

The Sports Crowd is Untruth

By Wayne Northey

Søren Kierkegaard wrote “The crowd is untruth.”
René Girard saw it in the hidden uncouth:
Scapegoating violence, originary, in all human cultures.
It is all innocent fun say dominant culture vultures
Of every sports win. Yet there lurks deeper
Shame-faced, thumbs-ready, coliseumesque, sinister
Geared up to erupt the violence of the untruth mob
“Crucify him!” the crescendoing perennial sob
Fickle in wait of first blood unseeing the shroud
Of unknowing, smeared victims’ faces, no awareness allowed.

At the best of times the Vancouver CBC Early Edition guy and former sportscaster is an insufferable sports fanatic. Together with the CBC national sports reporter, they prattle on endlessly year-round about organized sports events. That’s one thing. The other is the overt annual morality play they represent of forced ubiquitous jumping on the bandwagon when the *Vancouver Canucks* vie for the fortieth (or umpteenth/whatever!) time for the Stanley Cup. Not to embrace *Go Canucks go!* is in the moment the ultimate social heresy, pure Vancouver *lèse majesté*, sheer “unthinkability”: such offenders deserving relegation to the hinterlands, hard labour without parole, or worse. At minimum, it is ostracism of utter astonishment that one *may not actually be* a *Canucks* fan! Like being Alabaman or Georgian and not a *Ku Klux Klan*...

Inordinate air time on CBC Early Edition is devoted to hockey come playoffs, with a local sportscaster added to the team this year, who in shadowing the *Canucks* jet toggling between games, reports *ad nauseum* on every imaginable piece of trivia. Switching stations is out of the frying pan into the fire. One resignedly misses inadvertently while driving a lot of weather and news...

Not to be a “homer” if the *Canucks* are in the playoffs evokes gaping incredulity: as if one has cut off the nose to spite the faceoff. Not to be a hockey fan in Canada where such is ubiquitous zany *zeitgeist* zealotry is as un-Canadian as the letter Zee.

Now I began playing hockey at the age of four, and have loved the game ever since. I have loved playing in fact a range of sports, still do, though have excelled at few, except briefly in Grades 12 and 13 in Track and Field. But I have not been a sports fan let alone a “homer” of any team for decades.

I reflected on why more so in context of hockey this year, since playoff season this time goes on and on and on: I’m not a sports fan for pretty much the same reason I’m not a member of the Mob or Klan.

Perhaps the concussion suffered by Nathan Horton is best illustration. It was indeed a subdued sportscast triumvirate on the Early Edition the morning after, who sheepishly tried to put the best face on the blatant violence just beneath the surface of Canada’s blood sport: a violence all-too pervasive in player and fan, witness crowd roar at every fight, widespread vandalism after a home team loss, and worse in recent years in soccer. What is kept hidden in hockey, organized sports generally, and all human culture, argues anthropologist René Girard and many others, is an underlying scapegoat mechanism that trades in foundational violence.

Not all the anti-bullying programs at school one can initiate will prevent societal violence until its routinely modelled and legitimated organized expression in sports (and police and military) is given all-time game suspension. *Such in fact would mean reinventing culture.*

Put differently: being a “homer” for sports and country is, drilled down, violent scapegoating red in tooth and claw.

I am not saying remotely that sports *per se* is bad and all athletes violent. Terry Fox who ran across Canada and Rick Hansen who wheelchaired around the globe showed athleticism at its best, as myriad matches for fun, charity and sportsmanship and wonderful athletic leadership given to fundraising and social betterment, etc., etc. attest all the time! (Though the Olympics did originate in Greek War Games...) And I am not pointing out something original. Stubborn fact is: The corollary of compassion and altruism in organized sports is violent scapegoating *hidden just beneath the surface*, as most everywhere else in human culture.

Not only then is experiencing obsessive sports fanaticism insufferable during the playoffs for non-sports fans like me, it is profoundly more menacing than the “innocent fun” the above trendy trivial triumvirate and millions of fan(*atic*)s would have us believe. Kierkegaard was right: until culture is reinvented, *“The crowd is untruth.”*