedorov in 1990 at the Goodwill Games in Seattle (Traikos, 2005), and with players such as Viacheslav Fetisov, Igor Larionov, Vladimir Krutov, and Sergei Makarov legally gaining their right to pursue professional opportunities outside of the Soviet Union (Larionov, Taylor, & Reizer, 1990). As league hockey had previously been organized under the communist system, players had been bound to their teams as employees of the state;[vii] in 1992 however, no longer under Soviet rule, all players were free to pursue their careers elsewhere. While some chose the new replacement Interstate Hockey League (MHL), a great majority of elite Russian talent chose to leave for North America (or the professional leagues in Western Europe) and the money that came along with it. In 1995-96, the average salary in the MHL was estimated to be $1000 per month; the average salary in the NHL was more than sixty times that amount (Merron, 2002). In the 1989-1990 season, ten players of Russian origin spent time in the NHL; by 1994-1995, this number had already increased to sixty (National Hockey League, 2009).

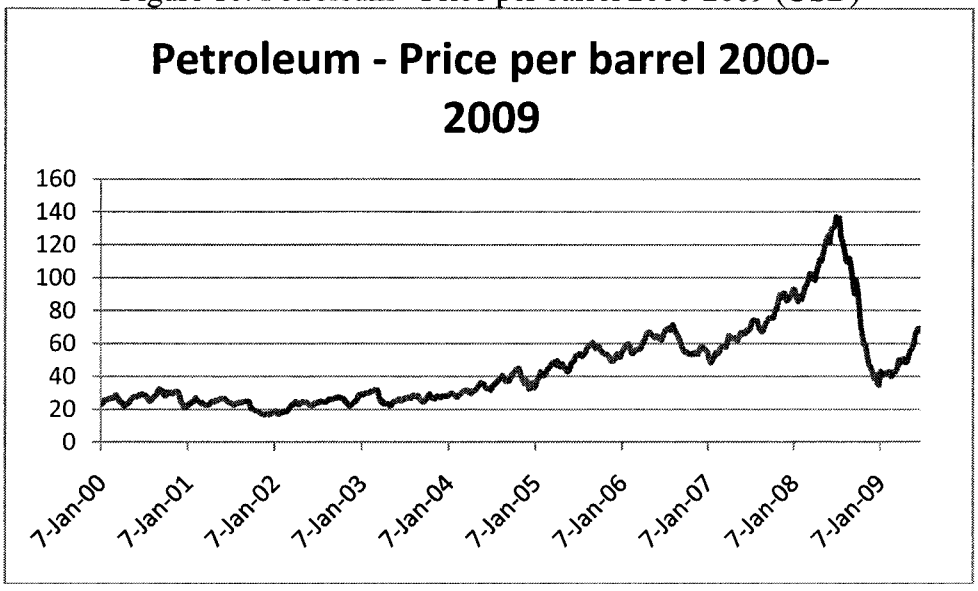
As Russia struggled in the early 1990s, so did its professional hockey leagues. There was a failure to draw fans. Not only were the better players now in the NHL, but disinterest had already been mounting as CSKA Moscow absolutely dominated the Soviet League, having won 13 consecutive championships. Corruption became prominent, with members of the Russian mafia making their presence known quite visibly, not shying away from publicly displaying their

firearms when attending games (Merron, 2002). In April of 1997, only days after speaking out against the influence of organized crime in Russian hockey, RHF President Valentin Sych was assassinated. Instability extended into league operations, and, after losing Sokol Kiev and Tivali Minsk, the MHL would in 1996 transform into the Russian Hockey League (RHL), before again rebranding in 1999 as the RSL (Merron, 2002).

The resignation of Boris Yeltsin in 1999 marked the beginning of a fruitful decade for Russia and introduced new leadership set on stabilizing the economy and eliminating corruption. In the last year of Yeltsin's term, the country's economy had hit rock bottom – the country's banks were failing in great numbers and unemployment skyrocketed to over 30% (Goldman, 2008). Vladimir Putin had come into power at a very fortuitous time – things couldn't get much worse than they already were. Russia under Putin soared, though the President's role in the country's good fortunes can certainly be questioned – the price of oil rose from approximately $20 per barrel in 1999 to over $120 per barrel in 2008 (see Figure 10) (US Department of Energy, 2009), not a small matter for a country rich in petroleum and its natural gas by-products – the country is the world's second leading producer of oil behind Saudi Arabia (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009). The country's oil and gas companies grew at an incredible pace and spawned a new class of wealth in Russia – the oligarchs – that would have a significant impact on hockey.

> "It's very interesting to see Russians wandering around Western Europe now, because they're the richest people. You see them on the Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich, with money to spend. And who are the people with the most furs and biggest diamonds and so on? They're the Russian oligarchs."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Figure 10. Petroleum - Price per barrel 2000-2009 (USD)



Emboldened by their financial positions, the Russian resource companies and their executives began to make their presence felt in the hockey world. Roman Abramovich of Sibneft invested heavily in the Avangard Omsk club, Gazprom – led by Alexander Medvedev – purchased the SKA St. Petersburg club, while oil interests also spent heavily in Kazan (Tatneft) and Ufa (Bashneft) (Klein J. Z., 2008).

> "The Russian league has a lot of money, either oil, locomotive or car money."
> Prendergrast, K. (2004, November 17) in HOCKEY; Skating to Europe. *New York Times*.
> [Vice-President, Hockey Operations – Edmonton Oilers]

For some, the chance to own a team was seemingly for entertainment value, with a team simply being another property with which to signify one's wealth.

> "To be a sponsor for a hockey team is a big toy for some businessmen… They have big money from crude oil or the metallurgical industry, and they spend it on the team so they can be popular in high society."
> Neznanov, D. (2002, December 7) in Hockey renaissance in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A3.
> [NHL Central Scouting]

> "The oligarchs are fighting each other for the chance to sponsor a team…"
> Illarionov, A. (2008, October 27) in Score Another One for Putin. *PLAY, The New York Times Sports Magazine (New York Edition)*, p. MM42.
> [Former Economic Advisor the President, Russia]

> "[T]hese are owners with, what I'd call them, 'toys.'"
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

In 2004-05, facilitated by the NHL lockout and seeking to claim the RSL title in the same year as their region's 1000th anniversary, the Tatneft-sponsored Ak-Bars Kazan club increased its salary spending to levels that rivaled NHL spending, luring 15 NHL players. While many of these players were Russian, Kazan also signed high-profile players from North America, including Dany Heatley, Vincent Lecavalier and Brad Richards.

> With a payroll rumoured to be about US $30 million, AK Bars Kazan has become the New York Rangers of Russia, spending more on players in this Russian Super League season than Nashville, Minnesota, Florida, Pittsburgh, or Atlanta did during the 2003-04 National Hockey League campaign.
> Spector, M. (2004, November 12) Deep, dark pockets. *National Post*, p. S1.

The salary explosion was not wholly anomalous; while the impetus for the salary increases was the arrival of NHL talent, the spending would set a precedent that would bring about the KHL. As ownership of a hockey club wasn't about profit, rather being about prestige and entertainment, money was not an obstacle for many of the Russian clubs.

> "If oligarchs with billions of dollars wish to spend some it on hockey players, why not? It is their wish. It's a market economy. It's democracy."
> Steblin, A. (2003, February 8) in Russian teams aim to lure former stars back home. *National Post*, p. S3.
> [President – RHF]

> "Those teams are basically in a position where money is no object…"
> Shushkovsky, V. (2004, November 9) in Jagr leaves homeland to join Russian team Omsk. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S2.
> [Player Agent, Russia]

> "It's not a business… This is sports — we're blessed with backers, people who give money not for a return in profits."
> Potapov, K. (2008, October 27) in Score Another One for Putin. *PLAY, The New York Times Sports Magazine (New York Edition)*, p. MM42.
> [President – Avangard Omsk]

That oil revenues were supporting the teams was not lost on those directly involved in the on-ice product. Players and coaches alike recognized the relative stability of an ownership structure not focused solely on ensuring profits.

> "It's about the oil. It's all about sponsors here, and no sponsor's going to get their money back. If the oil is sponsoring you, and the price of oil went up three times, instead of making whatever, $100 million a day, you get $300 million a day."
> Jagr, J. (2008, October 27) in Score Another One for Putin. *PLAY, The New York Times Sports Magazine (New York Edition)*, p. MM42.
> [Player – Avangard Omsk]

> "At any given moment Gazprom is the basic source of our victories, because we don't need money. The team doesn't have to be squeezed by "near-sport" problems, which distract from the game itself."
> Smith, B. (2007, December 10) in Slap Shot: The Hockey Team and Vladimir Putin's Hand-Picked Successor. *New York Times*.
> [Head Coach – SKA St.Petersburg]

Spending on infrastructure also increased as resource companies invested in the sport. A majority of the arenas used by RSL/KHL teams were built since 2000, with a number of others scheduled for construction.

> [Lokomotiv Yaroslavl's] modern arena, equipped with luxury boxes, a rink-side restaurant and its own micro-brewery, offsets Yaroslavl's centuries-old monastery and crumbling Soviet apartment blocs.
> Schwirtz, M. (2008, March 2) Russia ups ante in bet to reclaim hockey supremacy; Tired of best players flocking to NHL, sponsors have pumped money into country's pro league. *The Gazette*, p. B10.

> "[I]n the league itself there are better arenas; this is no different than North America. Times are changing, arenas are getting better, pay is going up, so they're no different than we are."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

This increased spending has not only been for players, but also for amenities for the players, providing comfort levels that rival the NHL. Players train in modern facilities and are afforded luxuries that were not available to them only a short time ago.

> "Some of the clubs here are like NHL organizations now. We stay in good hotels, fly charter planes. It wasn't like that 10 years ago."
> Semak, A. (2002, December 7) in Hockey renaissance in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A3.
> [Player – Dynamo Moscow]

> "We've almost finished a brand new $40-million facility. We spent $4-million building a new dormitory for the players."
> King, D. (2006, August 26) in NHL robbing Russia, according to coach King. *National Post*, p. S4.
> [Head Coach – Metallurg Magnitogorsk]

Gazprom, the world's largest natural gas company, also happens to be intricately wound in with Russia's professional hockey aspirations, both in terms of leadership and finances.

Alexander Medvedev serves as Deputy Chairman of the company's management committee, and is Director General of GazpromExport (Gazprom, 2009). In 2006 he led the company's purchase of the RSL's SKA St. Petersburg club, and reportedly doubled the club's budget to approximately $20 million. In addition to his role with SKA St. Petersburg – he now serves as club President – Medvedev has since taken on a number of more prominent roles in the world of hockey (see Table 3). In December of 2007 it was announced that Medvedev had teamed with Bob Goodenow, the former head of the NHLPA, and Igor Larionov to discuss the formation of a pan-continental league – what would eventually become the KHL, for which he now serves as President. He also sits on both the Board of Governors and Executive Committee of the RHF, and in May of 2008 he gained a place as Russia's representative on the IIHF council.

Table 3. Alexander Medvedev – Roles

Organization	Position
Gazprom	Deputy Chairman – Management Committee; Director General – GazpromExport
SKA St. Petersburg	Owner; Chairman
KHL	President
RHF	Member – Supervisory Council; Member – Executive Committee
IIHF	Councilor – Russia

At the official announcement of the KHL, Gazprom was identified as the league's primary sponsor, contributing a reported $100 million to the league's formation (McErlain, 2008), with seven other Russian corporations from the oil (Sibneft, Transneft), banking (VTB Group, Vnesheconombank), insurance (Rosgosstrakh, Ingosstrakh) and arms industries (Rosoberonexport) serving secondary roles and each contributing $6 million (Nicholson, 2008).

The league would provide continuity for the existing RSL teams but includes a number of key differences in terms of operating policies and business model. In addition to the twenty teams of the RSL, there are four expansion teams, one from the second-tier of Russian

professional hockey, and three from former Soviet states (Minsk, Belarus; Riga, Latvia; Astana, Kazakhstan). The league has requirements for salary expenditures (a salary floor of approximately $10 million, with a salary ceiling of roughly $24 million) and infrastructure (an arena with minimum 5,500 seats). In order to ensure equality between its divisions, the league structure is aligned not geographically, but by performance. Teams are drawn into four divisions – each named for a former Soviet great – based on their success over the previous five years.

Despite the new requirements for facilities, the KHL is not expected to draw much revenue from ticket sales – prices are kept low to ensure attendance. Similarly, merchandising efforts are in some areas non-existent.

> "It's hard to believe but there's no marketing, no merchandising, no real attempt to promote fans coming to the games at all, at least not the way we understand it [...] The tickets are between 10 and 20 bucks because the people don't have that much money to spend."
> Smith, B. (2008, May 1) in Hotel fires, bomb threats and great hockey; Ex-NHL assistant Barry Smith adjusts to St. Petersburg life. *The Province*, p. A63.
> [Head Coach – SKA St. Petersburg]

> "If I were giving the KHL a mark for marketing out of 5, I would give it a 3."
> Anonymous (208, December 14) in Kontinentaldivide. *Toronto Star*, p. S1.
> [Team Official – Lada Togliatti]

> "The league has its work cut out. In small shops at a handful of KHL arenas, several Russian national team jerseys are for sale, but most of the products available are NHL-themed."
> Westhead, R. (2008, December 16) North America or bust for top Russian player. *Toronto Star*, p. A1.

Instead of ticket and merchandise sales, the league looks to draw revenue from sponsorship and television contracts from networks across Europe.

> "Les droits de télé et les commandites, partout en Europe, seront notre principale source de revenus... Nos assises financières sont solides grâce à l'apport des investisseurs et je suis sûr que nous allons réussir à développer des sources de revenus stables."
> Medvedev, A. (2008, May 22) in Le rival russe. *La Presse*, p. S1.
> [President – KHL]

The league has been able to secure distribution deals for its games, though not to the extent that it had hoped. While deals have been negotiated with broadcasters, the league's reach has been limited to a select number of countries.

> [The KHL is] finalizing negotiations with the television [channel] NTV-Plus.
> Hackel, S. (2008, September 18) Slap Shot: The Morning Skate: N.H.L. Still Waiting for K.H.L Reply on Radulov. *New York Times*.

> Viasat obtains legal broadcasting rights for KHL games in 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12 seasons including current season playoff final series. [...] Viasat will be able to reach a broad audience in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, using licensed television and other signal transmission methods.
> KHL Press Service (2009, March 31) Kontinental Hockey League Signed An Agreement With Viasat.

While the KHL launched with 24 teams, the league has plans for expansion, a key component of its desire for a lucrative European television contract. For the inaugural season it was expected that teams from Western Europe might join; ultimately none did, though there had been interest.

> Medvedev said the new league would probably start with teams in Western Russian cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg, and could also feature clubs in cities such as Kiev, Ukraine; Riga, Latvia; and Astana, Kazakhstan. [...] "We'll also welcome teams that might apply from Western Europe if they meet certain financial requirements," Medvedev said.
> Westhead, R. (2007, December 15) Rival hockey league to raid the NHL; Russian tycoon plans European competitor that will go after players. *Toronto Star*, p. A1.

> [T]he league will expand to as many as 32 teams within five years, and many of Europe's most prominent professional teams have expressed interest. Medvedev also said that he expects to add an expansion franchise in a non-traditional hockey city like Paris, London or Milan, and predicted at least one of those cities would have a team in the near term.
> McErlain, E. (2008, May 21) Russian hockey is back, and in more ways than one. *The Sporting News*.

Notably, there has been interest from prominent Scandinavian teams, with public comments about joining the new league dating back to before the KHL's official launch.

> "A new league could mean more broadcast and sponsorship revenue."
> Harkimo, H. (2007, December 15) in Rival hockey league to raid the NHL; Russian tycoon plans European competitor that will go after players. *Toronto Star*, p. A1.
> [Owner – Jokerit (SM-Liiga – Finland)]

> "For us, Russia is very important to keep track of [...] We're very interested in seeing what's happening over here."
> Loob, H. (2008, May 6) in Sports Today: Continental Hockey League. *Russia Today Television*.
> [General Manager – Farjestad (Elitserien – Sweden)]

Apart from the basic salary requirements, there are a number of exceptions with regard to individuals who would qualify as "star" players – namely 25% of a club's salary must be devoted

to these players. In order to qualify for the "star" player requirement, the individual must have either a) played 40 NHL games, b) been a European national team selection, or c) under the age of 20 and a first- to third-round NHL draft pick (McErlain, 2008). In a bid to ensure the development of homegrown talent, the league also maintained a number of restrictions on import players that had been put into place by the RSL, with a limit of five roster spots available to players from outside of Russia and the participating countries, and a maximum of four such players per game; likewise, import goaltenders would be limited in the number of games they would be allowed to play (though the financial penalties that had been levied on import goaltenders in the RSL were lifted).

In its backing from Russian corporations, the KHL has a great deal of support, both directly and indirectly, from the regional governments and the Kremlin. At the sponsor level, Gazprom and Rosoberonexport are both state-controlled corporations, while Lokomotiv Yaroslavl is owned by Russian Railroads (partially owned by the state). Tatneft, which owns Ak-Bars Kazan, is owned by the Tatarstan government, while Avangard Omsk carries as one of its main sponsors Omskaya Oblast, Omsk's regional adminstration.

> "The government always has a hand in every Russian sports league, particularly hockey..." Gandler, M. (2004, November 12) in Deep, dark pockets. *National Post*, p. S1.
> [NHLPA-certified Player Agent]

> "It's an order from the Kremlin. It was Putin, and now Medvedev, who tells them to support this or that team." Illarionov, A. (2008, October 27) in Score Another One for Putin. *PLAY, The New York Times Sports Magazine (New York Edition)*, p. MM42.
> [Former Economic Advisor the President, Russia]

Vladimir Putin has even claimed that the creation of the league was an idea that originated in the Kremlin.

> "Not only did I support the idea [of the KHL], I was the initiator. I came up with it." Putin, V. (2009, July 21) in Председатель правительства России Владимир Путин: Знаю, как велика ваша аудитория (D. Chesnokov, Trans.). Sovietsky Sport.
> [Former President, Russia]

The support of government officials was crucial to the development of the KHL. The involvement of Alexander Medvedev and Gazprom came at the behest of Viacheslav Fetisov, in his position as Chairman of the State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport, and Vladislav Tretiak, President of the RHF and also a Member of Parliament. Tretiak was also a co-sponsor of a bill, signed into law by Vladimir Putin, that closed the so-called "two-weeks' notice" loophole in Russian labour law that allowed RSL players to effectively break their contracts, solidifying the league's legal protections on player movement; the loophole had been used by high-profile players such as Evgeni Malkin. Sergei Naryshkin, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, serves as Head of the KHL Board of Trustees (KHL, 2009).

5.3.1 The KHL's Inaugural Season

Perhaps fittingly, the KHL celebrated the completion of its inaugural season with a Gagarin Cup finals matchup that featured Alexei Morozov's Ak-Bars Kazan club vanquishing the Lokomotiv Yaroslavl club led by Alexei Yashin; both Morozov and Yashin had formerly found success in the NHL. While the league's playoffs provided a great deal of excitement and reason for optimism, the regular season was an uneven affair, beset by instances of controversy. In October, New York Rangers prospect Alexei Cherepanov, playing with the Avangard Omsk club, collapsed and died during a game; the arena's ambulance had already left that evening and the battery on the building's defibrillator had been drained (The Canadian Press, 2008). In January, the league hosted its inaugural All-Star game in Red Square, pitting 'Team Jagr' (International stars) versus 'Team Yashin' (Russian stars), but many of the tickets went unsold (Toronto Star, 2009). That same month Canadian goaltender Ray Emery of Atlant Mytischi was caught on film physically accosting his team's trainer after being pulled from a game (National Post, 2009).

Apart from controversy relating to on-ice happenings and players, the league has also had to implement "anti-crisis" measures including a rollback in the salary cap in order to stabilize the league's financial situation which has been negatively affected by the global economic downturn (apparent in the most recent data in Figure 10, though the situation seems to once again be strengthening) (LeBrun, 2009). Gazprom, the league's primary sponsor saw its market value plummet from $350 billion in April 2007 to $85 billion in December of 2008 and at least two teams, Metallurg Novokuznetsk and Khimik Voskresensk reportedly had trouble meeting their payroll commitments for the season, with 2 to 3 others possibly being demoted to Russia's second division because of inability to guarantee salaries for the league's second season (Loonen, 2009; Pakarinen, 2009). League President Alexander Medvedev has insisted that the situation was not dire and that the measures were not to ensure the survival of the KHL, but rather to allow it to continue to develop and, though a number of Russian teams are reportedly on shaky ground, Medvedev has reiterated that the failure of specific teams is not reflective of the strength of the league as a whole.

It is unclear, however, if the KHL will be able to remain viable. Some within the league have expressed concern about the league's business model and its heavy reliance on sponsorship, especially in light of a turbulent economy, instead of gate and merchandise revenues. Questions remain as to the dedication of the oligarchs to their teams in the face of constant monetary losses. The lucrative television contracts being sought by the league have not come to fruition, with only a handful of regional deals negotiated so far. Without additional revenues, the salary situation in the KHL may be unsustainable. While Swedish teams have expressed interest in the league, they will have to reconcile the fact that salaries within the Elitserien are not at the same level as those in Russia (see Table 1).

The KHL is not alone in experiencing financial tumult however; a number of NHL owners currently face liquidity problems, with the league having taken control of the finances of the Phoenix Coyotes franchise (The Canadian Press, 2009). A rollback in the NHL's salary cap is also expected for the upcoming seasons (Richardson, 2008).

5.4 Russian Hockey – International Relations; renewal of tensions, animosity

The creation of the KHL appears steeped in nationalism – the league's motto is "Our Game," and the league has positioned itself in opposition to not only the NHL but Canada, the United States and North America in general.

The NHL is clearly the KHL's main competition, and league representatives have not been shy about revealing their animosity toward it. The KHL is seeking to equal or surpass the NHL as the world's premier hockey league.

> "We will be No. 1 regardless [...] We have everything for this: talented people, government support, money, desire and great traditions."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, February 29) in Russia Is Luring Back N.H.L. Stars. *New York Times*.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport]

> "Sooner or later, the National Hockey League is going to have to reckon with our league, because, despite everything, we are getting stronger, not only in terms of players but in terms of our legal and financial protections."
> Yakovlev, Y. (2008, March 1) in Russian affront; Alexei Yashin has joined several countrymen who have turned their backs on the NHL to bring their game home. *National Post*, p. S5.
> [President – Lokomotiv Yaroslavl]

> "Nous ferons concurrence à la LNH [...] Nous avons besoin d'un nouvel équilibre dans le monde du hockey. Maintenant, nous avons de l'argent et un bon programme. Le hockey est redevenu une priorité en Russie."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, May 17) in L'histoire se répétera-t-elle? *La Presse*, p. S3.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport]

Interestingly, in taking aim at the NHL, KHL representatives have demonstrated that they see the league as part of a much greater geopolitical clash for supremacy in sport, with their hostilities directed not at the NHL, but Canada or North America as a whole.

> "Thanks to the combined financial help of the state and business we'll be able to create a very strong league, which will be no worse than our counterparts in North America."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, February 7) in Russia sets stage for NHL rival loop; Tretiak, energy tycoon behind new league. *The Gazette*, p. C3.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport]

> "A unipolar world is not good; we should have a multipolar world."
> Medvedev, A. (2008, May 22) in New Russian-based league flexes its muscles. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S3.
> [President – KHL]

> "Hockey is a Russian sport - though Canadians think it's theirs."
> Naryshkin, S. (2008, February 29) in Russia Is Luring Back N.H.L. Stars. *New York Times*.
> [Deputy Prime Minister, Russia]

The league's relationship with the NHL and the IIHF with regard to player transfers has been equally combative in terms of rhetoric. Tensions over transfer fees span the entire dataset of this project.

> "I regret deeply that a hockey nation like Russia is not part of it. We did everything we could to convince them to join but the owners of clubs of the Russian league were not willing to authorize the Russian ice hockey federation to sign the agreement."
> Fasel, R. (2005, August 17) in NHL transfer deal signed without Russians. *Toronto Star*, p. F02.
> [President – IIHF]

The main point of contention is that the NHL, through the IIHF transfer agreement, is able to acquire players from their European clubs with little compensation in return. Clubs have argued that the amounts distributed are inadequate – the 1994-2001 transfer agreement provided approximately $75,000 per player; the 2001-2004 renegotiation increased that amount to $200,000 per player – with their expenses in developing the players outstripping what they eventually see from the IIHF's development fund.

> "[I]t came to a point where the Russians said 'Look, that's not enough. We're supplying the better players and we want more money.'"
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

> "Compensation's not good enough, not enough per player. And I think what the Russians want to do, what they need, to me – and I'm somewhat sympathetic to them – when you have a player like Ovechkin and are given only so much compensation, well don't compensate everybody from one thru twenty-five. There has to be some grade to it all, and that's what they have difficulty with."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Specifically, Russia has taken issue with their elite talent being compensated at the same level as lesser talent. Because of its dissatisfaction, Russia has not been party to the two most recent iterations of the transfer agreement. Prominent cases, such as those of Alexander Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin, have been obstacles in negotiations. Ovechkin and Malkin proceeded to sign contract extensions that together total nearly $200 million – yet through the transfer agreement compensation would be equal for all, regardless of talent; the NHL was essentially making the argument that $200,000 was somehow fair value for a player that would then sign with an NHL club for $10 million per season.

> "The value of some of our players such as Ovechkin is very high and our teams get almost nothing for them [...] The compensation now is too small [...] In Russia, it is the teams or the state that pay for everything. The clubs build and maintain rinks and each of them employ a minimum of 15 professional coaches at their hockey schools. That represents a huge investment and they deserve to be properly compensated."
> Steblin, A. (2003, February 8) in European hockey czars plot to get more from NHL. *National Post*, p. S3.
> [President – RHF]

> "To prepare a player like Ovechkin, a top talent, takes years of effort [...] The NHL should be paying $1 million for a player like Ovechkin. That's the market value."
> Kukushkin, V. (2004, May 28) in Russians seek 'fair deal' from NHL; Tough talk over expired transfer agreement 'We're tired of being treated like poor relatives.' *Toronto Star*, p. C08.
> [RHF]

> "Honestly speaking, the Malkin case has become the main stumbling block in our negotiations with the NHL."
> Tretiak, V. (2006, August 10) in Transfer dispute over Malkin, Tretyak says: 'Main stumbling block.' *National Post*, p. B12.
> [President – RHF]

For the NHL, Russia had become a source of labour, easy to exploit due to the league's prime negotiating position with the IIHF. Without the transfer agreement, unsigned due to Russia's obstinate refusal to allow their players leave for such insulting amounts, clubs have gone uncompensated with player agents from the NHL blatantly taking advantage of legal loopholes to free the players from their existing contracts.

In May of 2007, RHF President Vladislav Tretiak indicated that the Russian clubs would be willing to participate in the transfer agreement were they to receive $1 million per player, far above what the NHL was willing to provide; KHL President Alexander Medvedev has suggested a more modest $500,000 transfer fee for players, but this again is double the amount currently offered. During the early days of the Alexander Radulov fiasco, which saw the player leave the Nashville Predators for the Salavat Yulaev Ufa club before the start of the 2008-09 season despite having one year remaining on his NHL contract (and subsequently be suspended by the IIHF for the illegal move), Medvedev went as far as to mock the NHL for its limited appreciation of the situation, suggesting that the KHL might be willing to sign the transfer agreement should the NHL accept without complaint the standard $200,000 compensation for any players signed by the Russian league. Without the transfer agreement, the KHL has made it clear that it too may pursue players under contract in other leagues.

> "If the NHL believes that $200,000 is a fair price for one hockey player, we are ready to confirm it in practice. It is a two-way street, is not it?"
> Medvedev, A. (2008, July 15) in Nolan second-best in power struggle with Isles' GM Snow. *Edmonton Journal*, p. C4.
> [President – KHL]

> "Legally, [KHL clubs] have the full right to [offer contracts to NHL players], because we have suffered in the past. We can't say, 'Look boys, it's morally not good without having an agreement. Don't do it.'"
> Medvedev, A. (2008, June 25) in NHL seeks truce with new Russian league to prevent poaching. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S3.
> [President – KHL]

For Russia, the unequal transactions provided by the transfer agreement are, apart from the financial impact on the clubs, disrespectful and have impeded further negotiations. As a result of the standoff over player transfers, the relationship between the KHL and the NHL remains one of enmity.

> "We don't want an agreement that they are forcing on us at this time."
> Fetisov, V. (2006, August 3) in Russians say nyet to transfer agreement. *Edmonton Journal*, p. D4.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport]

> "Nous voulons juste être respectés."
> Fetisov, V. (2008, May 17) in L'histoire se répétera-t-elle? *La Presse*, p. S3.
> [Chairman – State Committee for Physical Culture and Sport]

> "They don't see themselves being true partners with the National Hockey League. I think they feel that the kind of players they've been sending over lately, they haven't been properly compensated for."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

> "One would say that [the relationship between the RHF and the NHL] is very cold."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

The NHL had been courting and signing players regardless of whether they were under contract or not, with the league taking advantage of technicalities in Russian law, a situation that has resulted in at least four players – Nikolai Zherdev, Alexander Semin, Alexander Ovechkin, Evgeni Malkin – having their cases taken to court. Player transfers (whether under the IIHF transfer agreement or not) have been seen as one-sided, always favouring the NHL.

> "We're tired of being treated like poor relatives…We want to be treated like equal partners, we want respect and a fair deal... At the moment, NHL clubs don't recognize our contracts and can take any player they want. How is that fair?"
> Kukushkin, V. (2004, May 28) in Russians seek 'fair deal' from NHL; Tough talk over expired transfer agreement 'We're tired of being treated like poor relatives.' *Toronto Star*, p. C08.
> [RHF]

> "They all like to talk about democracy, the American way, and then they shamelessly steal our best players… This is pure sports terrorism."
> Velichkin, G. (2006, August 14) in Where in the world is Evgeny Malkin? *The Globe and Mail*, p. S3.
> [Director – Metallurg Magnitogorsk]

An additional point of contention for the Russians is that many of the players selected by the NHL might never actually play at the NHL level, instead becoming mired in the minor leagues. This then becomes an issue of a more limited talent pool for the Russian professional teams.

> "The NHL has to find a way to create a win-win situation. Right now, it's win-lose. All one way. […] The development of players in European leagues is in their best interests, too. Unless the leagues here are healthy financially and competitively, that development will be compromised. […]A win-lose situation can only go on for so long. […] Then it becomes lose-lose."
> King, D. (2006, August 26) in NHL robbing Russia, according to coach King. *National Post*,

p. S4.
[Head Coach – Metallurg Magnitogorsk]

"The NHL for 15 years has brought young players from Europe, first and foremost from Russia… I think that it is time to end this. Simply put (It's) time to stop robbing us."
Radulov, A. (2008, August 15) in Radulov to NHL 'Stop robbing us'; Former Predators star says it's time for more Russians to return home. *Toronto Star*, p. S15.
[Player – Salavat Yulaev Ufa]

"Where the Russians feel like they're being hurt is that, number one, they don't feel like they're being compensated properly for the players, and number two, it's the players coming over and playing in the American Hockey League – they want that player to stay in Russia until he's ready to play in the NHL. […] They just want to keep their talent in Russia, to help their Russian hockey league, while they're not in the NHL."
Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

Additionally, there is some fear of impact on the country's overall talent level and competitiveness in international competition.

"They're probably acting on emotions because some of their top prospects are leaving Russia to go play in North America. If they're missing five top players on the Russian team at next year's world junior championship, I don't think it's good for Russian hockey."
Tyjnych, S. (2008, July 1) in Russians pressure juniors to stay home. Telegraph-Journal, p. B4.
[Player Agent]

This perceived connection between professional play and national team performance is echoed in comments on Russia's recent success at the international level and the development of the professional system in the country.

We were able to implement the principle: 'strong clubs – a strong national team'. The basis of the Russian squad that won in Bern consisted of the players from the KHL.
Medvedev, A. (2009, May 15) in "KHL to match NHL in five years." Russia Today.
[President – KHL]

Russia has gone so far as to threaten to suspend those players who choose to play in the junior system in Canada from international competition for a period of four years.

"To tell you the truth, now I am being threatened with a suspension…In other words, if I do not make it in America then I will not be able to play for some time in Russia."
Filatov, N. (2008, July 1) in Russians pressure juniors to stay home. Telegraph-Journal, p. B4.
[Player, Russia]

An IIHF study that analyzed the impact of European players on professional hockey in North America – using a ranking system that categorized players on their achievements (e.g.,

Class 5 is "Superstar," in which the player is a major award winner in the NHL; Class 3 is "Solid NHLer, plays every game") – determined that 62.5% of European players who were drafted or signed from Europe were Class 1 players, meaning that they were "Non impact, minor leaguers," (Szemberg, 2006). As the developmental aspect of the North American minor leagues is considered weaker than many of the top-level European leagues due to an overemphasis of games rather than practices (Szemberg, 2006), the resulting impact is that young players might not be developing to their potential if the make the move to North America early in their careers.

> "[I]f I were a player back home and I wanted to come to North America, I don't know for sure that I would. They held back Teemu Selanne. They wanted Teemu Selanne to come here at 20 years old. They held him back, and held him back. He honed his game. Koivu. Honed his game."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Despite their occasional agreement on certain items, the IIHF had also been vilified by Russia earlier in the decade for its handling of Alexei Yashin's suspension by the Ottawa Senators. Yashin had been suspended for refusing to play for the team, seeking a more lucrative contract. At the NHL's request, the IIHF attempted to prohibit Yashin from competing in the 2000 World Championships, upholding the rule that any player under suspension by his professional team would be ineligible to play in international competitions, despite the Senators' season having already come to an end (an arbitrator later ruled Yashin eligible).

> "You robbed us of Mr. Yashin, and now you even want to prevent him from playing here in his home country in the world championship. The NHL has no right to do this. They can't punish him twice. They're trying to use force against him. But they cannot prohibit him -- he is a free man."
> Kukushkin, V. (2000, April 14) in Russians rally behind hockey pariah Yashin. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A1.
> [Committee Member (Russia) – IIHF]

> Russian officials say the NHL's move is illegal discrimination. The Russian national coach calls it deliberate vengeance. Russian fans denounce it as an unfair attempt to destroy their hero. For many people here, it is an example of North American arrogance and domination.
> York, G. (2000, April 14) Russians rally behind hockey pariah Yashin. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A1.

5.5 The Player Decision – Russia to North America; freedom, xenophilia, dreams

As has been shown, Russian player migration to North America was facilitated by reforms in the Soviet Union – beginning in 1989 players were able to leave to play professionally in North America.

NHL teams had been attempting to secure Soviet talent sparingly since the 1970s, recognizant of the level of talent and hopeful that the political situation would change. Viktor Khatulev was the first Soviet player drafted by an NHL team, selected by the Philadelphia Flyers in 1975. The first player to sign an NHL contract would be Viacheslav Fetisov, originally selected by the Montreal Canadiens 201st overall in 1978, and then again in 1983 by the New Jersey Devils, the team he would eventually join for the beginning of the 1989-1990 season.

The players' decisions to migrate to North America were not necessarily to do with the money to be made in the NHL, but rather political. As Igor Larionov wrote in his autobiography, "[T]he money paid us as NHL players would be astounding, the lifestyle as simple or lavish as we chose to make it. [...] But these alone are not reasons to tear away the roots in your homeland. Really, I left for one reason: Freedom to choose my own path," (Larionov, Taylor, & Reizer, 1990, p. 2). Along with Larionov, Viacheslav Fetisov had been a critic of the autocratic ways of Soviet hockey, but also was somewhat hesitant to leave, commenting that, "I am aware I could earn a great deal of money in the NHL," (in Martin, 1990, p. 231) but that defecting would be the wrong path. Fetisov further expressed his love for country, "To go away with no chance of returning—that is impossible to imagine" (in Martin, 1990, p. 231), and also a desire to lessen the restrictions on others wishing to leave. Fetisov would lobby for the chance to play overseas legally, and would eventually be granted the opportunity under the stipulation that those players

deciding to emigrate would return some of their earnings to the Soviet Union to be reinvested in youth hockey (Larionov, Taylor, & Reizer, 1990, p. 149).

> "[I]f I go to defect, I might close the door for the rest of the players."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, November 13) in Fetisov: Two careers and one remarkable man. *Toronto Star*, p. E03.
> [NHL Hall of Fame Inductee]

> "It was the most powerful communist system in the world. They didn't allow people to think freely. We were up against a big monster. You were not born free. People never got a taste of freedom. [...] That was probably my biggest accomplishment: I was very proud to sign my first contract with any foreign company -- in my case, the New Jersey Devils."
> Fetisov, V. (2001, November 13) in The glass wall came down for five in the Hall: There was a time when Fetisov couldn't skate in Toronto. *National Post*, p. A21.
> [NHL Hall of Fame Inductee]

Until 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, migration was coloured by the fact that only those players aged 28 and over, such as Fetisov and Larionov, would be eligible to leave, with the supposed belief that they were now too old to form the core of the Soviet national team (Martin, 1990); younger players wanting to play professionally in North America however were forced to choose defection.

The players had help in defecting and leaving under questionable circumstances as NHL teams would go to great lengths to secure talent. Buffalo Sabres GM Gerry Meehan met Alexander Mogilny in Stockholm at the World Championships to fly him back to North America; likewise, Detroit Red Wings owner Mike Ilitch had a private plane pick up Sergei Fedorov in Vancouver. For a player like Vladimir Konstantinov, the Red Wings managed to bribe Soviet doctors into reporting that he suffered from a rare form of cancer that would best be treated in the United States, earning Konstantinov a medical discharge from his military obligations.

After 1991 it became possible to secure talent without resorting to extreme measures, and so the league saw an incredible increase in the number of Soviet-born players. In the 1987 NHL entry draft, teams had selected only two Russian players; in 1992 this number had jumped to

thirty-six, with thirteen going in the first two rounds – the St. Louis Blues alone had used their first three picks on Russians – with some commenting that the league had fallen into a state of xenophilia.

> "Il ne faut pas penser qu'ils ne vont pas prendre un Russe avant de prendre un Québécois. Non. Ils vont prendre le Russe…"
> Daigle, A. (2002, March 6) in "Dans la Ligue nationale, personne n'a tout cuit dans le bec." *La Presse*, p. S3.
> [NHL Player]

> "[In 1992] the first two drafted were Europeans… there was almost mass hysteria. First of all the fans are pissed off, and kept booing, and secondly, they were tripping over each other to change their lists. The whole league! [*laughs*] You could see them, they were sitting at the table going 'Oh my god, what's going on?' Then of course anybody who had a kind of European name was selected […] [T]here's bit of a herd mentality in the National Hockey League."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

The influx of a greater number of Russian players in the NHL solidified the league's position as the world's premier league, and successes were seen on the ice. Younger players such as Mogilny, Fedorov and Pavel Bure became some of the league's most exciting players – Bure would win the Calder Trophy in 1991-1992, while in 1992-1993 Mogilny would lead the league in goal-scoring with 76. In Detroit, Fedorov would form part of the "Russian 5" (along with Viacheslav Fetisov, Vladimir Konstantinov, Slave Kozlov and Igor Larionov), a line combination put together by head coach Scotty Bowman that would help the team to the 1997 and 1998 Stanley Cups. The players became superstars and raised the profile of the league in their homeland, and for Russia's youth the NHL became the level of hockey to strive for.

> "Anybody with any competitive juices wants to play with and against the best players in the world, in the best league in the world."
> Holland, K. (2008, June 24) in Russian threat minimized. *The Globe and Mail*, p. R10.
> [General Manager – Detroit Red Wings]

> "When Ovechkin, Kovalchuk, Datsyuk, Malkin and Crosby want to play in Russia, then I [will consider it]."
> Filatov, N. (2008, July 11) in Truce reached in hockey's Cold War. *National Post*, p. S3.
> [Player – Columbus Blue Jackets]

> "[T]he goal of every young player was to, first of all, play for the team in his town, then play in the national 'A' league or elite league in the country, and then play for your national team.

> Now there's one step higher, and that's to play in the National Hockey League. So, for every young guy, whether he's living in Kelowna, or Langenthal, or wherever it is – all over Europe – they think about playing for the Ottawa Senators, or the Anaheim Ducks, or the Boston Bruins."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

> "[E]very player, whether they're Russian, Czechslovakian, Swedish, whatever nationality they are, I think they all want to play in the best league in the world. So from a player's point of view, everybody's the same; it doesn't matter what nationality they are."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

The perception of the NHL as the world's premier league has been reflected in comments made by some of the league's younger Russians.

> "My dream has been to play in the NHL since I was 11 or 12 years old... The NHL has the best players and that's where I want to be."
> Filatov, N. (2008, June 20) in Small Russian making a big impression; Blue Jackets and Islanders covet Filatov. *National Post*, p. B14.
> [Player, Russia]

> "I want to play in the NHL... It doesn't matter where. [...] All players dream of playing in the NHL. This is my dream."
> Ovechkin, A. (2004, May 28) in Ovechkin ready to fulfill dream. *The Globe and Mail*, p. S2.
> [Player, Russia]

> "[Seeing NHL games on TV] was fascinating... and since then, it became my dream to play in the NHL."
> Malkin, E. (2006, August 25) in Malkin certain tempest will calm. *Edmonton Journal*, p. D3.
> [Player, Russia]

> "It doesn't matter how much money they offer me here. [...] In Canada, if you play like a star, you're treated that way. The NHL is a league with 100 years of history."
> Kabanov, K. (2008, December 16) in North America or bust for top Russian player. *Toronto Star*.
> [Player, Russia]

This line of thinking would continue as long as the NHL remained, uncontested, the world's elite league. This sentiment is not shared by all young Russians however, especially in recent years.

> "That's the dream, to become famous in Russia."
> Baturin, Y. (2008, December 14) in Kontinentaldivide. *Toronto Star*, p. S1.
> [Player, Russia]

5.6 The Player Decision – Adapting; learning the language, living abroad

For the migrating players, life in North America is not necessarily easy. From day one, Russian players have struggled in the dressing room and off the ice. Lifestyle changes have been

formidable. Social discomfort has led to problems of player integration; miscommunication, or lack of communication in some cases, has led to controversy.

Many early Russian migrants, as a new phenomenon for the NHL, were not given any sort of special treatment or assistance. Instead they were left to fend for themselves.

> "You had these guys, who all at once were thrust into this world, in North America, and they were given a couple of million dollars, and were said, 'Well, here, get a house and be a practice at 10 o'clock,' or something. They were given little or no guidance. Some of these teams, it was a crime as to how they were treated, how they expected those boys to adapt in North America, instead of easing them in and helping them, just socially, and getting them integrated, and never mind the hockey."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Those players with families had to endure the difficulties of living apart (if the family stayed in Russia) or share in the obstacles presented by a move to a foreign country.

> "If you have family involved, his suffering is his wife's suffering, and her suffering is his."
> Risebrough, D. (2001, January 4) in Russian roulette: Although the former Soviet Union hockey greats blazed a trail for the flow of young Russian talent in today's NHL, the pitfalls of the pioneers may not be a thing of the past. *National Post*, p. B18.
> [General Manager – Minnesota Wild]

Language has been the primary concern. For those already able to speak English, like Igor Larionov and Alexander Ovechkin (it was noted by the interviewees that the more prominent Russian prospects like Ovechkin have had a great deal of exposure to English through international competitions such as the IIHF Under-20 World Junior Championship and the annual CHL-Russia Selects series), the transition to North America has been easier, as even simple tasks like ordering food and finding accommodations can be discouraging hurdles. The ability to speak English has also helped the players in their marketability and in giving interviews. Others have had to take classes or lean on more acclimatized teammates for assistance.

> "[Igor Larionov is] like the godfather of the kids. He tells them everything, from diet to sleep habits. His role as a player is to do whatever the coach wants. I think that comes from his Russian heritage."
> Lewis, D. (2002, October 9) in HOCKEY; New Coach, With Classic Lines, Is Ready to Roll

With Red Wings. *New York Times*.
[Head Coach – Detroit Red Wings]

"We need [Sergei Fedorov] to be a mentor to (Alexander) Svitov and (Nikolai) Zherdev just as he was mentored."
Hitchcock, K. (2006, November 29) in Fedorov knows what's expected of him on the ice. *The Province*, p. A52.
[Head Coach – Columbus Blue Jackets]

"Sergei (Kostitsyn) m'aide avec la langue, mais je ne veux pas qu'il m'aide trop parce que je veux m'améliorer par moi-même."
Valentenko, P. (2007, September 11) in "On en a pour notre argent..." *La Presse*, p. S3.
[Player (Draft Pick) – Montreal Canadiens]

"Anton Volchenkov spent quite a bit of time in English school when he came over. [...] [I]f there is a fellow Russian on the team, they try to pair them up on the road if they can, on road trips. And in this case, you've only got one Russian now and it's Volchenkov, so when Ilya Zubov, who's still in the system, comes up, he has a room at Volchenkov's, and they spend quite a bit of time together. They try to mentor in that kind of situation."
Warren, K. (2009) Interview 3.

On-ice interaction has also proven difficult, and has hampered the development of a number of players, with both players and coaches having expressed frustration.

"If a player is a great prospect in Russia, it is not the skill but the character [that needs to be developed and strengthened]. But that character can be eaten away totally if they can't communicate."
Riendeau, V. (2001, January 4) in Russian roulette: Although the former Soviet Union hockey greats blazed a trail for the flow of young Russian talent in today's NHL, the pitfalls of the pioneers may not be a thing of the past. *National Post*, p. B18.
[Former NHL/RSL Player]

For coaches, the difficulty arises when players are unable to understand drills and other instruction and feedback.

"La semaine dernière, on avait des Russes comme (Oleg) Petrov et (Gennady) Razine dans son (Andrei Markov) entourage, mais ici à Hull, il n'y a personne. [...] On le laisse jouer."
Therrien, M. (2000, September 5) in Markov impressionne Therrien: "Intelligence et talent." *La Presse*, p. S12.
[Head Coach – Montreal Canadiens]

"[Alexander Semin] has no trouble ordering his steak dinner in English, but when it comes to reporters and coaches, he doesn't seem to know any English anymore."
Hanlon, G. (2007, January 31) in Semin opts to fly under the radar. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. F2.
[Head Coach – Washington Capitals]

Patience is required on the part of the coaching staff. If this is lacking however, it may adversely affect the player's role on the team.

> "[I]f you look at most of the Russians who play here, they don't speak any English when they arrive. And the NHL clubs, they don't want them in the system, because the coaches don't speak Russian. It's very difficult to have a player on your roster that doesn't speak English. [...] Once that language barrier is resolved, then everything is easier for both the players and the coaches. It's very frustrating when they can't understand each other. Right now I've got an 18-year-old playing in the AHL, for example, who hasn't learned English yet. The main reason he's not in the NHL is because he can't speak English."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

Players have also had to adjust to the realities of hockey as a business, struggling with demotions and criticisms, oftentimes because of difficulty communicating with their teams. Alexei Kaigorodov of the Ottawa Senators had repeated problems discussing matters with his coach and general manager, leading to confusion as to his status on the team. At one point Kaigorodov, under the assumption it was understood between all parties that he would return to Metallurg Magnitogorsk in Russia were he not to make the NHL club, found himself suspended by the Senators for refusing his assignment to the club's AHL affiliate in Binghampton, New York. After being unable to make amends with the Senators, whom he had subsequently heavily criticized, he was eventually traded to the Phoenix Coyotes organization.

> "He has been assigned to Binghamton and it's his decision (whether to report)... Like any other player who is sent to the minors, he was disappointed. He had a hard time getting ice time (with Ottawa). We want to put him where he can be successful."
> Muckler, J. (2006, November 4) in Kaigorodov a no-show after being sent to AHL. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. C1.
> [General Manager – Ottawa Senators]

> "I know that the Senators went over and over and over the deal with him in training camp and early in the season, trying to explain what exactly they were looking for. But again, without knowing English as a second language, or a third language, it's difficult."
> Warren, K. (2009) Interview 3.

Sergei Samsonov of the Montreal Canadiens experienced the same sort of difficulties, not being apprised of his situation during a lengthy span in which he was listed as a healthy scratch. Samsonov would go on to publicly express his desire to be traded. After the Canadiens attempted to waive him – a process that saw him go unclaimed by any of the other NHL clubs – he was traded to the Chicago Blackhawks.

> "Je ne sais trop ce qui se passe, je n'ai pas parlé à l'entraîneur de la situation... Bien sûr, nous sommes dans la course pour obtenir une place en séries, et c'est toujours décevant de ne pas jouer dans ces moments-là. Mais c'est comme ça."
> Samsonov, S. (2006, March 21) in Samsonov n'a pas perdu espoir. *La Presse*, p. S4.
> [Player – Montreal Canadiens]

Samsonov's teammate, Alex Kovalev, endured similar controversy stemming from supposed difficulties with the Montreal coaching staff. In an interview given to Russian sportswriter Regina Sevostianova,[viii] Kovalev reportedly revealed that he felt discriminated against because of his nationality, with some of the coaching staff's personnel decisions involving other Russians (along with Mikhail Grabovski, a Belarussian) affecting team morale and performance on the ice.

> "J'ai l'impression, et nombreux sont ceux qui le disent, des journalistes, des amateurs, que cet entraîneur n'aime pas les Russes. Et tel est le cas... Ça paraît dans son attitude envers nous."
> Credited to Alex Kovalev (2007, March 5) in "Les jeunes ont du talent, mais il leur manque un peu de tête." *La Presse*, p. S2.
> [Player – Montreal Canadiens]

Pavel Vorobiev also wasn't shy about expressing the discrimination he felt, providing a blunt assessment of his time with the Chicago Blackhawks before returning to Russia to play for Khimik Voskresensk.

> "In America, they don't like the Russians, often hate us, and Chicago is the worst club of all."
> Vorobiev, P. (2006, August 8) in Vorobiev not high on 'hawks. *The Province*, p. D3.
> [Player – Chicago Blackhawks]

Fortunately for some of the players the transition to North America has been relatively smooth. The NHL style of play, while still relatively physical, is now a great deal more similar to the style they play in Russia than it used to be, and vice versa. Players are easily able to make any necessary adjustments.

> "The good thing, though, for the European player, is that hockey in the NHL has changed in the last 2 or 3 years, in that it dramatically… it's more similar to the European game. The 'old NHL' where you'd go from goon hockey to clutch-and-grab hockey is becoming more of a European style."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

Just as some see the NHL moving toward a more European style, others see Russians moving toward a more North American style.

> "I think one of the things you've seen over the years is that European players have become tougher, more used to the aggressive style of North American play."
> Houston, W. (2009) Interview 4.

> "[T]hey all play a kind of NHL-style game. I don't think the adaptation – I think if you look at Volchenkov here in Ottawa, well, geez, he plays like a North American defenceman. He's not a 'fancy Dan.'"
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Even for those players not accustomed to the violence in the NHL, the transition to the league has been manageable.

> "On voit [qu'Andrei Markov] a un beau talent… mais il doit s'habituer à notre style de jeu. À Hull, au tournoi des recrues, il a été le meilleur joueur sur la glace lors du premier match. Ça a été plus ordinaire par la suite. Pendant le match contre les recrues des Panthers de la Floride, je crois qu'il voyait des gars jeter les gants pour la première fois de sa vie. Quand il a vu la Zamboni passer sur la patinoire pour nettoyer le sang sur la glace, ça a peut-être eu un effet sur lui. Mais il montre de façon indéniable un beau potentiel."
> Vigneault, A. (2000, September 10) in Bloc-Notes. *La Presse*, p. S6.
> [Head Coach – Montreal Canadiens]

In addition to being comfortable on the ice, a number of players have become accustomed to the North American lifestyle, integrating themselves into their local communities. Some have made their moves to North America permanent, seeking citizenship in their adopted countries.

> "My heart started beating when I lifted my hand and I was saying the words to the oath. I can't explain the special feelings."
> Korolev, I. (2000, November 16) in 'O Canada' for Korolevs ; Maple Leafs forward Igor, wife Vera thrilled to call Canada their chosen home. *Toronto Star*, p. C01.
> [Player – Toronto Maple Leafs]

A number of players have found themselves feeling at home within more cosmopolitan areas, remarking on the large Russian populations.

> "Je me sens à la maison à Montréal. Je veux terminer ma carrière avec le Canadien et vivre ici après avoir joué au hockey. Je suis ici depuis plus de huit ans et je ne me suis jamais senti à l'écart… J'ai plus d'amis ici qu'à Moscou."
> Petrov, O. (2002, November 9) in Petrov, un Montréalais pure laine. *La Presse*, p. G3.
> [Player – Montreal Canadiens]

> "Je me plais à Montréal. La communauté russe y est importante. Il y a des commerces, des restaurants, des cafés russes. Parfois, je me sens à Moscou ici."
> Markov, A. (2003, July 31) in Pas question d'un retour en Russie pour Markov. *La Presse*, p. S3.
> [Player – Montreal Canadiens]

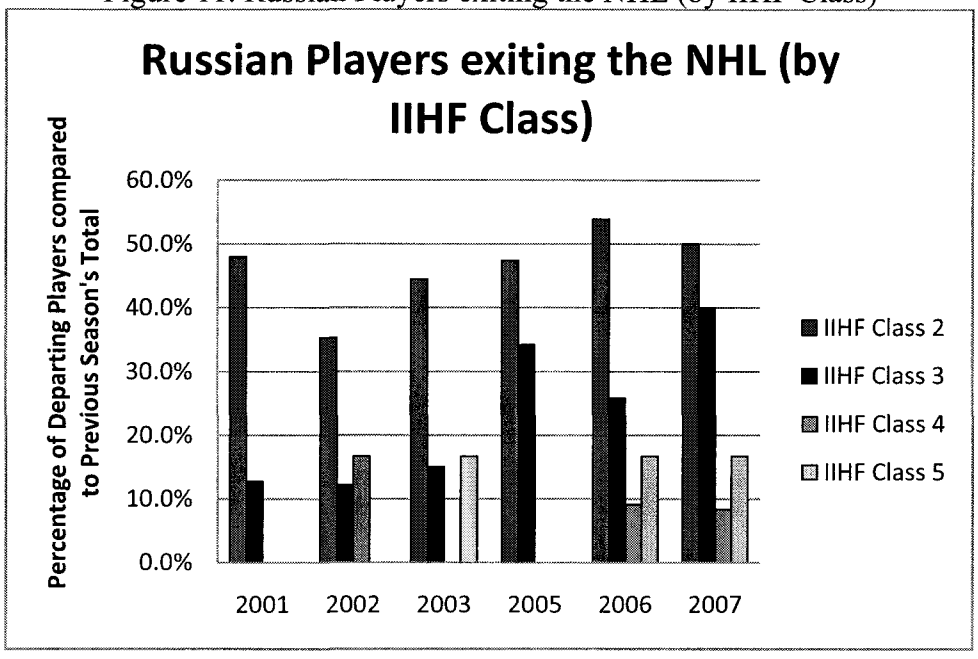
For all the controversy that Alexei Yashin endured through his contract holdout in 1999-2000, his disputed NAC donation, and his lackluster performance on the ice, his move to North America was intended to be a long-term one – in the offseason he returns to his residence in New York and also maintains a home in Ottawa, where his parents also reside (in a home he had purchased for them).

5.7 The Player Decision – North America to Russia; opportunity, financial security

While the NHL still draws Russian talent, it does so in dwindling numbers. The league has seen a sharp decline in the number of Soviet or Russian-born players since the peak of 89 in the 2000-2001 season. As has been shown, a great number of changes have taken place with regard to the hockey infrastructure in Russia, and those changes have had a tremendous impact on players' decisions.

In the early part of the decade, players returning to Russia could primarily be considered as "marginal players, frequent 'healthy scratches'" – Class 2 players in the IIHF classification system (Szemberg, 2006). Though Class 2 players continue to be the most frequent returnees, since the NHL lockout they have been joined by an increasing number of Class 3 players – "Solid NHLers" (see Figure 11 and Appendix IV).

Figure 11. Russian Players exiting the NHL (by IIHF Class)



First and foremost, there now exists an elite-level hockey league in Russia that can nearly compete in terms of quality of play with the NHL. The KHL builds on the leadership, infrastructure and sponsorship momentum of the RSL and the league is seen by most as the world's second-best league.

Among those in the KHL, the league is approaching the caliber of play seen in the NHL.

> "Hockey here is really catching and very quick; Russian Superleague's level is very close to that of NHL… I used to think that the best Russian players play in NHL but I was wrong: there are lots of players who could settle in perfectly in NHL but stay here."
> Gardner, P. (2007, September 25) in Gardner: I will support Russia. *Sport-Express Daily*.
> [Head Coach – Lokomotiv Yaroslavl]

> "From my perspective, there is a competition between Russian clubs and the N.H.L. for the best product on the ice."
> Yashin, A. (2008, February 29) in Russia Is Luring Back N.H.L. Stars. *New York Times*.
> [Player – Lokomotiv Yaroslavl (former NHL player)]

Apart from the caliber of play, amenities are also nearing NHL levels.

> "It's the best place to play hockey beside the NHL… Some of the clubs here are like NHL organizations now. We stay in good hotels, fly charter planes. It wasn't like that 10 years ago."
> Semak, A. (2002, December 7) in Hockey renaissance in Russia. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A3.
> [Player – Dynamo Moscow (former NHL player)]

> "They get everything they need, and most teams have new arenas, modern locker-rooms… It's not the NHL, but it's as close as you can get."
> Gandler, M. (2008, March 13) in Russia fun, but Alexei misses NHL. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. B2.
> [NHLPA-certified Player Agent]

For players, the league represents an option when their NHL opportunities have dried up or are less than ideal. A generational gap can be seen in the migratory trends. Young players, instead of playing for the AHL affiliates of the NHL clubs, among other reasons may choose to return to Russia to pursue their development as a player. Older players may see Russia as an opportunity to gain playing time in the hopes they might impress NHL scouts and return to North America.

> Tampa Bay Lightning forward Evgeny Artyukhin considers his decision to sign with Yaroslavl Lokomotiv of the Russian Super League a way to eventually get more playing time with the NHL club.
> The Ottawa Citizen (2006, August 7) Hockey: Artyukhin move panned. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. D3.

> "We had the interest of three or four (NHL) teams…But at the end of the day we weren't comfortable with not only the compensation, but the situation as a whole…We just decided it was best to go over there, and see where things stand a year from now."
> Diamond, T. (2007, July 22) in Yashin gives up on NHL, moves back to Russia. *The Province*, p. A49.
> [NHLPA-certified Player Agent]

> "Oleg [Saprykin (former NHL player)] wants to play in Russia, have a big offensive year and then have a chance to be a top six guy in the NHL. […] He would've liked to have contributed more."
> Lawton, B. (2007, August 8) in Saprykin wanted much more in Ottawa. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. B3.
> [NHLPA-certified Player Agent]

> "[A] lot of Russian players will decide that unless they're guaranteed an NHL spot, then no, they don't want to come over to North America."
> Warren, K. (2009) Interview 3.

Apart from developmental opportunities, there are a number of other reasons that Russian talent is avoiding the AHL. The league is seen as a less luxurious in terms of team amenities and overall lifestyle, and more violent league than the KHL.

> "[The AHL is] a rough hockey league. You're being challenged all the time, and I still think that the Europeans are getting challenged more than the North American kids – they're always kind of being tested, you know? Can they take the bullshit? […] And the bullshit is

> riding the buses. [...] Unless you're kind of a star in the National Hockey League and making big money, why not play back [in their home country], instead of Syracuse or Hershey..."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

Additionally, AHL salaries are capped at approximately $125,000, meaning that a player's earning potential is severely restricted if he chooses to play for his NHL club's affiliate, a point repeatedly emphasized in the interviews with player agents.

> "[I]f they're in the KHL, they're making good income and the hockey's good. You bring them over here, and let's assume it's a 19 year-old. Let's assume he's not ready for the NHL, which a lot of kids aren't. Let's assume he can't speak English, and let's assume he's not an Alexander Ovechkin-type player, but he's good – they're going to put him in the AHL or the Canadian Hockey League. That player is going to make a heckuva lot less money doing that. When I say a heckuva, I mean a lot less. [...] [F]igure it out - if they're not playing in the NHL, they're throwing probably [*laughs*] $500,000 away... of lost income."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

Even for those considered to be elite talents and able to compete in the NHL (as opposed to simply the AHL), the league's salary restrictions on entry-level contracts mean that the KHL, where such restrictions do not exist, is potentially more lucrative. Under the NHL's 2005 Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), entry-level contracts are limited to approximately $900,000 (the actual amount rises each year until 2011) for the first three years of a player's career, with performance bonuses also limited (National Hockey League, 2005, pp. 24-25). Staying in Russia to play professionally thus becomes more attractive for young players. The NHL CBA is essentially structuring younger players' decisions in this regard.

> "Kirill Petrov, for me, is a top-10 talent... But he's not going to go in the first round, because he's playing for his hometown team, Kazan, and that team is owned by huge oil and natural gas interests and they're paying him a ton more money than what he could make in any entry-level deal. [...] The incentive for him coming over is very small."
> Woodlief, K. (2008, May 29) in Le prospect Nikita; There is no shortage of money to stay in Russia, but this young sniper has dreams of the NHL. *National Post*, p. S3.
> [Scout]

> "I told my bosses in Nashville that I wanted to play at home and some Russian clubs were offering me much better conditions than I had in Nashville."
> Radulov, A. (2008, July 12) in Predators' Radulov defects back to Russia; $13-Million Deal. *National Post*, p. S3.
> [Player – Salavat Yulaev Ufa]

> "[T]ake a 21 year-old, a really good Russian player who comes over, and maybe can play at home for $3-, $4-, $500,000, but if he comes over to the NHL, he may be on a two-way contract, and if he plays in the NHL, he might make $6-, $700,000, but if he's in the minor leagues it may be more like $80,000 or $90,000. So it does make a big difference, and a lot of Russian players will decide that unless they're guaranteed an NHL spot, then no, they don't want to come over to North America."
> Warren, K. (2009) Interview 3.

> "If you have a young hockey player in Russia, you'll make more playing in Russia than you will in the NHL for the first four years for example, because of our entry-level contracts. So it's the players that really want to come over – they'll come over, 'cause they're going to make less money for the first three years at least of that contract."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

Similarly, the CBA works to structure the decisions of older players. Under the CBA, contracts for players older than 35 cannot be removed from a team's overall salary cap figure, regardless of injury or retirement. Again, this differs from the situation in Russia. The clause has led to a situation whereby NHL teams are often hesitant to sign older players to long-term contracts, and instead negotiate short, often one-year, contracts instead, a disincentive for many players to continue to play in the NHL.

> "[I]t looks like with the new CBA, it's tough for older guys to sign long-term contracts because teams are worried you're going to get injured or retire and they're stuck with the salary on the salary cap."
> Jagr, J. (2008, July 4) in Leaving NHL the hardest decision: Jagr. Toronto Star.
> [Player – Avangard Omsk]

The notion of the RSL/KHL as an alternative to the NHL has manifested itself a number of contract controversies. As money seems to be easily available for top talent in Russia, for veteran players not bounden by entry-level restrictions, playing in their home country has been used as a bargaining chip for contract negotiations with the NHL clubs holding their rights. Following the NHL lockout of 2004-05, a number of high profile players threatened to remain in Russia. Pavel Datsyuk and Ilya Kovalchuk used the prospect of playing in Russia as leverage in their negotiations with the Detroit Red Wings and the Atlanta Thrashers respectively (King, 2007, p. 82), while the tactic was also used by Evgeni Nabokov (of the San Jose Sharks) and Nikolai Zherdev (of the Columbus Blue Jackets).

> "It gives some of our guys another place to play…It gives them some leverage they might not otherwise have, which is to present to their NHL teams that they have a competing offer from a KHL team, and (they can) maybe improve their bargaining position."
> Kelly, P. (2008, July 11) in Hockey tries hand at glasnost with Russians, NHL. *Toronto Star*, p. S1.
> [Director – NHLPA]

Apart from the financial incentives of playing in Russia, there are a host of other considerations for players. Many of these concerns are with regard to lifestyle and family issues (especially with regard to older players), and playing conditions, and have led to players returning to the country even if their NHL prospects were more lucrative than offers in the RSL/KHL.

> "[P]eople forget that the Russians are a very proud and melancholy people, and playing in Russia, playing at home is not such a bad deal. […] It's much nicer to be at home and playing for your home team and among your own people. I think people forget that. It's a very important aspect of it. […] [A] lot of the boys will tell you – that the National Hockey League, and living in Philadelphia is not the greatest thing in the world… […] I think they're very comfortable playing there, just very comfortable. That may sound very simplified, but I think it's as simple as that. They're home. […] And you can't say why, there's just so much more money, and they say 'Well, I have my house, I have my cottage in the country…' and so on. […] [T]here's a kind of a romanticism about professional hockey, that's been shared by so many people, like 'Yeah, I can make a lot of money and it's great,' and this kind of thing, but this is not the end-all."
> Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

> "As long as a player, and this goes across the world, is getting the ice time, enjoying the game, and making a good salary, you'll never hear a complaint. […] A lot of players now, the ones we represent, will never come over. They're very content with playing in their homeland. Family is one reason. […] [T]he Russian hockey player, as I said before, they all want to play in the best league. But are they ready to learn the English language, North American customs and so forth? That's very difficult for these guys."
> Hedges, R. (2009) Interview 2.

These types of concerns seem to be more pertinent for older players, with family concerns and retirement coming into the picture.

> "I think a lot of the players want their kids to be raised as whatever they were. That's always a bit of a difficulty, and so they end up going back. Of course a lot of them get involved – it's easier for the Europeans to get involved in hockey from that end, than on this side, if you want to get into hockey as a scout or as a manager or that kind of thing. [...] I think you can float a little easier there. You can make kind of the same money, you don't have to answer the bell… and you know, I think the toll that is taken on a National Hockey League player is greater than you'd think. Just the physical toll… and then there's such a toll just being up for 74, 84 games – you've got to be there all the time, so I think there's something to do with that. And they just think 'I should take the easy out and go back and play in the Russian

league, and play for 5 or 6 more seasons, and make a good buck, be with the family, and that kind of thing.'"
Holmes, D. (2009) Interview 1.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

The results of this project show a clear change in hockey's World System as it is apparent that Russia may soon join North America in the core. While Russia's hockey system underwent tremendous upheaval as the country experienced political and social instability, it is currently experiencing a renaissance. This renaissance reflects changes in the political economy of Russia as a whole, with influencing factors that include the country's economic recovery, the rise of an oligarchic class, the renationalization of industries, and a rise in Russian nationalism. At the same time, the Russian hockey system is benefiting from changes to the North American political economy over the past two decades, changes that ultimately weaken the NHL.

This chapter first presents major political economic changes in Russia and North America and explores changes specific to hockey in each region. The impacts of these changes on hockey's World System and the migrant typology are then discussed.

6.1 Major Changes in Political Economy

6.1.1 Russia after the Dissolution of the Soviet Union

Certainly the most notable change that influenced the migration of players to North America was the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December of 1991. A number of factors led up to the fall of the communist regime, not least of which was a drop in world oil prices (Goldman, 2008). As the country's production of oil had begun to stagnate in the mid-1980s due mainly to the deterioration of infrastructure and inefficiencies of central planning (Gaĭdar & Bouis, 2007), the price drop hit the economy quite hard. Oil exports decreased significantly, leading to trade deficits. The Soviet Union's economy struggled to the point that the communist government could no longer maintain power over its constituent republics, having to withdraw

the resources needed to ensure a military presence (Gaĭdar & Bouis, 2007). The weakness of the central communist regime emboldened the regional governments, with Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia proclaiming sovereignty in 1990 (Gaĭdar & Bouis, 2007), followed by Belarus, Russia and Ukraine in 1991.

Russia, under Boris Yeltsin, faced an uphill battle in improving its economy, as the same problems that had plagued the Soviet regime understandably continued to adversely affect Russia. Russia's key export was less than lucrative; oil production remained flat as prices for the commodity remained low (Goldman, 2008). Yeltsin's government, faced with enormous deficits, introduced broad liberalization of the country's economy, with the resources industry consequently undergoing mass privatization. In 1993, Gazprom (which had formerly been the Ministry of the Gas Industry) went from being state-owned to being a private joint stock company, with shares made available to the public (Goldman, 2008). Many of the resource companies soon found themselves in the hands of a select few individuals who were able to manipulate the banking and bond markets thanks to government connections and weak oversight (O'Brien, 1998), giving rise to an oligarchic class rich enough to weather an economic storm.

By 1998, despite Yeltsin's reforms, Russia's economy was still far from stable. The country faced a currency crisis as the government faced multiple economic hurdles. Firstly, the economy was still experiencing the shock of the transition to free market principles, which had lead to hyperinflation as prices were no longer controlled by the state. Secondly, as oil production remained stagnant, the government defaulted on its debts as it was unable to overcome falling commodity prices brought about by the "Asian economic flu" and the resulting lack of accompanying tax revenues (PBS, 1998). The fall of the ruble against international

currencies – the ruble lost 41% of its value against the Deutschmark in a single day on August 26, 1998 (PBS, 1998) – severely weakened Russia's bargaining power with other nations.

With Boris Yelstin's inability to turn Russia's fortunes around, there was a great opportunity to enact changes in the way Russia's economy was run. Reforms under Vladimir Putin have been described as both corporatist (Smith, 2003) and state-capitalist (Baker, 2004), with the government taking a direct interest in the way that the country's corporations were being run. Through the early years of Putin's presidency, the government would move to buy back stakes of the country's largest corporations sold off under Yeltsin, retaking controlling interest of, among others, Gazprom (Baker, 2004). The moves proved fortuitous as the price of oil reached unprecedented levels over the following years (see Figure 10), allowing resource revenues to grow tremendously and the country's economy to stabilize. The country's GDP growth over 2002-2005 (approximately 7% per year) was characterized as "strong" and allowed for budgetary surpluses, which in turn allowed for increases in spending on education, health and sport (World Bank Moscow Office, 2005, pp. 2-9).

Putin also moved to restore social and political stability. Among the strategies used to win support within the country were the co-optation of opposition parties and a restoration of Soviet symbols, such as the national anthem, to win over those still somewhat loyal to the communists (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation being the main opposition to the Putin-supported *Yedinaya Rossiya*) (Smith, 2003). Controversially, the government also curbed freedom of speech, with the government taking over Rossiya TV and Channel One (and Gazprom taking ownership of NTV), and placed tight restrictions on independent news media (Kramer, 2007). Such measures allowed Putin to solidify his power domestically.

While Russia hasn't returned to quite the lofty status held by the Soviet Union, it has demonstrated increasing confidence on the world stage, highlighted recently by a parade in Red Square "to show off Russia's new missiles and tanks [...] and mark its return as a military power" (Laruelle, 2009, p. 6). Putin has also repeatedly called for changes to what he sees as a "unipolar world" (Baldwin, 2007), and used heated rhetoric in discussing international relations. Over the course of his presidency, Putin actively engaged in disputes over the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – using the threat of nuclear force in an attempt to dissuade Ukrainian entry into the organization (Finn, 2008) – as well as the United States' involvement in the Kosovo crisis and its invasion of Iraq without the support of the United Nations (UN) (Wagnsson, 2005). It should be noted that Ukraine's entry into NATO was not an isolated instance of Russia threatening or using force against a former Soviet republic, having engaged in military action in Georgia in a dispute over the Russia-aligned regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Laruelle, 2009) – an incursion was undeniably nationalistic.

6.1.2 North America and Globalization

Just as Russia was undergoing incredible change in the 1980s and 1990s, it can be argued that so too was much of the rest of the world as "globalization" became the buzzword *du jour*, with the notion that national barriers were being broken down in all spheres of life, be it economics or sport.

Within the economic sphere, patterns of globalization have been characterized by neoliberal policies that facilitated trade and a deregulation of financial markets that would allow for the flow of capital across borders (Harvey, Rail, & Thibault, 1996); transnational corporations became the norm.

In sport, the movement of athletes in Europe came to be greatly unrestricted, highlighted by the Bosman ruling in 1995, which opened up a new market for European players in the various professional sports leagues, rendering the idea of foreign athletes in domestic competition perfectly normal. Similarly, in North America, antitrust challenges weakened the various professional leagues' abilities to restrict player movement through the use of reserve clauses (in which teams would maintain exclusive rights to players even after their contracts had expired) (Berry, Gould, & Staudohar, 1986).

6.2 Changes in the Political Economy of Hockey

6.2.1 Russia

The fall of the Soviet Union had a tremendous impact on Russian hockey. Just as the country dealt with financial and social collapse, the country's hockey system fell into disarray. The Soviet League, in existence for over 40 years, dissolved without state support. In what remained of its professional hockey infrastructure, a loose assembly of clubs that would join together for league play (first the MHL, then the RHL and the RSL), clubs fell victim to the NHL. *Perestroika* allowed players to pursue professional opportunities abroad, and many, including outspoken greats Viacheslav Fetisov and Igor Larionov (see section 5.5), did. Players would sign with foreign (NHL) clubs through the IIHF transfer agreement with little compensation to their Russian clubs in return; controversy over the signings of Alexander Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin would eventually lead the RHF to drop out of the agreement (see section 5.4). An international labour market came to exist and skilled Russian labourers were choosing to leave.

In parallel fashion, the importance placed on international victories declined greatly. The new international labour market for the Russian players adversely affected the country's national

team program (refer back to Figures 8 and 9). As players were now contract-bound, NHL playoff schedules took precedence over World Championship participation. For Russian players, the ultimate championship became the Stanley Cup; the ultimate level of competition became the NHL. The NHL had stolen the throne that had been held by the 'Red Machine' and hockey dominance had a distinctly North American appearance.

The rise of Vladimir Putin, and the resurgence of Russia during his presidency, finds many parallels with the Russian hockey renaissance. Changes to the operation of Russian hockey were put into place for specific, nationalist, reasons. Deliberate actions, evidenced by the appointment of player-friendly coaches and managers such as Viacheslav Fetisov instead of hard-liners such as Viktor Tikhonov to run the national team program (see section 5.2), were taken to strengthen what had become a weakened system, depleted through years of labour migration and mismanagement.

Beginning in the early 2000s, with newfound resource wealth, Russia's elite, a loose partnership of business and government, put in place a plan of action to reenergize the country's athletic development, investing heavily in new infrastructure and attempting to lure back homegrown talent. As KHL President Alexander Medvedev would later mention, "the sponsors and owners understand that hockey in Russia is not just business, it's of great social importance," (in Clark, 2009), echoing the assertions of Wilson (1994) and Gorman and Calhoun (1994) on the importance of sporting prestige to a region (Clark, 2009). Under Putin, a major proponent of personal fitness, state spending on training facilities rose considerably. With an incredible history of success in ice hockey to recapture, new arenas were built at a brisk pace. Government-controlled corporations began to invest in professional leagues, eventually culminating in the development of the KHL (see section 5.3), a league founded on the back of

Gazprom profits that would serve to consolidate the Russian professional model. New Russian hockey leadership turned to forceful rhetoric in affirming its presence, and firmly established a position of independence from what it saw as the NHL's "arrogance and ignorance" (Medvedev in LeBrun, 2009). Quotas and fines were instituted on foreign-born players, with bold (or at least competitive) contract offers made (to players such as Alexander Radulov and Alexei Yashin) in attempts to repatriate homegrown talent. Russia withdrew from international agreements that had guaranteed easy migration to the NHL and effected changes to labour law, a stop-loss policy that would curtail players leaving for North America.

Where previously a strong state machinery had been lacking, nowhere more evident than in the mismanagement and outdated coaching tactics of the Russian national team in the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia was able to put in place a formidable cast of supporters to lead the hockey renaissance. Alexander Medvedev of Gazprom rose to prominence (see Table 3), spurring the development of the new professional league and taking positions with the RHF and the IIHF. Vladislav Tretiak and Viacheslav Fetisov, both acclaimed superstars of the Soviet hockey system, gained positions of power within the professional leagues and in government, becoming close associates of Putin in the process. Sergei Naryshkin, the country's Deputy Prime Minister even came to hold the top executive position with the KHL. These were individuals with influence, both financially and politically, and were able to effect change.

6.2.2 North America

While Russian hockey fell into disarray, the NHL solidified its core status in hockey. Domestically this was facilitated through the increasing bargaining power of the NHLPA and the involvement of mass media conglomerates, turning the NHL into a lucrative enterprise. In negotiations during the 1994-1995 partial-season lockout, the NHLPA was able to secure

unrestricted free agency for its membership (Hochberg, 1995), allowing for salaries to climb dramatically in an open market and in turn increasing the league's reputation in the eyes of players. In 1993, player salaries averaged $572,161 per season; by 2003 this number had reached $1.8 million (Conrad, 2006). Corporations such as Disney Corp. (whose holdings include ESPN and ABC) and AOL-Time Warner took up ownership of sports franchises (in hockey, The Mighty Ducks of Anaheim and Atlanta Thrashers respectively), ensuring the presence of the league on the airwaves (Law, Harvey, & Kemp, 2002) – in 1999 the league signed a five-year, $600 million broadcast deal with ESPN and ABC (CTV, 2005) – and in the cases of expansion franchises, expanding the league's geographic footprint and increasing league revenues. Just as player salaries had jumped, so too did the NHL's revenues, from $500 million in 1993 to $1.93 billion in 2003 (Conrad, 2006).

Buoyed by the involvement and sponsorship of transnational corporations such as Nike (Harvey, Rail, & Thibault, 1996), the league looked to expand its international relationships. In 1994, the league formalized its relationship with European hockey federations in signing a transfer agreement through the IIHF, which simplified the task of signing players from their European clubs. The agreement removed the need for NHL clubs to negotiate directly with their European counterparts, instead relying on a standardized process (Wise & Meyer, 1997). From inception, the transfer agreement was arguably unfair with regard to compensation, as players no longer needed permission from their respective clubs (rather only from their federations) to leave for the NHL. Further to the dismay of clubs, while there would be compensation, this was at a standard level for all players, regardless of talent level. The transfer agreement ultimately meant a greater number of European players in the NHL and therefore an increasing attraction of fans outside of North America.

Additionally, in establishing an international presence, the NHL has sought to maximize its exposure to fans through competition and broadcast rights outside of North America. Since 2001, NHL games have been distributed through NTV-Plus and TV7 in Russia and the Galaxie satellite network in the Czech Republic (Sports Business International, 2001), and since 2004 has had an agreement in place with the North American Sports Network to broadcast games across all of Europe and parts of Asia (The Canadian Press, 2005). The league has also chosen to allow its players to participate in the three most recent Winter Olympics, as well as the upcoming competition in Vancouver in 2010, a move that suspends league play for a period of over two weeks (the league may, however, end its Olympic participation, citing the costs of schedule disruption) (CBC Sports, 2007). In addition to suspending play for international competition, the league has, since 1989, played exhibition games Sweden, Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Japan, and England, and taken its regular season abroad, with season-opening games in London, Stockholm and Prague (National Hockey League, 2009).

While league revenues grew incredibly during the 1990s, the NHL's growth did not ensure profitability for its teams. While the league maintains a non-statutory labour exemption from antitrust laws (Wise & Meyer, 1997), the threat of a player strike in 1994 led the league to concede to NHLPA demands for unrestricted free agency. This ultimately resulted in skyrocketing salaries that became unsustainable. A revenue gap had grown between teams in major markets and those in smaller markets, creating a situation whereby small market teams could not afford to compete for talent. Many teams were hit with massive financial losses and the media conglomerates that had spurred growth began to pull out. The Mighty Ducks of Anaheim reportedly lost $40 million in the two seasons that preceded their sale by the Disney

Corp. (Foster & Shaikin, 2005), while AOL-Time Warner's sale of the Atlanta Thrashers went through as a debt reduction measure (Odum, 2003). The broadcast deal with ESPN and ABC came to an abrupt and disappointing end as the networks declined to pick up the option to extend the contract even at half the previous rate (CTV, 2005).

The NHL found itself in an untenable setup and financial woes led to owners pushing for cost certainty. This would take the form of a salary cap during collective bargaining, a point that the NHLPA was originally unwilling to concede, eventually resulting in the lockout of 2004-2005 as the two sides remained at a stalemate. When the parties finally agreed on a deal, it was the NHLPA that would be left reeling as salaries would now be capped – in aggregate for teams, at the individual level for both veteran players (no player can earn more than 20% of the team cap amount) and for younger players (entry-level deals would now be severely restricted in order to minimize the risk of signing unproven talent) (Conrad, 2006). Another barrier for players was that the contracts of older players – those over the age of 35 – would count toward a team's salary cap figure, regardless of whether the player was still in the league or not. This move was meant to reduce the risk of signing talent that may be more prone to injury or likely to retire. With the restrictions in place, both older and younger players were effectively being dissuaded from signing NHL contracts.

6.3 Changes in Hockey's World System

The notion that the NHL is alone at the core of hockey's World System has been put into question as Russians, and others, are beginning to consider the KHL as a viable alternative. Russia's reversal of fortune, its attempted transformation from this status as a semi-periphery nation, still incomplete, has been along two of Wallerstein's (1974) possible paths. Wallerstein outlined three paths to transformation, that of seizing the chance, in which a semi-periphery

nation takes advantage of a momentary vulnerability in the core due to major events such as war, that of promotion by invitation, in which a core nation aligns with a semi-periphery nation to solidify its position in the face of threat, and finally, that of self-reliance, in which the semi-periphery enacts protectionist policies and breaks off relationships of dependency with the core. It is argued here that Russia has taken a dual path in its transformation from semi-periphery, utilizing a strategy of self-reliance as hypothesized, but also seizing the chance – capitalizing on the catastrophic disruption that was 2004-05 NHL lockout.

6.3.1 Self-reliance

Russia's return to hockey prominence is well under way, with successes seen both professionally and in international competition. As of writing, Russia has captured their second consecutive IIHF World Championship (see Figure 9), again defeating Canada in the final. The victory allowed Russia to claim the top spot in the 2009 IIHF rankings (IIHF, 2009), leading Sport Minister Vitaly Mutko to declare that Russia has "returned to the leadership of world hockey," (RIA Novosti, 2009). The national team's success has followed a de-emphasis on NHL players. The number of local professionals on the team has grown in recent years both at the Olympic level and at the World Championship level, with eighteen of twenty-five players on the most recent national team entry being selected from KHL clubs (in 2000 the team had only eight players from the RSL); Alexei Morozov of Ak-Bars Kazan has served as captain of the two recent gold-medal winning World Championship squads. Russia's Olympic team have also seen a decline in the presence of NHL players, with only 16 participating in the 2006 competition, down from 22 in 2002 and 1998 (IIHF, 2008; Hockey Hall of Fame and Museum, 2008).

In the professional sphere, with North America having undeniably solidified its role as the core in the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia could at best have been considered semi-periphery

– while the RSL could draw talent from former Soviet states, its own elite talent was being drawn away. That changed as money and leadership came into the league. For the 2004-05 season the RSL took advantage of the greater availability of talent, signing not only Russian-born, but North American-born players, an action that was facilitated by a strategy of self-reliance within Russia's hockey system. Continued focus and investment in Russian hockey domestically eventually led to the formation of the KHL, which has risen to become an enticing choice for players as evidenced by player comments (see section 5.7).

The KHL would ostensibly serve as a "continental" venture, though it would be firmly rooted in Russia. While it has experienced difficulties, the league has had success. Clubs have been able to secure NHL-calibre talent and the league is moving forward with plans to expand. Alexander Radulov will remain with Salavat Yulaev Ufa (Staples, 2009), while a number of veteran Russians (Viktor Kozlov, Sergei Fedorov) are expected to join the league this year (El-Bashir, 2009). International talent also sees the KHL as an option, with Jaromir Jagr having signed to play with Avangard Omsk for three years, and high-profile younger players such as Marek Zagrapan of Slovakia (a first-round draft pick of the Buffalo Sabres) choosing the Russian league instead of the NHL (Štulajter, 2009). Additionally, though a number of Russian teams are reportedly close to failure, the league is pushing forward with plans for expansion, with Karlovy Vary of the Czech league publicly announcing their intentions to join the league (IIHF, 2009). Five teams from the Swedish Elitserien have also expressed an interest in partnering with the KHL for the upcoming seasons (Jonasson, 2009), a move that may be a preemptive strike to ensure that top Swedish talent remains in Sweden, with players such as Matthias Weinhandl and Linus Omark already having left for Russia and a number of elite prospects having been selected in the KHL's inaugural draft (KHL, 2009). For the KHL the move makes a great deal of sense

as it would help the league establish a greater foothold in Western Europe, an area that appears to be the next front for Russia's conflict with the NHL. With the ability to draw top talent a key indicator in determining one's place within the hockey World System, the idea that top teams in Sweden – one of the stronger semi-periphery hockey nations (see Table 1) – may now be looking to align with the KHL is highly indicative of Russia's movement toward the core.

6.3.2 Seizing the Chance

On the NHL's side of the issue, the lockout significantly damaged the league's status in that it allowed for competition to make inroads – a result of the lockout was greater exposure to the Russian professional system. Without North America in the picture (save for the few who chose to play in the AHL or otherwise), at least 245 of the NHL's players chose to spend the season in Europe, with the RSL as a top destination (Associated Press, 2004). Some of these players chose not to return – the number of Russian players in the NHL dropped significantly (see Figure 3).

Because of the current CBA, the NHL is also in the precarious position of being directly responsible for the non-renewal of talent in the league. Not only are Russian players hesitant to sign entry-level contracts with the league (see comments in section 5.7), but younger Western European and even North American players have also chosen the KHL – Mark Giordano, now of the Calgary Flames, signed with Dynamo Moscow instead of agreeing to a two-way contract with the Flames that allowed for the possibility of a drastically reduced salary at the AHL level (Sportak, 2007). Likewise, the salary cap hit for older players may be seen as encouraging the departure of veteran talent.

If the KHL is able to remain viable, there exists a great possibility that the number of Europeans in the league will drop sharply, led by the departure of the Russians. Though some

elite talent continues to take the risk of the entry-level contract, the restrictions may prevent lesser, albeit still NHL-calibre talent from entering the league, in turn strengthening the KHL and how it is perceived, with the eventuality of the leagues becoming viewed as equivalent. Russians will be rendered an even smaller minority in the NHL than today, making adaptation to North America more difficult, in turn further increasing the barriers to entry. If the KHL is successful in its plans for expansion, similar patterns of migration (leaving North America) may occur. Statistics point to the European presence in the NHL already being in decline. The 2007-08 season represented the first time since 2000 that European players comprised less than 25% of all NHL players – 242 in all; down from a peak of 300 in 2003-04 (IIHF, 2009).

6.4 Changes in the Player Decision

A major shift has taken place in the migration patterns of Russian players, with current trends showing a clear distinction from those of only a few years ago. As discussed, the lockout season of 2004-05 serves as a turning point in migration trends. Not only was this a season that saw the NHL severely weakened by a labour stoppage, but it saw the implementation of a restrictive CBA that has ultimately structured the decisions of certain segments of players. It was also a season marked by a resurgence of hockey in Russia as NHL players sought professional opportunities elsewhere. The RSL was becoming better able to compete with the salaries and amenities offered by its North American counterpart. These changes had tremendous impact on the decision-making process, with a change in priorities as a number of factors became more balanced between North America and Russia.

Prior to the 2004-05 season, migration patterns held to a model that saw the NHL as the core of hockey's world system, and saw Russia as part of the semi-periphery. The NHL was in a position whereby it could draw talent from other leagues, notably the RSL. One of the primary

reasons for this is that Russian clubs were not able to compete in terms of the salaries they were able to offer players; NHL salaries in the early 2000s were unquestionably the most lucrative of any league in the world. In Magee and Sugden's (2002) migrant typology, the most prominent factor in a player's decision to migrate is financial security (the Mercenary). The NHL was able to offer this like no other league could; to maximize their potential earnings, the world's best players sought to play the NHL.

The financial appeal of the NHL to the world's best players is a point that reinforces a secondary factor in a player's decision to migrate – the desire to compete against top competition (the Ambitionist). The NHL essentially monopolized the world's elite talent through its ability to provide the most financial security, ensuring the best on-ice product of any league. According to Magee and Sugden (2002), within the Ambitionist category, we see a desire to improve one's own skills, but also the notion of ascension to certain leagues as benchmarks in one's professional development. In hockey, the NHL represented the pinnacle of professional development; if players were able to secure a roster spot in the league, they could feel confident that they themselves were among the world's best.

The Mercenary and the Ambitionist were unquestionably the most prominent categories in the migrant typology in the early part of the decade. The NHL's ability to draw talent was so unmatched in its ability to provide financial security and an elite level of competition, that it rendered other factors unimportant.

Since the 2004-05 season, the situation has changed considerably. Russian players are choosing to play in Russia instead of the NHL. The categories of the migrant typology that were so important earlier in the decade remain important, but are now of lesser importance, giving way to other factors that the players must consider.

For the Mercenary, the notion of financial security is a complex issue and is somewhat paradoxical in the post-lockout era; while the NHL can still provide the most lucrative contracts (with its greater salary cap), there is inherent risk involved for most Russian players.

Under the current CBA, young players are subject to entry-level restrictions that hamper their earning potential and face the ever-present threat of demotion to the minor leagues (see section 5.7). Young players thus may choose to spend the early parts of their career in the Russian professional system, initially earning more than they would in the NHL. For the NHL this is an awkward situation wherein players may never actualize their migration to North America, instead becoming comfortable with the reasonable rate of pay in their homeland. This uncertainty surrounding the availability of players has led to a decline in the number of Russians selected in the NHL entry draft (see Figure 6). If the players develop their skills and perform at a high (though not elite) level, they can expect to receive contract offers that would best what NHL teams would be willing to offer (the reasoning being that while the players were able to perform in the KHL, they remained unproven in the NHL).

For the elite talents, there was consensus among the interview subjects that most would still take the risk of lower pay in the NHL during the initial stages of their careers (see comments by Kabanov in section 5.5 and example of Evgeni Malkin in section 1.1.1.1) with the benefit that by the time their entry-level contracts expired that they would have achieved success and thus be able to command salaries far greater than those in Russia.

For older players the Russian professional system now makes more sense because they are more likely to be able to sign longer-term contracts, thus maximizing their late-stage earning potential (see comments by Jagr in section 5.7).

The end result is that the NHL will likely continue to see fewer Russians of the IIHF's Class 3 designation ("Solid NHLer") (see Figure 11), with an overrepresentation of Class 4 or Class 5 talents (see Appendix V).

Where the situation is also unclear is with regard to players aspiring to the world's best league (the Ambitionist). The NHL still holds the designation of league's best, but the opinion among players is that the Russian league is becoming very competitive (see section 5.7). The league is already regarded as the best on the continent and is considered superior to the AHL, a reputation that will grow if the league can continue to draw talent. While players may strive for the NHL, as it still holds the most allure for players, it is no longer seen as the only elite-level option. Players may be willing to trade the prestige of the NHL for other benefits.

As financial security (the Mercenary) and the chance to play in the best league in the world (the Ambitionist) have less impact on the migratory patterns of the Russian players as the RSL/KHL nears parity with the NHL, the secondary categories of the migrant typology, the Settler, the Nomadic Cosmopolitan, the Exile, and the Expelled, become more evident and require greater scrutiny.

One of the repeated reasons for players staying in Russia was the ability to live a comfortable lifestyle (the Settler), free of cultural obstacles and in closer proximity to one's established social networks (family, friends) (see comments from Interview 1 and Interview 2 at the end of section 5.7). Moving to a new country for employment can often present hurdles in the form of language and customs. Many of the players that have come over have had difficulty integrating (see section 5.6). The primary issue here is one of language, where communicating effectively can become burdensome, often requiring the use of a translator, and can be especially difficult within the workplace, discussing one's situation with a general manager or plays with a

coach. Players that have come to North America have looked to veteran Russian players for mentorship, advice, and translation services (see section 5.6). A smaller number of Russians in the league would ultimately mean a smaller number of such mentors, especially with a dearth of Russian or even European coaches in the NHL, rendering the adaptation process more difficult than it already is. Playing in the KHL would present no such difficulties for Russians, as they would be speaking their native language. For families the difficulty is removed from the team setting, but the burden still exists. Language as a consideration becomes important not only in day-to-day communications, but in the rearing of children. One of the reasons that so few Russian players move permanently to North America is because they want their children raised in the Russian culture, learning the Russian language – a veritable impossibility in North America. In the NHL, the Settler, though indicated in a number of examples, is rare; with fewer mentors, it will likely become increasingly rare. Again, this would represent a shift in patterns of migration – cultural comfort is an incentive for players to return to Russia and play in the RSL/KHL.

Additionally, it can be argued that, rather than being rare – as suggested by Magee and Sugden (2002), many of the players returning to Russia would fall into the category of the Exile. The lack of satisfactory professional opportunities means that players will seek out alternative leagues. Veteran players are not receiving contract offers because of salary cap issues, while borderline talents are returning home instead of accepting demotions to the NHL's minor leagues. The RSL/KHL thus becomes an acceptable second choice for many.

Finally, the remaining categories of the Nomadic Cosmopolitan and of the Expelled were not readily evident in any of the data for this project.

At least for the world of hockey, the typology of sports labour migration as used by Magee and Sugden (2002) seems to be fairly accurate, despite the authors' assertions that it need not necessarily apply to sports other than football. First and foremost, players are looking for financial security (the Mercenary), with other factors being of a secondary nature. This has shown itself both in the decisions to migrate to North America and the decisions to return to, or stay in, Russia. Migration patterns changed significantly as the Russian professional system came to prominence during the NHL lockout season of 2004-05 – Russia became a viable option both in terms of the salaries that the RSL/KHL is able to offer and in terms of the level of play. No longer do players have to play in North America to earn lucrative contracts or compete against elite talent.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

This project sought to explore the relationship between changes in the political economy of Russian hockey and the factors that shape in the migratory decisions of Russian players. The underlying assumption was that a decline in the number of Russian players in the NHL would put into question its position as the world's premier league. In looking at the issue in the context of changes to the operating environment of hockey worldwide, it was hypothesized that the declining presence of Russian players was due to increased salary restrictions in the NHL, a reemergence of Russia's professional hockey system, and national pride, the latter factors constituting a strategy of self-reliance within Wallerstein's World Systems Theory. The data in many ways supports the original hypothesis.

It has been shown that salary restrictions have had a tremendous impact on the number of Russian players in the NHL. Patterns of migration have changed, with many players choosing Russia's KHL instead of the NHL. As the salary cap of the NHL's CBA limits player salaries, earning potential is restricted; lucrative contracts are available, but only to elite players – otherwise, comparable salaries are increasingly available in the KHL. Because of this, non-elite players who have held regular roster spots on NHL teams are returning to Russia. Specific rules have also influenced the decisions of those near the beginning or end of their careers. The CBA dissuades both younger and older players alike; entry-level contracts are capped, negatively impacting possible earnings, while salary cap rules are not conducive to the signing of older players to contracts that provide financial security. As a result, players are more likely to investigate their options in other, less restrictive leagues.

This project supports the main points of Magee and Sugden's (2002) formulation of a migrant typology. The primary factor in the decision to migrate is that of financial security (the Mercenary), with a secondary factor being the chance to play in the best league in the world (the Ambitionist). After these factors however, the typology is somewhat weaker; the Nomadic Cosmopolitan and Expelled categories were non-existent in this study, while the Settler and the Exile were seemingly only relevant to returning players. The primacy of these first two categories, however, may be reflective of the fact that there has existed for some time only one hockey league (the NHL) that could claim core status, with the drop in salaries and level of overall talent in other leagues so significant that other factors were negligible.

This project also supports the idea that a country's overall economic health is key to its position within a sport-specific World System. The strength of Russian hockey reflects the country's increasing confidence on the world stage, a rise that has been fueled by resource industries. Notably, the KHL was founded with the primary backing of Gazprom, a nationalized corporation that is one of the world's largest natural gas producers. As the Russian economy grew, both government and the business sector – characterized by the involvement of a new oligarchic class – became able to invest heavily in hockey, often sponsoring or taking ownership of teams. As a result, team budgets increased to the point that they became competitive with those in the NHL, spurring the return of players.

These findings support the use of World Systems Theory as a viable framework for understanding migration in sport. The foundations of Wallerstein's (1976) theory are sound. This project upholds the idea that a country's economic health contributes significantly to its role in relationships of power, as does its ability to develop a strong professional sport system,

supporting previous studies that have utilized sport-specific understandings, such as those of Magee and Sugden (2002) and McGovern (2000).

This project is unique from previous studies, however, in that it demonstrates that transformative possibilities exist within a sport-specific World System and can be actualized. Russia is currently transitioning from the semi-periphery to a shared position in the core with North America and this is having an incredible impact on talent entering and leaving the NHL. This is a significant contribution to our understanding of sport migration in that it demonstrates that migratory patterns are dynamic – they can and do change – and provides a theoretical framework by which to understand these changes.

It is acknowledged here however, that there are certain limitations to this work. While certain points of the hypothesis were supported, there are elements that did not become apparent in the data. While connections have been made between political economic factors in both Russia and North America, what remains unclear from the original hypothesis is the connection between Russian hockey and national pride. While certainly the KHL has been a successful venture as far as Russian hockey is concerned, at no time was the return of players directly characterized as demonstrative of Russia's prominence outside of the sphere of hockey. Also tenuous is the connection between the national team program and Russia's professional system – can recent Russian victories in international competition be attributed to the rise of the RSL/KHL, or are improvements in both areas simply parallel results?

Additionally, though this project accomplishes its primary objective of understanding the migration of Russian players, broader questions have been revealed. Importantly, we are left with the question of what these changes in hockey's World System ultimately mean. The role of other semi-periphery nations is an area that requires further study in order to achieve a complete

understanding of the issue; just as we can identify significant changes in Russian migration, so too can we see changes in the numbers of other Europeans. Will a greater Eurasian influence lead to increased conflict over contracts? Even within the core, what factors are leading to the increased participation of players from the United States? Will North America continue to maintain its position within the core? All of these questions provide the opportunity for further study.

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE – SAMPLE QUESTIONS

A.1 Biographical Questions

- Can you tell me the recent history of players coming to the NHL from Russia?
- What factors led them to leave their local club team?

A.2 Professional Hockey and Life in North America

- How do the players perceive the NHL?
    - Are there things that the players like or dislike?
- What are some of the key differences they would identify between the NHL and hockey in Russia?
- How do they perceive the AHL as the NHL's lower league?
- How do you think that Russians are perceived in the NHL?
- Do the players think there is a different style of play in North America?
- Do you think that the players' styles are compatible with this?
- How well do you think the players have integrated into the community here?
    - Do you think that there is a language barrier?
- Do players spend the offseason in North America or Russia, and if so, why?

A.3 Professional Hockey in Russia

- How do players perceive professional hockey in Russia?
    - Are there things that players like or dislike?
- Do you think that Russian hockey has changed recently?

- What would you identify as the most important changes since 2000?
- Do the players think that Russian hockey is headed in the right direction?

A.4 Decision-Making Process

- What has been the biggest factor for players deciding to play in North America?
  - Of what importance is salary to the players?
  - Of what importance is playing against top talent to the players?
  - Of what importance is living abroad to the players?
- Have many [current NHL] players ever considered returning to Russia?
- Have many [current NHL] players received offers to play in the Russian Superleague or the new Continental Hockey League?
- Under what circumstances do you think players would return to play in Russia?
- Would players consider playing somewhere other than North America or Russia?
- If the players were young, and had to choose between Russia and the NHL today, which would they likely choose?
- If the players were near retirement, and had to choose between Russia and the NHL today, which would they likely choose?
- Do the players consult many others in making their decisions?
- How important is the agent in deciding where to play?
- What do the players think of the return of several prominent players to Russia?
- During the NHL lockout of 2004-05, many players returned to Russia. What was the general player experience during the lockout, and how has it affected their decisions since then?

A.5 Relations between the NHL and Russia

- How is the IIHF transfer agreement perceived by players?
- How do players perceive Russia's refusal to sign the agreement?
- In your opinion, would a young player develop better in North America or Russia?
- Russia's performance in international competitions has not been at the same level as it was during the Soviet years. Why do you think this is?
- Do you think that a country's professional system affects its international play?

APPENDIX II

NHL PLAYERS BORN IN RUSSIA OR THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Given Name	Family Name	NHL Games[ix]
Dmitry	Afanasenkov	227
Maxim	Afinogenov	465
Nikita	Alexeev	159
Alexander	Andrievski	1
Artem	Anisimov	-
Nik	Antropov	374
Denis	Arkhipov	352
Evgeny	Artyukhin	72
Anton	Babchuk	96
Yuri	Babenko	3
Maxim	Balmochnykh	6
Andrei	Bashkirov	30
Ruslan	Batyrshin	2
Sergei	Bautin	132
Sergei	Berezin	502
Maxim	Bets	3
Alexandre	Boikov	10
Peter	Bondra	1081
Nikolai	Borschevsky	162
Sergei	Brylin	683
Ilya	Bryzgalov	60
Pavel	Bure	702
Valeri	Bure	621
Viacheslav	Butsayev	132
Yuri	Butsayev	99
Ilja	Byakin	57
Dmitri	Bykov	71
Vladimir	Chebaturkin	62
Denis	Chervyakov	2
Igor	Chibirev	45
Stanislav	Chistov	196
Artem	Chubarov	228
Pavel	Datsyuk	363
Evgeny	Davydov	155
Fedor	Fedorov	18
Sergei	Fedorov	1128
Ruslan	Fedotenko	465
Anatoli	Fedotov	4
Viacheslav	Fetisov	546
Nikita	Filatov	-
Dmitri	Filimonov	30
Alexander	Frolov	307
Maxim	Galanov	122
Alexander	Godynyuk	223
Yan	Golubovsky	56
Sergei	Gonchar	826
Viktor	Gordiouk	26
Denis	Grebeshkov	33

Alexei	Gusarov	607
Sergey	Gusev	89
Ravil	Gusmanov	4
Alexei	Kaigorodov	6
Dmitri	Kalinin	420
Valeri	Kamensky	637
Yan	Kaminsky	26
Vitali	Karamnov	92
Valeri	Karpov	76
Alexander	Karpovtsev	596
Martins	Karsums	-
Alexei	Kasatonov	383
Darius	Kasparaitis	863
Alexander	Kerch	5
Nikolai	Khabibulin	586
Sergei	Kharin	7
Alexander	Kharitonov	71
Alexander	Khavanov	348
Yuri	Khmylev	263
Dmitri	Khristich	811
Sergei	Klimovich	1
Vitaly	Kolesnik	8
Konstantin	Koltsov	144
Maxim	Kondratiev	36
Evgeny	Konstantinov	2
Vladimir	Konstantinov	446
Evgeny	Korolev	42
Igor	Korolev	795
Alexander	Korolyuk	296
Andrei	Kostitsyn	34
Sergei	Kostitsyn	-
Ilya	Kovalchuk	387
Andrei	Kovalenko	620
Alex	Kovalev	991
Viktor	Kozlov	749
Vyacheslav	Kozlov	963
Igor	Kravchuk	699
Mikhail	Kravets	2
Sergei	Krivokrasov	450
Vladimir	Krutov	61
Alexei	Kudashov	25
Nikolai	Kulemin	-
Mikhail	Kuleshov	3
Maxim	Kuznetsov	136
Dmitri	Kvartalnov	112
Oleg	Kvasha	493
Igor	Larionov	921
Enver	Lisin	17
Andrei	Lomakin	215
Roman	Lyashenko	139
Sergei	Makarov	424
Vladimir	Malakhov	712
Evgeni	Malkin	78
Andrei	Markov	411

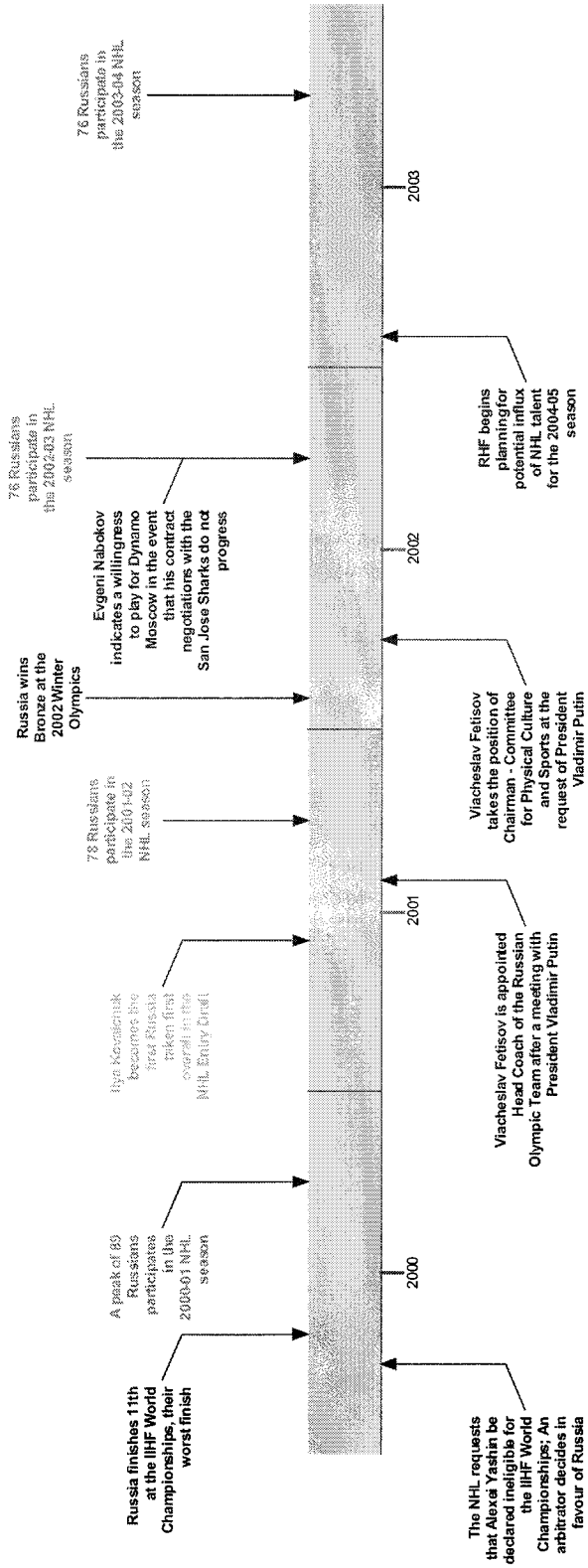
Danny	Markov	538
Maxim	Mayorov	-
Alexei	Mikhnov	2
Oleg	Mikulchik	37
Boris	Mironov	716
Dmitri	Mironov	556
Alexander	Mogilny	990
Aleksey	Morozov	451
Sergei	Mylnikov	10
Dmitri	Nabokov	55
Evgeni	Nabokov	353
John	Namestnikov	43
Andrei	Nazarov	571
Viktor	Nechayev	3
Sergei	Nemchinov	761
Andrei	Nikolishin	628
Alexander	Nikulin	-
Igor	Nikulin	1
Ivan	Novoseltsev	234
Roman	Oksiuta	153
Alex	Ovechkin	163
Grigori	Panteleev	54
Dmitri	Patzold	-
Alexander	Perezhogin	128
Sergei	Petrenko	14
Oleg	Petrov	382
Alexei	Ponikarovsky	268
Sergei	Priakin	46
Vitali	Prokhorov	83
Konstantin	Pushkarev	17
Alexander	Radulov	64
Igor	Radulov	43
Kirill	Safronov	35
Ruslan	Salei	676
Sergei	Samsonov	596
Oleg	Saprykin	325
Petr	Schastlivy	129
Alex	Selivanov	459
Alexander	Semak	289
Alexei	Semenov	142
Anatoli	Semenov	362
Alexander	Semin	129
Konstantin	Shafranov	5
Yevgeny	Shaldybin	3
Vadim	Sharifijanov	92
Timofei	Shishkanov	24
Mikhail	Shtalenkov	190
Denis	Shvidki	76
Andrei	Skopintsev	40
Alexei	Smirnov	52
Sergei	Starikov	16
Alexander	Suglobov	18
Maxim	Sushinsky	30
Alexander	Svitov	179

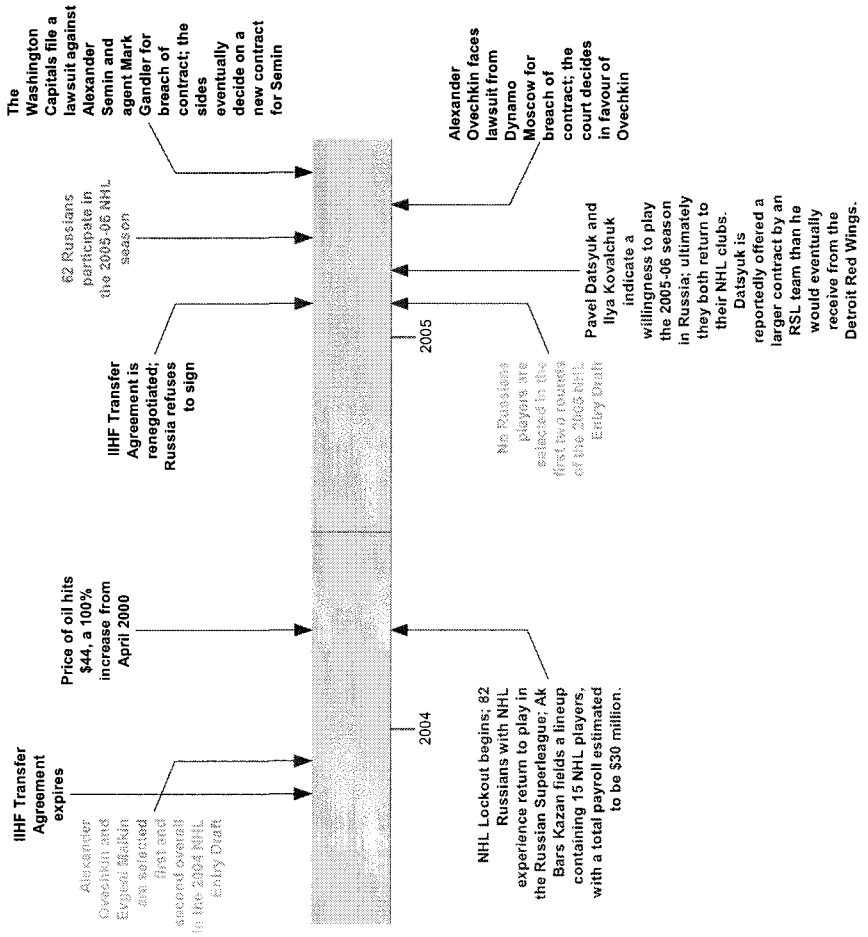
Mikhail	Tatarinov	161
Dmitri	Tertyshny	62
Alexei	Tezikov	30
Viktor	Tikhonov	-
German	Titov	624
Denis	Tolpeko	-
Pavel	Torgaev	55
Andrei	Trefilov	54
Nikolai	Tsulygin	22
Denis	Tsygurov	51
Vladimir	Tsyplakov	331
Oleg	Tverdovsky	713
Fedor	Tyutin	168
Igor	Ulanov	739
Sergei	Varlamov	63
Simeon	Varlamov	-
Alexander	Vasilevski	4
Alexei	Vasiliev	1
Andrei	Vasilyev	16
Ivan	Vishnevskiy	-
Vitaly	Vishnevski	483
Anton	Volchenkov	229
Alexandre	Volchkov	3
Pavel	Vorobiev	57
Vladimir	Vorobiev	33
Igor	Vyazmikin	4
Sergei	Vyshedkevich	30
Vitali	Yachmenev	487
Mikhail	Yakubov	53
Dmitri	Yakushin	2
Alexei	Yashin	850
Alexei	Yegorov	11
Vitali	Yeremeyev	4
Dmitry	Yushkevich	786
Valeri	Zelepukin	595
Alex	Zhamnov	807
Nikolai	Zherdev	201
Alexei	Zhitnik	1020
Sergei	Zinovjev	10
Ilya	Zubov	-
Sergei	Zubov	1012
Dainius	Zubrus	689
Andrei	Zyuzin	464
Kaspars	Astashenko	23
Helmut	Balderis	26
Victor	Ignatjev	11
Arturs	Irbe	568
Raitis	Ivanans	143
Sandis	Ozolinsh	836
Karlis	Skrastins	539
Peter	Skudra	146
Janis	Sprukts	13
Herbert	Vasiljevs	51
Harijs	Vitolinsh	8

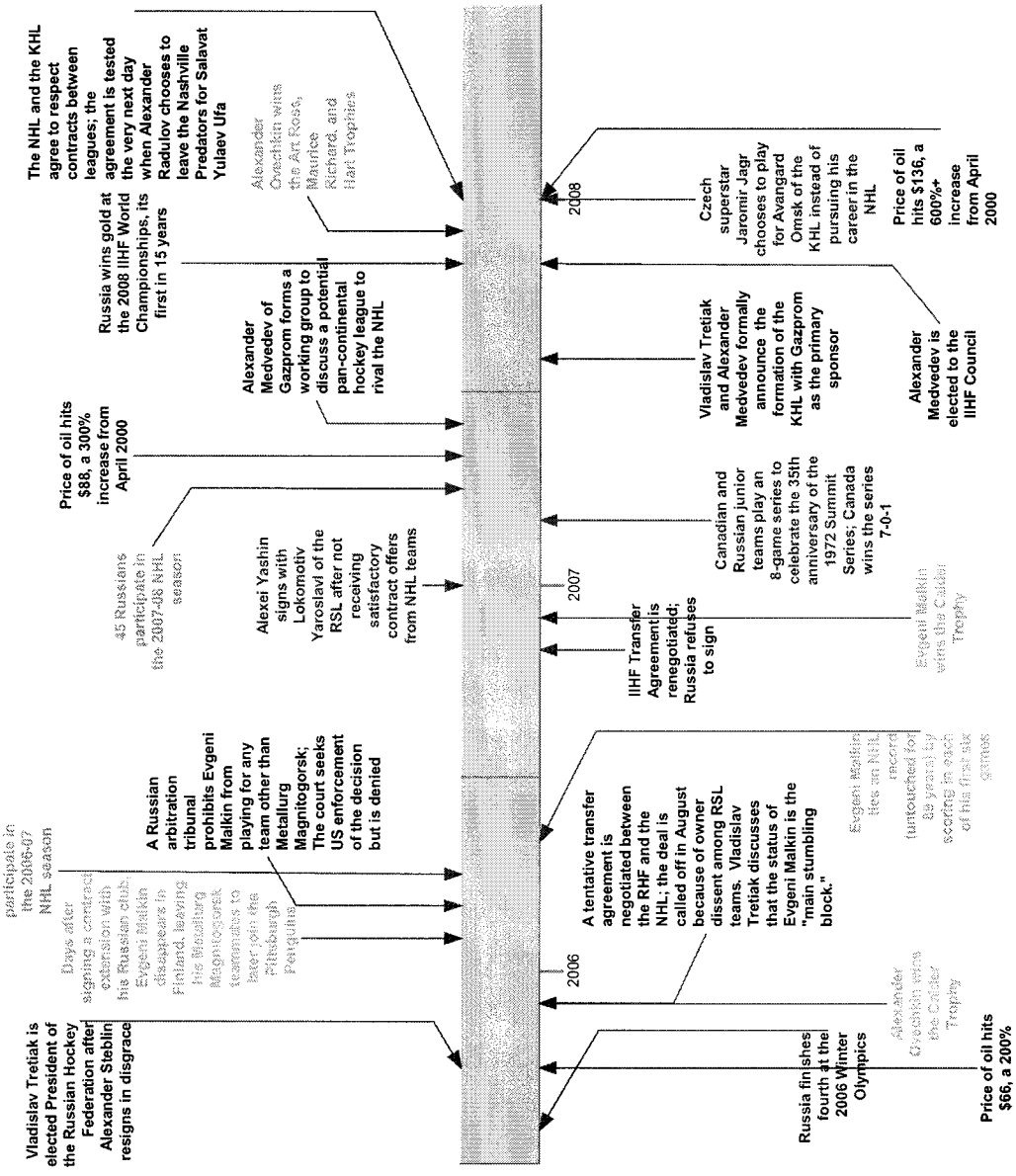
Sergei	Zholtok	588

APPENDIX III

TIMELINE OF RUSSIAN HOCKEY – 2000-2008




IIHF Transfer Agreement expires
Alexander Ovechkin and Evgeni Malkin are selected first and second overall in the 2004 NHL Entry Draft
Price of oil hits $44, a 100% increase from April 2000
IIHF Transfer Agreement is renegotiated; Russia refuses to sign
62 Russians participate in the 2005-06 NHL season
The Washington Capitals file a lawsuit against Alexander Semin and agent Mark Gandler for breach of contract; the sides eventually decide on a new contract for Semin
2004
NHL Lockout begins; 62 Russians with NHL experience return to play in the Russian Superleague; Ak Bars Kazan fields a lineup containing 15 NHL players, with a total payroll estimated to be $30 million.
No Russians players are selected in the first two rounds of the 2005 NHL Entry Draft
Pavel Datsyuk and Ilya Kovalchuk indicate a willingness to play the 2005-06 season in Russia; ultimately they both return to their NHL clubs. Datsyuk is reportedly offered a larger contract by an RSL team than he would eventually receive from the Detroit Red Wings.
Alexander Ovechkin faces lawsuit from Dynamo Moscow for breach of contract; the court decides in favour of Ovechkin
2005


56 Russians participate in the 2006-07 NHL season
Days after signing a contract extension with his Russian club, Evgeni Malkin disappears in Finland, leaving his Metallurg Magnitogorsk teammates to later join the Pittsburgh Penguins
A Russian arbitration tribunal prohibits Evgeni Malkin from playing for any team other than Metallurg Magnitogorsk; The court seeks US enforcement of the decision but is denied
Vladislav Tretiak is elected President of the Russian Hockey Federation after Alexander Steblin resigns in disgrace
2006
A tentative transfer agreement is negotiated between the RHF and the NHL; the deal is called off in August because of owner dissent among RSL teams. Vladislav Tretiak discusses that the status of Evgeni Malkin is the "main stumbling block."
Evgeni Malkin ties an NHL record (untouched for 84 years) by scoring in each of his first six games
Russia finishes fourth at the 2006 Winter Olympics
Alexander Ovechkin wins the Calder Trophy
Price of oil hits $66, a 200% increase from April 2000
45 Russians participate in the 2007-08 NHL season
Price of oil hits $88, a 300% increase from April 2000
Alexei Yashin signs with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl of the RSL after not receiving satisfactory contract offers from NHL teams
2007
IIHF Transfer Agreement is renegotiated; Russia refuses to sign
Canadian and Russian junior teams play an 8-game series to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the 1972 Summit Series; Canada wins the series 7-0-1
Evgeni Malkin wins the Calder Trophy
Alexander Medvedev of Gazprom forms a working group to discuss a potential pan-continental hockey league to rival the NHL
Russia wins gold at the 2008 IIHF World Championships, its first in 15 years
Alexander Ovechkin wins the Art Ross, Maurice Richard, and Hart Trophies
The NHL and the KHL agree to respect contracts between leagues; the agreement is tested the very next day when Alexander Radulov chooses to leave the Nashville Predators for Salavat Yulaev Ufa
2008
Vladislav Tretiak and Alexander Medvedev formally announce the formation of the KHL with Gazprom as the primary sponsor
Alexander Medvedev is elected to the IIHF Council
Czech superstar Jaromir Jagr chooses to play for Avangard Omsk of the KHL instead of pursuing his career in the NHL
Price of oil hits $136, a 600%+ increase from April 2000

APPENDIX IV

RUSSIAN PLAYERS EXITING THE NHL

IIHF Classification (Szemberg, 2006)

Level 1. Non impact, minor leaguers (Example: Jakub Cutta, Joakim Lindstrom, Zdenek Blatny)

Level 2. Marginal players, frequent "healthy scratches" or callups (Example: Peter Buzek, Denis Shvidki, Branislav Mezei)

Level 3. Solid NHLer, plays every game (Example: Zednik, Sturm, Holmstrom)

Level 4. Star, first-liner (Example: Koivu, Ohlund, Marian Hossa)

Level 5. Superstar, trophy winner, on a NHL all-star team (Example: Forsberg, Lidstrom, Jagr)

2001	**Departed Players**	**18**	
		#	%
	IIHF Class 2	12	66.7%
	IIHF Class 3	6	33.3%
	IIHF Class 4	0	0.0%
	IIHF Class 5	0	0.0%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Andrei	Bashkirov	2	31
Alexandre	Boikov	2	26
Maxim	Galanov	2	27
Yan	Golubovsky	2	25
Alexei	Gusarov	3	37
Sergey	Gusev	2	26
Evgeny	Konstantinov	2	20
Andrei	Kovalenko	3	31
Alex	Selivanov	3	30
Andrei	Skopintsev	2	30
Maxim	Sushinsky	2	27
Vladimir	Tsyplakov	3	32
Sergei	Vyshedkevich	2	26

Vitali	Yeremeyev	2	26
Valeri	Zelepukin	3	33
Kaspars	Astashenko	2	26
Yuri	Babenko	2	23
Dmitri	Mironov	3	36

2002

Departed Players	**13**	
	#	%
IIHF Class 2	6	46.2%
IIHF Class 3	5	38.5%
IIHF Class 4	2	15.4%
IIHF Class 5	0	0.0%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Dmitry	Afanasenkov	2	22
Ilya	Bryzgalov	3	22
Vladimir	Chebaturkin	2	27
Valeri	Kamensky	4	36
Alexander	Kharitonov	2	26
Dmitri	Khristich	4	33
Evgeny	Korolev	2	24
Alexander	Korolyuk	3	26
Sergei	Krivokrasov	3	28
Sergei	Nemchinov	3	38
Alexei	Tezikov	2	24
German	Titov	3	37
Herbert	Vasiljevs	2	26

2003

Departed Players	**15**	
	#	%
IIHF Class 2	8	53.3%
IIHF Class 3	6	40.0%
IIHF Class 4	0	0.0%
IIHF Class 5	1	6.7%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Nikita	Alexeev	2	22
Sergei	Berezin	3	32

Pavel	Bure	5	32
Yuri	Butsayev	2	25
Dmitri	Bykov	2	26
Evgeny	Konstantinov	2	22
Igor	Kravchuk	3	37
Roman	Lyashenko	2	24
Oleg	Petrov	3	32
Kirill	Safronov	2	22
Oleg	Tverdovsky	3	27
Sergei	Varlamov	2	25
Vitali	Yachmenev	3	28
Dmitry	Yushkevich	3	32
Peter	Skudra	2	30

2005

Departed Players	**22**	
	#	%
IIHF Class 2	9	40.9%
IIHF Class 3	13	59.1%
IIHF Class 4	0	0.0%
IIHF Class 5	0	0.0%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Denis	Arkhipov	3	26
Valeri	Bure	3	31
Stanislav	Chistov	3	22
Artem	Chubarov	3	26
Igor	Korolev	3	33
Alexander	Korolyuk	3	29
Mikhail	Kuleshov	2	24
Maxim	Kuznetsov	2	28
Igor	Larionov	3	45
Boris	Mironov	3	33
Aleksey	Morozov	3	28
Andrei	Nikolishin	3	32
Ivan	Novoseltsev	2	26
Igor	Radulov	2	23
Petr	Schastlivy	2	26
Alexander	Semin	3	21
Denis	Shvidki	2	25
Alexei	Smirnov	2	23

Alexander	Svitov	2	23
Sergei	Zinovjev	2	25
Arturs	Irbe	3	38
Sergei	Zholtok	3	33

2006	**Departed Players**	**17**	
		#	%
	IIHF Class 2	7	41.2%
	IIHF Class 3	8	47.1%
	IIHF Class 4	1	5.9%
	IIHF Class 5	1	5.9%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Evgeny	Artyukhin	3	23
Fedor	Fedorov	2	25
Denis	Grebeshkov	3	23
Alexander	Karpovtsev	3	36
Alexander	Khavanov	3	34
Vitaly	Kolesnik	2	27
Konstantin	Koltsov	2	25
Maxim	Kondratiev	2	23
Oleg	Kvasha	3	28
Vladimir	Malakhov	3	38
Alexander	Mogilny	5	37
Andrei	Nazarov	3	32
Timofei	Shishkanov	2	23
Igor	Ulanov	3	37
Pavel	Vorobiev	2	24
Mikhail	Yakubov	2	24
Alex	Zhamnov	4	36

2007	**Departed Players**	**18**	
		#	%
	IIHF Class 2	6	33.3%
	IIHF Class 3	10	55.6%
	IIHF Class 4	1	5.6%
	IIHF Class 5	1	5.6%

		IIHF	Age when

		Class	left
Dmitry	Afanasenkov	3	27
Nikita	Alexeev	3	26
Denis	Arkhipov	3	28
Anton	Babchuk	2	23
Peter	Bondra	4	39
Stanislav	Chistov	3	24
Alexei	Kaigorodov	2	24
Darius	Kasparaitis	3	35
Danny	Markov	3	31
Alexei	Mikhnov	2	25
Alexander	Perezhogin	3	24
Konstantin	Pushkarev	2	22
Oleg	Saprykin	3	26
Alexander	Suglobov	2	25
Alexander	Svitov	3	25
Oleg	Tverdovsky	3	31
Alexei	Yashin	5	34
Janis	Sprukts	2	26

2008	**Departed Players**	**9**	
		#	%
	IIHF Class 2	3	33.3%
	IIHF Class 3	4	44.4%
	IIHF Class 4	2	22.2%
	IIHF Class 5	0	0.0%

		IIHF Class	Age when left
Sergei	Brylin	3	33
Maxim	Kondratiev	2	25
Sandis	Ozolinsh	3	36
Dimitri	Patzold	2	25
Alexander	Radulov	4	22
Denis	Tolpeko	2	23
Vitaly	Vishnevski	3	28
Alexei	Zhitnik	4	36
Andrei	Zyuzin	3	30

APPENDIX V

RUSSIAN PLAYERS REMAINING IN THE NHL

2008	Remaining Players	47	
		#	%
	IIHF Class 2	16	34.0%
	IIHF Class 3	16	34.0%
	IIHF Class 4	10	21.3%
	IIHF Class 5	5	10.6%

	Remaining Players	IIHF Class	Age
Maxim	Afinogenov	3	29
Artem	Anisimov	2	20
Nik	Antropov	3	28
Evgeny	Artyukhin	3	25
Anton	Babchuk	2	24
Ilya	Bryzgalov	4	28
Pavel	Datsyuk	5	30
Sergei	Fedorov	5	39
Ruslan	Fedotenko	3	29
Nikita	Filatov	2	18
Alexander	Frolov	4	26
Sergei	Gonchar	4	34
Denis	Grebeshkov	3	25
Raitis	Ivanans	2	29
Dmitri	Kalinin	3	28
Martins	Karsums	2	22
Nikolai	Khabibulin	4	35
Andrei	Kostitsyn	3	23
Sergei	Kostitsyn	2	21
Ilya	Kovalchuk	5	25
Alex	Kovalev	4	35
Viktor	Kozlov	3	33
Vyacheslav	Kozlov	4	36
Nikolai	Kulemin	2	22
Enver	Lisin	2	22
Evgeni	Malkin	5	22
Andrei	Markov	4	30
Maxim	Mayorov	2	19
Evgeni	Nabokov	4	33

Alexander	Nikulin	2	23
Alex	Ovechkin	5	23
Alexei	Ponikarovsky	3	28
Ruslan	Salei	3	34
Sergei	Samsonov	3	30
Alexei	Semenov	3	27
Alexander	Semin	4	24
Karlis	Skrastins	2	34
Janis	Sprukts	2	26
Viktor	Tikhonov	2	20
Fedor	Tyutin	3	25
Simeon	Varlamov	2	20
Ivan	Vishnevskiy	2	20
Anton	Volchenkov	3	26
Nikolai	Zherdev	3	24
Ilja	Zubov	2	21
Sergei	Zubov	4	38
Dainius	Zubrus	3	30

NOTES

[i] Prior to 1989 there were two Russian-born players (Val Hoffinger; Sweeney Schriner); both had immigrated to Canada in their youth and played before the modern era of the NHL and the formation of the Soviet Union.

[ii] Included as 'Russian' in this discussion are players from former Soviet states; these individuals are able to obtain Russian passports and are not considered "foreign" under the rules of the Russian Superleague.

[iii] The 2007-2011 transfer agreement expired in June of 2008 after the individual federations had been given the opportunity to re-open negotiations. They were unable to reach consensus on potential changes (Klein J. Z., 2007).

[iv] Though Klein (1989) was initially hesitant to use the "World Systems" label, his approach is nonetheless compatible and in later work he does embrace Wallerstein's theory (see Klein, 1995).

[v] After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia and five former Soviet states competed as the "Unified Team" in the 1992 Winter Olympics.

[vi] Steblin would finally be forced out due to the national team's continued failures on the ice and allegations of drunkenness and violent behaviour. He was replaced by Vladislav Tretiak, another former player (along with Fetisov) under Tikhonov, in April 2006.

[vii] As an example, players with the CSKA Moscow team officially held rank in the military – Igor Larionov remarked in his autobiography that "...I was a senior lieutenant, and a sorry excuse for one. I had not fired a shot from my pistol even once. I did not know how to disassemble the automatic weapon. The only technique I had mastered was in hockey, the only battle tactics those on ice," (Larionov, Taylor, & Reizer, 1990, p. 105).

[viii] Kovalev later denied ever having given the interview.

[ix] Up to beginning of 2007-08 season.