

24th Storyworth: What Sports Teams Were You A Fan Of As A Child?

My earliest memories of “team awareness” would have been for baseball, as I played at both the middle and high school levels. “Played” is probably not the most accurate word to describe what I did, but the most generic for most peoples’ understanding. I was never a terribly good batter, runner or fielder. But I had decent spatial recognition, and so most of my actual time during games was spent (when not running the MILES which the coaches put us all through ;-)) as a line coach. For those not real experienced with the game, those are the people who signal runners whether to go or hold as they round the bases. I earned both JV and Varsity letters from Roosevelt High in Hyde Park NY for the sport.

So it would be natural for me to be aware of, if not exactly follow, the professional ball clubs for that sport, which would mean the NY Yankees and the NY Mets. While it is true that many people continued to follow the Giants and Dodgers when they moved from NY to CA, I was only seven at the time, so not yet enamored of either. And while Porsche was certainly racing before I got to middle school, my awareness of them and religious adherence to their philosophy was not yet budding until late in my high school career, as I moved closer to my engineering avocation. I’ll write much more about this below.

My love for hockey, which developed entirely while I was at Clarkson, but continues to this very day (just ask Dawn, who swears I made no mention of it before we were actually together as of April 2019, and now cannot BELIEVE the time I spend wanting to watch it however I can because we no longer get live streaming as we’ve largely cut the cord on Spectrum TV, so I must content myself with ESPN+ replays ;-)) and my faves, who happen right this moment to be battling for the Eastern championship; the NY Islanders vs the Boston Bruins. I first loved the “Habs”, the Montreal Canadians, who were a staple at Clarkson as we picked up over the airwaves “Hockey Night In Canada” despite not actually BEING in Canada, but because we were so far from the US broadcasts as to get little but snow. That was both over the TV and the weather, I assume you realize ;-)) The Habs just startled EVERYBODY by sweeping the Winnipeg Jets in four straight after being down 3-1 in games in the best of seven prior series against the Toronto Maple Leafs, another team I liked, who were favored to win. Seven straight is VERY rare at that level, but the Habs have done it.

I would personally have preferred that the NHL, which skewed the season weirdly as it was, because of Covid and the problem with closed borders and trying to constrain costs while the fans were prevented from attending games live, paired what I wish could have been possible by taking the surviving two teams from each of the four divisions in a round-robin playoff format for The Stanley Cup, instead of effectively choosing a “best of division”, which won’t result in the best HOCKEY for the final, sadly. That was playing last night when the Islanders surprised Boston at the Garden to go up 3 – 2 in their series. FABULOUS hockey (excuse me – fighting, where hockey broke out ;-)) At least they are allowing MOST of the fans back into the arenas, and it was lively ;-)) But this way it is possible ONLY one Canadian team can be in the “final four”, so they will be the Habs, and Winnipeg would normally have been playing against the Vegas Golden Knights, as an example.

Just an aside here; when you look at professional sport, Hockey is surprisingly better balanced racially than many, such as auto racing, while football (US style, which is NOT what most of the world plays as that sport) and basketball are almost skewed the reverse. And it is definitely NOT because of any “affirmative action”, except possibly helping actual talent along, because at that level any LACK of talent is OBVIOUS. In some respects it is precisely the existence of the unique Lewis Hamilton who best points out the racial disparity in auto racing, which has so many barriers to equal representation. Not that I have ANY suggested solutions, as I know NASCAR, for example, has had some non-white participants. But they have been not remotely representative of the demographics of their fan base, while the NHL has a surprisingly large non-white mix, especially considering the global nature of its participant base and its root development opportunities. There are simply not a lot of local ice rinks in Kenya, for example ;-))

And local rinks were how I became such a fan of hockey in the first place. While Clarkson as a school has always been a powerhouse in collegiate hockey, the reason I became enamored was because I got to actually PLAY, not just watch. And it is the rare kid whose parents will be up at 4AM to get them to a local indoor rink, and the costs inherent thereto, which separate the masses from the opportunities. But in Potsdam, a little patience and a field was all that was needed to have a decent rink for a real good portion of the year to develop the talents. And embarrass the crap out of us college boys when the five year olds from town used to eat our lunch at pickup games ;-). Takes me back ;-). And makes it so sad that Canada will be so poorly represented when the Stanley Cup is actually presented this year, at least from a team home standpoint. Because an AWFUL lot of the actual players come from Canada, and I am sad that they don't INSIST that EVERY team sing BOTH the Star Spangled Banner and Oh Canada before EVERY game in the Playoffs.

By the way; it is not lost on me in any way how many of the current rosters have Eastern European players. As I suggested; the cream rises to the top, and talent is the ONLY way to be relevant in the NHL. If you've never seen a game, FIND a way to watch some of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. They are on NBC and NBCSN right now. You will see people do things which will make your head spin wondering how they could physically move that way. And then think about the fact that at one time, goalies didn't even have face protection, and guys would still block shots that way. I do love to watch the motion, which is ALWAYS frenetic.

Now – about that auto racing and specifically Porsche racing, and why it appeals and ever did. So far as I know, there has never been any attempt by Porsche to participate in NASCAR, despite the fact they have some vehicles which would, on paper at least, be compatible vehicles. The Panamera is a four door sedan, which is most closely represented by the cars they run, despite the fact that almost nobody produces any actual two door versions of the “stencil” representations they use, which are actually a unique design which then has look-alike bodies with branding to LOOK like the Chevy, Ford, Dodge or Toyota sponsors' cars. Small wonder I yawn when I think of it ;-).

Porsche has always been involved in endurance racing. Examples include LeMans, Daytona, Sebring with groups like IMSA. Plus they have supported other series like the monoposto (single seat) like F1 and the like with powerplants. As an organization, Porsche AG was always first an engineering firm, and their cars reflect that heritage, starting from the VW power and chassis of the original 356 cars. Racing against some of the big boys, they ran together but in different classes from those huge engined Fords and Ferraris, preferring to survive to win “Index of Performance”, which was a relative placing after the duration of the race. That was until they decided to read the rules book like a NYC lawyer and build 25 identical “homologation” cars of the 917 in the late '70s. And started to win races outright. They have been a powerhouse ever since. And, as an engineer, I have loved to see the creative ways they have interpreted what was allowed, like the “cooling fan” on the gearbox which sucked so much air from beneath the car as to create a vacuum which kept the car on the track through the turns like a slot car. Or the silhouette 935, which was based on the 911, but whose allowed aero devices could put water cooling in an engine which was never water cooled, to get more power. Or the “Group C” rules which were intended to emphasize efficiency by limiting the fuel allowed for the entire race, which Porsche interpreted to mean to shut off fuel injection every time the pedal was lifted, but use the exhaust pressure to spool up a turbine so as to push more pressure into the engine so it breathed better.

Yeah, I like engineering minds. Especially when they like to win ;-). MY kinda team ;-).

Joe Holzer 6/8/2021