

# The Saskatchewan Roughriders and the Construction of Identity and Regional Resistance in Saskatchewan, Canada

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## Abstract

Sports teams often are the focal point for the development of community, identity and resistance. In this study, the Canadian Football League (CFL) team in the hinterland province of Saskatchewan is examined as a case study of this process. The Saskatchewan Roughriders have always been a community owned team. The team does not exist in a market that would normally be associated with a professional sport franchise in North America and is in an area peripheral to the Canadian political economy. The Riders have faced various challenges such as capitalism in sport, a series of ongoing crises in the CFL and globalisation processes. This article situates the Roughrider sport franchise in a broader context of the local and regional communities and identities, of resistance to local and national events and, finally, in the context of globalisation. The analysis covers the period from the beginnings of football in Saskatchewan in the early twentieth century to 1997, when the team went through its most recent economic crisis. This club, it is argued, has been a source of wider identity formation and resistance throughout the changes in Saskatchewan history.

## Introduction

It is often argued that parody, when played out, becomes irony. For it was in Regina, the capital city of the Province of Saskatchewan that the city, province and Roughrider football club in 1995 hosted the second, and last, Grey Cup championship for 'Canadian football' contested by one Canadian and one United States of America (US)-based team. In the game, the Baltimore Stallions franchise defeated the Calgary Stampeders for the Grey Cup sending the championship of Canadian football south of the border for the only time. According to sources far and wide the 1995 Grey Cup festival was the 'best ever' (O'Brien, 1995; Stewart, 1996). This was also be the first, and likely last, time in 83 years of the festival that the smallest city with a CFL team would host the Grey Cup final.

The CFL's mis-adventure into the US football market ended at the conclusion of the 1995 season. The CFL's attempt to venture beyond the Canadian hinterland would prove disastrous. Out of the ashes the phoenix of Canadian football would re-emerge under the slogan 'Radically Canadian', by having the only successful American franchise, Baltimore, relocated to Montreal. This was not achieved through a nationalistic design, but rather as the result of the National Football League's (NFL) Cleveland franchise move to Baltimore.

Saskatchewan, one of three provinces located on the central Great Plains of the Canadian part of North America, has had a long history of pioneer spirit, hinterland identity, and regional resistance to the central Canadian metropole (southern Ontario and the St. Lawrence River section of Quebec). With a fan base drawn from amongst the roughly one million residents and diasporas of expatriate fans, the Roughriders have survived many financial and personnel problems. Fans from every corner of the province support the team and many proudly wear the team's green and white colours. The team has always been a community owned team with the board of directors elected from within its locale. Located in a region with a severe climate and with limited resources, the club has been able to continue operations while clubs in more populous cities have come and gone due a lack of support or financial ruin.

The provincial government, the club itself, and the wider community rallies around the Roughriders as a source of collective identity. The history of the club is positively linked with the pioneer spirit and social democratic ideology found in Saskatchewan. As the heart of many cooperative ventures (such as grain and machinery cooperatives, global medical care, public corporations) create a climate of cooperation, community and resistance to larger, impersonal forces, Saskatchewanian identity and resistance to the metropole are evident in the continuance and support provided for the Roughriders.

There are several theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain how and to what extent specific regions can vary economically from a broader national context. With the nation-state as the unit of analysis, the metropolis-hinterland or core-periphery models hold saliency, in this case up to the 1970s. The metropolis-hinterland model permits an analysis at the sub-national level of cultural construction and is the focus for initial analysis in this case study. I then discuss how globalisation has lead to a changed version of community identity and resistance and the role of the Saskatchewan Roughriders in these changes during the 1980s and 1990s. It is the purpose of this article to show how one cultural activity can operate in the broader construction of an oppositional cultural identity used in the generation and maintenance of local and regional identification and resistance to the dominance of central Canada. The particular cultural activity discussed is Canadian football. The Saskatchewan Roughriders do not exist in the type of market most often identifiable with professional sport teams in North America, yet the team has survived despite the odds. This suggests a strength of community identification with the team in this hinterland region of Canada.

### **A Brief Historical Note on Saskatchewan**

In order to understand the Roughriders centrality in the discussion to follow, it is important to briefly discuss the historical context surrounding the team and the development of Saskatchewan. It is within this wider cultural context that Rider football and support for the Riders unfolds. Saskatchewan identity was not based on any form of indigenous, regional, ethnic, racial, or other type of identity.

Initially, it emerged out of British imperial culture, based on the diffusion of British culture and values to the region. When Canada came into being in 1867, a large part of North America was 'owned' by the Hudson's Bay Company, one of the large trading monopolies established by the British parliament. After much wrangling, the Canadian government was able to obtain ownership of the area known as Rupertsland and the Northwest Territories for £300,000 by 1869 (Conway, 1994). As Conway (1994: 16) notes, 'at no time were the inhabitants of the region consulted' about the way their lives and identities would be constructed.

Much of the concern for legal purview was in reaction to the expansionist plans of the United States. As part of its doctrine of 'manifest destiny', and, more importantly, in order to maintain the rapid capitalist expansion of its economy, ever-increasing frontiers for US investments and markets were needed. As first Britain, and then Canada recognised the importance of British Columbia with its vast natural resources and Pacific ports for Asian trade and military operations. Both British and Canadian leaders knew that they would have to 'cut-off' American expansionism from turning north. Further, to entice British Columbia to join the Canadian confederation, the federal government acceded to certain local demands. These demands became part of an eventually identified 'National Policy'. This policy had three elements: first was the completion of a national rail link from eastern Canada to the west coast; second the settlement of the great central plains of the country; and the third element was a policy on tariffs.

The first element was met when the federal Conservative government heavily subsidised and sold out to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR).<sup>1</sup> The railway was built along a difficult, expensive pathway in order to be close to the 49th parallel, the arbitrarily designated demarcation between the countries. This in itself was expensive, as the line did not follow natural pathways (i.e., the 'northern' route later built by a second company), and added to the delay in its completion. Finally, in 1885 the CPR reached Vancouver on the west coast thus meeting the main condition of British Columbia's joining Canada. The new rail line also passed through the then government seat of the Northwest Territories, Regina. Along with the rail line came small populations that settled predominantly in designated railroad centres. In addition, the Northwest Royal Mounted Police, now known as the RCMP, was established to ensure orderly settlement of Western Canada. Police members brought with them a range of cultural practices from the metropole, including a handling form of football, the preferred form of rugby union that emanated from English public schools and became popular in Canadian schools and universities during the 1860s. It was out of this background that football first came to the region and to Regina.

To meet the second condition Ottawa passed homestead legislation and sought peoples from various European nations to populate the newly created provinces. Although this legislation appears to be altruistic, it was a part of a broader protectionist and expansionist program of the economic elite of central Canada. As Arthur K. Davis (1991: 14) succinctly states:

from the standpoint of English Canada in 1967, the century of Confederation had been a pronounced success. The national policy of western settlement as a new 'investment frontier' for Ontario and Montreal business and financial interests – a competitive Canadian reaction to the immense American industrial and agrarian expansion after the mid-nineteenth century – had achieved a great deal, not all of it intended. By 1885, the heavily subsidized all-Canadian railroad link between the maritimes and the Pacific had been forged, despite the thousand-mile barrier of rocky bushland north of the Great Lakes and in spite of the 600 miles of far-western mountain ranges. To make way for the agricultural settlement on the prairies, the Indians had been shunted aside onto isolated reservations, and the rebellious Métis had been defeated at Batoche, Saskatchewan.

In other words, what the government had set out to do was not what ultimately appeared. The population development of the west was slow and difficult and never reached the expectations of the governments involved.

The national policy (Brown, 1995), while appearing to benefit peoples from various locations to establish themselves as small producers (*petit bourgeoisie* and local capitalists), actually exploited them. With large monopolies controlling the land, transportation and markets, local producers were not in control of their own production. Further the political success of the Conservative government and its economic supporters were tied to the national policy. The Homestead Act, established to encourage settlement, failed to attract large numbers of settlers, as much of the homestead land available was poor quality and often located at considerable distance from the main centres and railways (mainly because the railways had been given most of the prime land as part of the agreement to build the rail line). As a result, markets did not develop as anticipated. Part of this failure rested with the tariff policy contained in the national policy. To protect a nascent indigenous industrialisation, and in league with industrialists, a twenty per cent tariff was imposed on manufactured goods. This element of the national policy historically has been the most hated and the focus of much resentment and resistance. It never allowed the area to develop economically, locking it into a hinterland existence.

Three problems resulted from this part of the policy. First, the restriction of trade annoyed consumers in hinterland regions. Simply, they could not afford protected goods as their ability to set prices was guaranteed by the tariff; that is, there were not competitors in some markets.<sup>2</sup> While metropolis financial interests were served, the ability of local settlers to pay was severely restricted, leading to widespread farm failures, an endemic situation that became a feature of the area. Second, while discontent over the restricted trade practices marked western resistance and dissatisfaction with central Canada, it was the reduced market size that led to failure of the tariff policy. A competitive, substantial indigenously owned industrial sector in Canada did not develop. Third, unregulated segments in the

transportation and marketing areas further restricted the ability of the primary producers to receive a fair price for their goods (therefore leading to a 'buy dear, sell cheap market' context of economic despair). Failures in the formation of these political and economic legislation and policies moulded the basis of western resistance to both central Canada and the metropolis beyond Canada (Britain and the US). Here, the basis of regional and local identities and resistance can best be understood within Davis's (1991) metropolis/hinterland thesis. Davis (1991: 119) identifies this thesis in the following:

we must recognise hierarchies of metropolis-hinterland relationships. As northern Saskatchewan in certain respects may be seen as an economic and political hinterland of southern Saskatchewan, so Saskatchewan, itself, is in large part a hinterland of eastern Canada; and Canada, of the United States. Needless to say, the United States likewise includes a complex network of hinterland or under-class groups, regions, marginal colonials, and so on.

The symbiotic *metropolis-hinterland* model assumes (1) conflict of interests between metropolis and hinterland; and (2) a tendency on the part of hinterland groups and interests to fight back eventually against their metropolitan exploiters in order to gain a larger place in the regional or national or international sun. In fact, we really need to think of inherent 'surges and down-swings' of specific metropolitan-hinterland conflicts – to borrow J. N. McCrorie's terminology (emphasis in original).

Central Canada was indifferent to, and neglected, the aboriginal peoples, the Metis and the restricted number of white settlers in western Canada. In several cases this led to armed resistance and the need for military action.

Several applications were made to provide the prairie west with 'civilisation,' provincial (local) government and the attendant resource generating abilities (see Archer, 1980 and Conway, 1994 for the details of these requirements). The Northwest Territories was an extremely large area to govern. It embraced the current provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, the bulk of Manitoba, and the Yukon and current Northwest Territories. The Canadian government wanted to regulate the number and size of new entities in order to exercise economic and political control over the area (Archer, 1980).

Saskatchewan was demarcated out of the North West Territories of British North America in 1905. Prior to this only British Columbia (1871) and a small Manitoba existed as provinces in western Canada. The proclamation of the Saskatchewan Act came after much political agitation, lobbying and even rebellion. Resistance was present prior to Saskatchewan's foundation and remained a feature of the province's political life. Indeed, the formation of Saskatchewan occurred with little consultation with those who actually lived in the region.

It is evident that these larger social and political forces helped to create a situation of discontent in the province even before it received its current political status. An 'other' was readily available for the people of Saskatchewan. They could differentiate themselves from people in central Canada who they felt ignored and exploited them. They could then rally together to confront and protest against those 'others.' If we apply the sport metaphor to those outside the province, but especially those in central Canada, we can see a competitive situation in which the Roughriders became a tacit, direct metaphor and an object through which community identity and resistance could operate.

### **Background on the Saskatchewan Roughriders**

The literature on the CFL is less well-developed than for football in many other countries. Nevertheless, broad historical texts are available, including Frank Cosentino's histories of the CFL (1969, 1995). Other information can be gleaned from general sources such as sports history texts by the Howells (1969, 1985) and Alan Metcalfe (1987). Jack Sullivan (1970) provides a descriptive history of the Grey Cup up to 1969. In terms of the Roughriders, Bob Calder and Garry Andrews' 1984 book *Rider Pride: The Story of Canada's Best-Loved Football Team* provides a useful popular history.<sup>3</sup> This paper expands upon the content of these works in examining the role the Roughriders have played in the development of identity, resistance and a larger imagined community in Saskatchewan.

Football, whether rugby union, soccer, or Canadian rugby (the Americanised version as opposed to rugby union) was part of the colonial experience since the first, predominantly British, settlers arrived. Each football form struggled for adherents, both playing and spectating. It was Canadian rugby that initially gained the ascendancy, however, type of football is now popular and supported. Canadian rugby football has been organised in Regina since the 1910 formation of the Regina Rugby Club, the oldest western Canadian franchise. Early competitions were with other city and town teams that sooned formed mainly in the southern portion of the province. Eventually western inter-provincial competitions and leagues were organised and competitions expanded with teams from various locations in Alberta, Manitoba and eventually British Columbia. All of these developments took place within what Ron Lappage (1977) identified in an article title as 'sport as an expression of western and maritime discontent' to the central Canadian metropolis.

Central Canada and its sporting organisations historically have held power in the regulation and control of Canadian sport. What Lappage (1977) discusses points merely to another facet of the Roughriders existence. Discontent surrounded the identification of import players, the number of eligible import players, playing rules and regulations, league structures and operations and the timing and location of matches and championships. Simply stated, the metropolis reduced equitable contexts for sport in the west to operate and sustain itself. Western sports, leagues, athletes and their successes, including those of the Roughriders, must be viewed in

a context of resistance to the metropolis as competition and resources were not distributed equally across Canada. Athletes and administrators from western Canada throughout history have endured numerous central Canadian initiated political and financial impediments.

Increasingly sport franchises and competitions took on a more 'professional' orientation resulting in the Regina team being the focal point for elite football. In 1924 the team name 'Roughriders' was adopted and in 1948 the team became known as the Saskatchewan Roughriders to indicate that their support base came from throughout the province.<sup>4</sup> Professionalisation was slow to emerge as volunteers managed the team well into the 1960s (Calder & Andrews, 1984), which indicates that the Riders were not strong financially, but that a strong community spirit sustained the club.

Bob Calder and Garry Andrews note that, in 1910, a 'club had been formed, a provincial union had been created, and a foundation had been laid for the development of a community-owned and community-inspired organization' (1984: 9). This is a central feature of the franchise and is in many ways unique in its survival and its position in community and identity politics. The cultural trappings of team colours, cheers, songs, awards and annual functions also are the basis of this identity. This also allowed the club to be a point of opposition, to franchises in larger cities and especially those in eastern Canada.

Considering its location the Roughriders have enjoyed reasonable competitive success. As evident from Appendix One the team has been western Canadian champions on 23 occasions, participants in fourteen Grey Cup championships, winning the national title twice up to 1999. This record must be kept in perspective. The Roughriders are located in a market smaller than the other cities and provinces. Regina's urban population hovers around 200,000, while the total population of Saskatchewan is below one million. Saskatchewan had a larger population before World War Two, and its declining population and economic base have been problematic in terms of its ability to attract and keep players and to fund the franchise. Whilst such contractions may present difficulties, it may be argued that they actually stimulated those remaining to gather in a stronger communal purpose.

Frank Cosentino's (1995) latest CFL history volume indicates the difficulties the CFL has endured since the late 1960s. Clearly the league and its franchises have constantly struggled to survive. Many of these difficulties have been financial, but the attraction of other football codes and sports have also presented problems. The CFL has long exhibited what Canadian journalist and satirist Alan Fotheringham relates as the 'Canadian disease', that is, the belief that something other than Canadian is better. The CFL continues to hold the stigma that it is not as good as the US NFL competition.<sup>5</sup> The resultant attention and support of 'American' football and football players has long been a deterrent to the attitudes and successes of Canadian teams, not to mention a feature of the continual debate about import restrictions or minimum numbers of Canadian players.

It must be remembered, though, that the Canadian version of American football has long had a deleterious financial history. The Roughriders' financial problems are indicative of the wider league situation. Given the franchise's location in a resource dependent province, however, the economic difficulties are exacerbated. Calder and Andrews argue that:

throughout its long history, the Saskatchewan Roughrider Football Club has survived against the odds, not by accident or mere good fortune. Its endurance in difficult economic times or sustained losing seasons has always come about through determination and old-fashioned prairie toughness. The Roughriders had fought back from extinction in 1937, in 1951, and again in 1960. The year 1979, however, presented one of its gravest crises, and once more revealed the strength with which the football roots have gripped the prairie soil (1984: 183).

The club was able to weather the depression, other severe economic calamities (most politically derived in nature), as well as the climate in the years up to the 1970s. Support for the Riders in this era increased in difficult economic times as the team became a rallying point for discontent and regional solidarity. The club was often worse off in better economic times.

The Roughriders provided a focal point for opposition to more populous Canadian cities and provinces and great pride was taken in beating teams from these larger cities and provinces (e.g., Calgary, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Vancouver) in their league, yet, it has been the infrequent success against eastern teams that have been most celebrated. Conversely, defeats against these teams were endured and palliated with the Saskatchewan lament of 'next year'.<sup>6</sup> The Roughriders have enjoyed the sympathy and frenzied support of most Saskatchewanites and diasporas of fans who moved to other parts of Canada, but there were times when the club itself became a focus for discontent. As Calder and Andrews note:

it is safe to say that the frustration, disappointment, and anger among Roughrider supporters has never been as intense as it was in the summer of 1983. Broadcasters and sportwriters, tired of describing losing efforts and weary of attempting to explain them, turned to cynicism and sarcasm. All across the province, people wrote to newspapers to express their anger or their support, and the ubiquitous sports phone-in programs hotly debated the vices and virtues of the club executive, the general manager, the coaches, and the players. (1984: 182)

Clearly a cultural object provides both a site for outward resistance as well as a point of individual expression of dissatisfaction. More often though the Riders

have been a positive force in identity construction. Again Calder and Andrews (1984: 182) comment in the following passage:

That special brand of Roughrider fan, the expatriate who never really shakes off the dust of the prairies, endured the taunts or the patronizing sympathy of people all the way from Victoria to St. John's. In one sense, the public outcry of 1983 is reassuring. That an entire province can be gripped by a malaise attached to the fortunes of a football club is indication of the unique place that the Roughriders occupy in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

In 1997 the club was over \$2.6 million in debt and again in a financial crisis. The then president identified a 'drop-dead date' for the club's operations should pledges for 200,000 game tickets not be made by midnight Saturday 15 March 1997 (note: these were game tickets, not season tickets, the usual marker of needed sales). As Robert Tychkowski (1997) notes the club was 'telling fans they *have* to buy tickets instead of making them *want* to buy tickets' (emphasis in original). The team had performed badly on the field and was not helping the club's situation. Eventually, through a telethon staffed by volunteers, current Roughrider players, and league personalities, the:

Saskatchewan Roughriders fans and corporate supporters came through at the last minute Saturday night to push the financially troubled football club into the black. As the clock ticked toward midnight, supporters of the Canadian Football League franchise coughed up the cash to purchase 215,222 game tickets by the club's self-imposed deadline (*Sport in brief*, 1997).

More interesting was the rhetoric in a journalistic piece from the Regina *Leader-Post* newspaper. The article posits the tenacity of the club's executive to actually fold the team. Comments from other club officials are indicative of the club's position in the league. For example, the Calgary manager Wally Buono argued that 'personally, I think the Saskatchewan Roughriders mean more to the province than red and black (ink). When you see the support they have across the country, that means more than bottom line' (Hamilton, 1997: B1, B4). Thus the Saskatchewan Roughriders have a wider symbolic cultural currency within the CFL and Canada. John Nauright and Phil White (1996) argue a similar point about the symbolism surrounding the demise of the Winnipeg Jets ice hockey franchise and their ultimate relocation to Phoenix in 1996. They argue that Winnipeg and the Jets symbolised a nostalgic identification with Canadian culture and identity that was being rapidly eroded. The loss of the Roughriders would be a major blow to the CFL's attempts to remain as a national sporting competition. The provincial government, however, a loan guarantor for the club, stated that they would not bail

the club out this time. The Calgary franchise president also provided interesting comments on the situation. He stated:

as far as stability goes, Saskatchewan over the years has been able to weather all the storms. There has been very little concern over the situation in Saskatchewan because they have always seemed to bounce back. . . [but] once you lose a franchise that's perceived as one of the model franchises – and I mean 'model franchise' in terms of always staying afloat despite struggling – you know you are in trouble. If Regina is out of the loop, I think there'll be a pretty quick snowball effect around the league. Losing Saskatchewan would be a strong indication that we're in big trouble (Hamilton, 1997: B1, B4).

As of 1999 the Riders continue to operate, as does the CFL, and such issues prevail. This echoes a passage from Cosentino (1995: 280):

the Roughriders always seemed to be 'getting by,' always appeared to be perilously close to folding, as had Hamilton lately. Both teams were a 'long standing cultural obsession' in their respective communities, their only professional sports franchise. There was a strong bond, historically, between the citizens and their football team. 'The fortunes of both franchises have fluctuated, at times fan support has wavered. But there is too much baggage, too much personal history tied up in their lore for a sport-watching citizen of either place to completely let them go'.

Cosentino (1995) was describing the 1989 Grey Cup, and citing a Toronto *Globe & Mail* article on the teams. He went on to describe 'Rider Pride' as being:

alive and well not only in Regina but all of Saskatchewan. Ever since 1948 [sic] they had been a provincial team forging links to a province wide community through dinners, bingos, fan club memberships and with as many Saskatchewan natives among their non-import contingent as possible. Fans drove from miles around to Regina to watch their team play, streamers and pompoms of green and white waving (Cosentino, 1995: 280).

It should also be noted that the CFL, in its various organisational versions, has long struggled with its unique identity. In fact, much of its history exhibits the hinterland existence and mentality of Canada and its cultural institutions. The league has long struggled to maintain its unique football playing features and to not become inundated with American players. The former became most evident with the attempted CFL move to locate franchises in the US (Cosentino, 1995; Nauright

& White, 1996; 1997). The latter has been part of the Canadian game's history, described as the import restriction or Canadian content rule. Both matters have been ongoing debates, with the latter unlikely to end in the near future.

### **Community Identity and Resistance, Part I**

In the time before the early 1980s, direct, local and national political action permitted resistance to the experience of hinterland or colonial exploitation. People could vote to register their dissatisfaction from a local, immediate (community) position. Flowing out of the late 1970s and the 1980s was another set of conceptual and historical circumstances that demand a different approach directly within the concept of globalisation. This later approach provides the foundation for the following section.

Many definitions of community focus on place. Community has been a difficult term to define and it has not always been presented well in the sports studies literature. Whilst there is a material basis for the concept, historical and social relationships are also significant (cf. Andrews, 1998). In terms of a hinterland locale, and outside of the indigenous peoples, community in Saskatchewan was constructed and sustained by those newly arrived. John Archer (1980: 101) captures this in the following:

The pioneering process was such that, while the individual was called upon to exercise initiative and self-reliance, he could not eschew collective action. Neighbourliness was a necessity and it went beyond tolerance. It was not dependent on likes or dislikes, political affinities or religious persuasions, though these were not stifled. Working bees, beef rings and sharing were the pioneering responses to the particular frontier environment. Co-operation was a prime characteristic of the frontier and individuality was muted to this end when the need arose. Later, as settlement matured and population grew this first co-operative commonality tended to break down – but by then there were other issues to unite.

These issues included culturally based elements and organisations around which to unite.

Archer's (1995: 91) argument corresponds with that of Christopher Lind (1995): 'I reserve the term community to describe personal relationships, which involve history, identity, mutuality, and fellowship'. This relates to conscious choices about relationships and about the land. Community provides a setting where key values, moral and self worth and full personhood obtain. The dialectic of self-identity and community are central here. Further Lind (1995) locates community within culture and as a location where a sense of 'institutional identity' is built (i.e., in the normal sociological sense of institutions). The history of Saskatchewan is one such institutional identity. From farm-based collectives, such

as grain and equipment co-operatives, and forms of social democratic institutions, such as social democratic parties and governments and the first social welfare programs, to sport based institutions, Saskatchewan exudes this notion of community. Certainly, it was and is central to the survival of the people and region from the earliest days to now.

Philip Hansen and Alicja Muszynski's 1990 study of rural Saskatchewan argues that while economic survival is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for community survival, 'community survival also requires a collective sense of identification and public spirit, which in turn requires the survival of other kinds of organizations and associations that can regularly renew social relationships' (cited in Gruneau & Whitson, 1993: 207). Sport, Richard Gruneau and David Whitson (1993: 30) argue, 'is significant as a central dimension of popular experience and collective memory: nothing more, nothing less' and that 'these memories of sights, sounds, and feelings are the stuff of nostalgia' that attach us to 'places, times, and social influences that [shape] . . . developing conceptions of self' (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993: 2).

Here we can place the Roughriders as such an organisation. Whether in conversation, following the team in the media or actual attendance and vicarious enjoyment of the team's performances, the Roughriders permit regular renewal of social relationships. Further, the team continues to provide a form of resistance when it beats teams from the metropole in games or championships. Calder and Andrews (1984), as well as newspaper archives, provide numerous examples of the discourses surrounding Saskatchewanite feelings in terms of the team's successes and failures. A poignant example appeared in a cartoon in the *Regina Leader Post* following the 1951 Grey Cup. The cartoon, published after the 1951 Grey Cup loss to Ottawa, depicts the Roughrider players completing a touchdown pass over their rivals, the Ottawa Rough Riders. Two things can be read from the cartoon. First is success in terms of completing a pass. Second is the wording on the opposition players' pants - 'calamitous harvesting conditions' and 'storage and transportation problems.' The ball, replaced with a loaf of bread (with 'wheat' written upon it), with a trail of 'western determination' being caught near the goal line indicated with goalposts with '1951 harvest' written on the crossbar and a small sign with 'hungry world' near it.

We can decode the signifiers as follows: though not successful in the game, Saskatchewan continues to succeed despite natural and central Canadian imposed difficulties (that is, ever-present national issues around harvest storage and transport problems not being adequately addressed by the federal government) that are constantly put in their path. The difficulties the Roughriders dealt with in their Grey Cup campaign (many days away from home, extensive and time consuming travel, numerous injuries) merely project the difficulties Saskatchewanites endure in their hinterland struggle to survive natural and human imposed conditions. Beyond the football field Saskatchewan has the ability to feed a hungry world, to give sustenance despite historical impediments.

A final expression of the Roughriders' place in these processes comes from a Winnipeg news reporter, John Robertson. Robertson coined the phrase 'Rider Pride' in 1979 when describing his shock over the 'uncharacteristic pessimism of the Roughrider supporters' and that there was a need to rediscover that support. Robertson stated, 'there is a magnet here, its like an old lover I keep coming back to' and 'football is a culture, the most important culture in Saskatchewan. It's almost a spiritual kind of thing and the time has come to either rejuvenate the Riders or for them to become dead meat' (cited in Calder & Andrews, 1984: 183-4). 'Rider Pride' continues to be a central cultural element of the team and community discourse.

### **Globalisation: Community, Identity, and Resistance Part II**

In 1997 the Riders faced a major financial crisis. Remarks by a then current Roughrider player indicated that the team had not had the same community support for the team for some time: "Football is a love for this province", said Jurasin, one of 20 players who participated in the 5 ½ hour telethon that completed the sales blitz. "The commitment the fans made is something I've not seen for 11 years and it's something I've been looking for since 1986" (Davis, 1997). This identifies a change in the nature of the community and of the Roughriders place within it. What was the nature of this change? How was community felt and held in the province at that time? To begin to deal with these changes Lind (1995) points to a different hinterland experience, one resulting from globalisation processes.

Lind's 1995 monograph *Something's Wrong Somewhere* analysed the situation in Saskatchewan following the late 1970s and early 1980s globalisation processes and the neo-conservative government agenda toward this process. Globalisation occurs at two primary levels. The first at the economic level, the second at the cultural level. In the first case the market system and financial markets within that system expanded and operated beyond identifiable political boundaries and beyond the capacity of national governments to resist these market pressures. National banks were unable to set or influence economic, financial and fiscal policies. As Lind (1995: 92) noted: 'when the boundaries of the market became massively larger than the boundaries of the nation, power shifted from the nation to the market. Instead of the Bank of Canada regulating the market, the market now regulates the Bank of Canada'. They were merely able to respond, within limits, to global forces. Neo-conservative governments (Devine in Saskatchewan, following Mulroney [Canada], who followed Reagan and Thatcher) merely supported the ideology and financial climate for these forces to operate and operate profitably.

Global markets dictated economic, political and social policies in the hinterland. Further 'the unregulated market is a powerful and potentially destructive force. By itself it is amoral. It has no conscience' and 'globalization has once more ripped economic forces from their embeddedness in the political structure of nation states and inverted the relationship between politics and economics' (Lind, 1995: 97). Broader market forces leaves dependent nations unable to significantly affect

market prices or protectionist activities, even beyond the multi-national trade agreements (for example, GATT, NAFTA). Whilst on the one hand these trade agreements appear to regulate and even market forces, they in fact permit some nations or trade blocks to protect their producers. This was the case where the US and the European Union (EU) acted to protect their producers and markets against the spirit of broader trade agreements (Stabler, Olfert & Fulton, 1992). In Saskatchewan this meant that efficient producers of the highest world quality grains were unable to compete on the global market. They received far less for their crops than it cost to produce them. This was not because of poor farming habits; it was due to unfavourable market forces.

J.C. Stabler, Margaret Olfert and Murray Fulton (1992: 43) argue that 'the concentration of Saskatchewan's population and businesses in the province's larger centres, accompanied by stagnation or decline of small communities, began in the early 1940s and has continued through to the present'. They (1992: 43) further argue that 'most of the consolidation and concentration of the last fifty years can be attributed to changes in technology in agriculture and other primary industries, as well as in the transportation, communications and distribution industries'. That is, farms became larger and were farmed with fewer people using larger (more expensive) equipment. With globalisation there was further contraction of communities and farms as more farm operations failed. Debt review boards met with greater regularity and more farms were seized by financial institutions. As the farming industry is so large and central to the Saskatchewan economy, the whole of the province was affected by economic globalisation. A domino effect occurred throughout the economy and, tied to neo-conservative political agendas, resulted in drastic changes to the 'welfare state' and the cultural basis of community (Stabler, Olfert & Fulton, 1992).

People's anchors to communities and cultural and community identity were eroded. Moreover, they did not understand the broader implications of the changes foisted upon them. Again Lind (1995: 92) argues:

the power shift [see above] created a practical dilemma. The world environment was changing rapidly, before everyone really knew what was going on or what the implications were. People were now operating on the basis of ideas which no longer corresponded to material reality.

All of these factors contributed to the demise of community identity. Both national and subnational cultural activities, practices and identities were affected.

The Roughriders have long been influenced by metropolitan culture. Whether we look at the early days of the CFL (Cosentino, 1969), the recent evolution of the CFL and its unsuccessful attempt to move into the US market between 1993 and 1997 (Cosentino, 1995) or the general cultural influence of the US historically, the Roughriders continue to be a significant element of regional

identity. What can be identified in the period of heightened globalisation is that the roles of and nature of community, identity and resistance have shifted. Within that shift the Roughriders, as with other cultural elements, have declined in their ability to promote community identity. Their centrality in local and regional identity formation and resistant cultural expression has had to be reconstructed.

The economic calamities of the 1980s and 1990s affected the ability of citizens to support cultural elements of their society. A form of psychic dissonance seemed to prevail. This was evident from the statement made by a Roughrider player during the 1997 fund raising telethon. The team also suffered in their ability to attract and keep players on contract and to win. Being a small market and unable to do much to circumvent the salary cap by providing non-salary perks, the Roughriders were less attractive as an employer. The team also failed to make the playoffs from 1977-87. These added to the difficulties of the club and seem to reflect the general downturn in Saskatchewan. The Roughriders became a metaphor for the overall economic decline in Saskatchewan.

In 1989, however, there was a brief respite from the dismay. Against the odds the Roughriders won the Grey Cup. Celebrations and renewed community spirit and identity prevailed for a brief time. The media and politicians made much of this success. Shortly following these celebrations the Roughriders and Regina were finally successful in their bid to host the Grey Cup game.

Preparations for and the actual 1995 Grey Cup celebrations became a focal point for re-building community and identity. This was the first time in the 83-year history of the championship game that Saskatchewan hosted it. Previously, Saskatchewan was seen as too small (in terms of population and facilities), too cold and too financially unattractive to act as host. Preparations began well before the match. Homeowners decorated their houses with green and white lights, opened their homes to visiting spectators (as insufficient hotel rooms existed for the expected influx), participated in numerous community consciousness and fund raising activities and volunteered for a plethora of committees.

While local media outlets and political and economic leaders made good mileage out of the successful celebration, R. Stewart gives us some non-partisan viewpoints on the 'festival'. Writing in the widely circulated *Reader's Digest*, Stewart (1996: 43) stated 'I was in Regina, smallest city in the CFL, for the league's grandest hoedown'. He also noted that 'over the years, I have joined in the fun surrounding Grey Cups in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Vancouver, but I have never seen people enjoying themselves as much as in Regina. All the veteran fans I talked to – some of whom hadn't missed a Grey Cup game in 50 years – said the same' (Stewart, 1996: 45). His description and laudatory comments permeate the article. Whilst his ethnography might not have scientific backing it provides an example of the success of the Saskatchewan community to cohere and show the rest of Canada how things could be done.

As with the 1989 Grey Cup victory, hosting a highly successful 1995 Grey Cup festival seems to have rekindled a community spirit and identity. It might well

be argued that this was an exercise in 'bread and circuses', a pleasing distraction from a desperate material reality. Nonetheless, there appeared to be some hope in 'next year' country after these successful events. As Lind (1995: 96) argues 'the way to fight globalisation is by intentionally building community . . . by reversing the process of erosion'. It can be argued that these successful activities provide a platform for (re)building community, identity politics and the politics of resistance. Cultural organisations, as Lind (1995) has suggested, are institutions that provide such a basis for change. As with the population of Saskatchewan, the Roughriders endured the effects of globalisation and the concomitant neo-conservative political agenda. They are part of the dark, dialectical change witnessed since the 1980s. How much they will be part of the further dialectical change in community, identity and resistance, and in reversing the erosion brought on by increasing globalisation remains to be seen.

### **Conclusion**

Lind (1995: 94) speaks of building community in the following passages 'it's in the regular meetings of everyone's local, voluntary organization [e.g., sport] – the place where community is formed' and

a community has a shared history and shared histories are created by common action. In common action intentions are formed and fulfilled; visions are realized. A community has a shared identity. A shared identity is acquired through the articulation, adaptation, and affirmation of shared values. These intentions, visions, and values are worked out in the context of other activities. If community is to be formed, people must be willing to cooperate for a common purpose. In the course of working out the purpose, community may be formed (Lind, 1995: 95).

I argue that the Roughriders are an organisational (and institutional) activity through which 'intentions, visions and values are worked out'<sup>7</sup> in Saskatchewan. The club has provided a forum through which common purpose was met, and can be met in the future.

The Roughriders' place in this process was discussed from both an older conceptual basis, that of metropolis-hinterland, and then from a globalisation perspective. Each analysis is necessary as they point to different historical configurations of community identity and, at times, resistance. In the former scenario they were centrally featured and positively related to these activities. During the past two decades of heightened globalisation the Roughriders position in these activities suffered the same general fate as in other spheres of life in Saskatchewan. I argue, however, that as part of civil society the Riders contribute to building a new material reality of community and identity. Through this contribution they are part of 'intentionally built communities' that function in the 'politics of resistance'

(Lind, 1995) for the future survival of the people of Saskatchewan.

Appendix 1: Saskatchewan Roughrider Playoff and Grey Cup Records

Western Championships

Grey Cup

1912-1919<sup>8</sup>

1920 (semi-final winners, no final played

(Lost in the 1922 western finals)<sup>9</sup>

1923

(Lost in the 1924 western finals)

(Lost in the 1925 western finals)

1926 -1927

1928

1929

1930

1931

1932

(Lost in the 1933 western finals)

1934

(Lost in the 1935 western finals)

1936

(Lost in the 1938-1949 western finals, inclusively, when played)

1951

(Lost in the 1963 western finals)

1966

1967

(Lost in the 1968 western finals)

1969

(Lost in the 1970 western finals)

(Lost in the 1971 western finals)

1972

(Lost in the 1973 western finals)

(Lost in the 1974 western finals)

(Lost in the 1975 western finals)

1976

(1977-1987 inclusively, did not make the playoffs in any of these years)

(Lost in the 1988 western finals)

1989

(Lost in the 1990 western finals)

(Lost in the 1992 and 1993 western finals)

(Lost in the 1994 western finals)

Lost 54-0 (Queen's University)

Declined to participate<sup>10</sup>

Lost 30-0 (Hamilton)

Lost 14-3 (Hamilton)

Lost 4-0 (Toronto Balmy Beach)

Lost 22-0 (Montreal AAA)

Lost 25-6 (Hamilton)

Lost 20-12 (Sarnia)

League rules Roughriders ineligible<sup>11</sup>

Lost 21-14 (Ottawa)

Won 29-14 (Ottawa)

Lost 24-1 (Hamilton)

Lost 29-11 (Ottawa)

Lost 13-11 (Hamilton)

Lost 23-20 (Ottawa)

Won 43-40 (Hamilton)

## NOTES:

1. A scandal ensued over this whole matter and led to the downfall of John A. MacDonald's first government. Much of the 'national policy' became part of his second term in office.
2. Goods were, in fact, cheaper and available from closer locations in the US. With the tariff, however, they were dearer.
3. A number of popular 'coffee table' histories are not indicated here. This work suffices as a better representation of the popular history genre.
4. Calder and Andrews (1984, p. 32, 73) provide background to these changes. They argue that the Ottawa franchise, initially holding the Rough Rider name had changed their name to the Senators upon which the Regina team took over the moniker. For much of CFL history the league has had two teams with the same name, which is unusual in the professional sport business, especially in terms of marketing and merchandising. The change to Saskatchewan Roughriders seems to have been quietly completed through the media, although it did follow the demise of other Saskatchewan teams.
5. Cosentino (1995, p. 309) discussing the media attention Bruce McNall, Wayne Gretzky and John Candy brought to the CFL through their 1991 purchase of the Toronto Argonaut franchise, cited a *Toronto Sun* newspaper article: 'Nineteen ninety-one may go down as the year the Americans discovered Canadian football. While at home the papers and the airwaves are full of stories about financial woes of the teams, it's left up to American publications and TV networks to come up with upbeat news about our game. . . Grasping for American approval – isn't that the Canadian way.'
6. Saskatchewan has long been identified as 'next year' country. At its basis this refers to farming and farm economics; the crops, weather, harvest, sales and ability to enjoy life will happen and be better next year. The phrase is now a popular appellation for all less attractive outcomes in life in the province.
7. Gruneau & Whitson (1993, p. 200) also make the point that: 'The local game has been the stuff of community volunteer work, sociability, pride, and entertainment'. The basis for community as a nostalgic category, sense of 'place' and basis for social solidarity.
8. The Edmonton Eskimos were the first western team to challenge for the Grey Cup in 1921 (Sullivan, 1970, p. 185).
9. Whether the Roughriders lost in the semi or final games(s) is not indicated in this table.
10. There were a number of occasions when financial or other impediments resulted in western teams not taking up the offer to play in the Grey Cup. The tyranny of distance abetted the financial costs and the inability of players to have more time off of work.
11. This was due to the number of American players on the roster. This was a major point of contention between the eastern and western league officials (see Cosentino, 1969 and Calder & Andrews 1984 for details).

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