

Exorcizing the ghost: Donovan Bailey, Ben Johnson and the politics of Canadian identity

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It's not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning to us. It's all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren't alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can't get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it's as if I could see ghosts slipping between the lines. (Ibsen, *Ghosts*, 1970: 76)

Introduction

Although Ibsen's drama concerned itself with another time and place, its message seems to resonate within a contemporary Canadian context. Specifically, there appears to be a ghost *slipping between the lines* of the narratives and discourses that signify, represent and oppress visible minorities, and in particular black people, in Canada. Herein, the metaphor of the ghost is used in order to capture the elusive and haunting nature of racist-based discourses in Canada.

This article focuses on one metaphoric ghost of Olympics past, namely Ben Johnson, and his influence upon the contemporary politics of racial and national identity in Canada. In particular, the study examines the impact of Johnson's legacy on Donovan Bailey, the man Canadians looked to for redemption in the years following the steroid scandal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. One of Canada's most celebrated athletes during the 1990s, Bailey retired following the 2001 World Track and Field Championships under less than ideal circumstances fighting age, injury and a loss of popularity. The height of his career was the 1996 Olympics when he won two gold medals and set a world record in the 100-metre event making him the fastest man on earth. Yet, despite all his achievements, Bailey has lived

with the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson, the man who arguably brought all Canadian Olympic athletes under suspicion following his positive drug test at the 1988 Olympics. Highlighting Donovan Bailey's experience may provide insights into the much more pervasive problem facing black people in contemporary Canada. To begin, I return to the infamous 1988 event that inscribed Ben Johnson and Canada on the world's collective memory.

On 24 September 1988 Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson defeated American Carl Lewis in the men's 100 metre final at the Seoul Olympics and, in the process of winning Canada's first gold medal in the event since Percy Williams in 1928, established a new world record of 9.79 seconds. However, the *best* of times soon became the *worst* of times on 26 September, when it was announced that Ben Johnson had tested positive for the use of anabolic steroids, forcing him to forfeit his gold medal (Jackson, 1998a). News of the disqualification sent shock waves throughout the international sporting community. In Canada, the initial shock and disbelief quickly turned into either sympathy, or anger and resentment, as evidence of Johnson's prolonged steroid use emerged (Jackson, 1998a). The ensuing Dubin Inquiry, which commenced on 11 January and concluded on 3 October 1989, involved 119 witnesses, culminated in 14,817 pages of testimony and cost Canadian taxpayers \$3.6 million (Semotiuk, 1994). At its conclusion, it was described by one critic as: 'an extraordinary pageant of irony, tragedy, and farce' (Burstyn, 1990: 45).

Now, more than a decade after his Olympic disqualification and nine years since he was banned for life for a second positive steroid test, Ben Johnson remains one of the most infamous and controversial athletes in both Canadian and Olympic history. Despite exhausting almost every legal avenue available to him, including a rejected 1999 appeal to the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) citing 'restraint of trade', Johnson remains defiant. Johnson's legal battle to make a sporting comeback, his steadfast claim that he is still the fastest human in history, along with his highly publicized, if somewhat ironic and short-lived role as fitness adviser to Argentinian soccer star Diego Maradona, are all components of a carefully orchestrated plan to revitalize and reinvent his public persona. Arguably, the case of Ben Johnson marks the genesis of the modern steroid controversy and serves as the reference point by which all subsequent incidents have been judged (Jackson, 1998b). Moreover, the Ben Johnson affair remains a national embarrassment that continues to haunt the Canadian public, Athletics Canada and Caribbean-born athletes in particular (Jackson, 1998b). As Cecil Foster, author of *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada*, notes: 'His is one of the most telling and tragic stories of what it means to be black in this country' (1996a: D3). As such, the ghost of Ben Johnson's legacy, if not Ben Johnson himself, constitutes one aspect of the contemporary politics of

Canadian identity and a defining feature of Canadian race relations (Jackson, 1998b).

This article explores how sporting 'Others', such as Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey, are constituted by, and constitutive of, the politics of racial and national identity in Canada. Tracing the emerging media discourses surrounding these two 'Jamaican-born' Canadian sprinters, this study specifically examines: (a) the context within which Ben Johnson and the contemporary crisis of racial and national identity in Canada emerged; (b) previous research regarding the discourses that defined and redefined Ben Johnson's racial and national identities before and after the 1988 steroid scandal; and, (c) evidence of the nature and extent to which the symbolic spectre of Ben Johnson haunts Donovan Bailey and other Canadian black people of Caribbean descent, as well as Canada itself.

Contextualizing Canada in 1988

Given this study's focus on the media's role in constructing dominant meanings of racial and national identity in Canada, it is important to recognize the relationship between discourse and identity. Hall, for example, notes the significance of the context of power relations within which the discursive formation of identity occurs:

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted entity – an identity in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). (1996: 4)

Hall, at least indirectly, acknowledges the cultural dialectic at work whereby the discursive formation of identity, and national identity in particular, serves to both include and exclude. Here, the concern is with how media discourses serve both to construct a dominant image of Canadian national identity and to demarcate particular racial/ethnic 'others' within specific contexts. Returning to Hall's previous point, this study locates the social construction of identity in relation to Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey within particular discourses and within the specificities of particular contexts. In turn, the analysis proceeds by drawing upon previous work related to the 1988 crisis of Canadian identity as it relates to the 1988 Free Trade Agreement (Jackson, 1992), Wayne Gretzky (Jackson, 1994) and the racial politics of Ben Johnson (Jackson, 1998a, 1998b; Jackson et al., 1998).

Arguably, Ben Johnson's initial emergence as a national hero in 1988 and his subsequent haunting of Canada can only be understood by locating the complex context of historical, political, economic and social relations from which his ghost emerged. Several seemingly distinct, yet interrelated, factors may have contributed to what has been described as a 'year of crisis of Canadian identity' (Jackson, 1994), a part of which served as a defining moment in Canadian race relations. Among these factors are Canada's renowned historical insecurity about its cultural uniqueness. As the dwarfed neighbour to the world's most powerful nation, the United States, Canada's fixation with its cultural identity has been referred to as an 'obsession' (Chaiton and McDonald, 1977), an indication of 'collective schizophrenia' (Kilbourn, 1988) and, more recently, as the 'unbearable lightness of being Canadian' (Gwyn, 1995). In 1988, Canadian anxieties about the fate of their cultural identity were exacerbated by the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement, (FTA) which nationalists feared would inevitably translate American economic colonization into the eradication of Canadian sovereignty (cf. Bowker, 1988; Davies, 1989; Lapierre, 1987; Scott, 1988). The significance of the Free Trade Agreement was highlighted by its pivotal role within the debates leading up to the federal election held later that year. Political factions that purportedly represented the left of centre, including the Liberal and New Democratic parties, argued that the FTA posed a clear risk and that it was time to protect and advance Canadian interests. Conversely, the ruling Progressive Conservative Party asserted that the cross-border trade agreement was essential for Canada's survival. Reflecting on the context of the late 1980s Mackey notes that:

Desires for 'Canada-first' emerged at a particular moment in national and global history. While Canadian identity was proclaimed as 'in crisis' new forms of global capitalism filled the world's stage, economic recession took its toll, forms of right-wing populism emerged, and the federal Progressive Conservative government was seen to have mishandled the job of managing the country. (1999: 153)

Arguably, the economic and cultural threat posed by the FTA, whether real or imaginary, contributed to a renewed search for anchors of meaning and symbolic markers of difference in order to confirm Canada's unique culture and identity relative to the USA. On the popular cultural front two sporting heroes figured prominently in Canada's search for identity in 1988, namely, Wayne Gretzky and Ben Johnson.

Nationalist fears about the threat of 'Americanization' were, for example, demonstrated in the impassioned debates surrounding the marriage and trade of ice hockey star Wayne Gretzky to 'American' interests. Within the span of one month in mid-1988 Canada's prodigal sporting son not only married an American actress but was subsequently traded from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings. Within the context of 1988

these events struck a particular nationalist chord. Indeed, judging by popular media coverage, Wayne Gretzky's trade foreshadowed Canada's economic and cultural vulnerability in relation to their powerful southern neighbour (Jackson, 1994). Gretzky's exodus from Canada, amidst popular and parliamentary debate, created a space within which Ben Johnson could emerge as a national hero and helps to explain why his eventual Olympic downfall was an additional blow to Canadian nationalism. As noted by one *Sports Illustrated* writer:

Johnson's transgression had sent an emotional wave sweeping over the country. . . . Children wept and sportswriters anguished in print over the disgrace of the man who had become the nation's No. 1 hero in the wake of the departure of Wayne Gretzky to Los Angeles. (Johnson, 1988: 38-9)

The anticipation of Johnson's Olympic triumph provided a rallying point for Canadians on several fronts. His gold medal victory at Seoul proved that Canada could not only compete with, but defeat, the world's best, and in particular the Americans. Moreover, according to one source, the rise and fall of Ben Johnson arguably represented an important moment in Canadian race relations as evidenced in the following editorial: 'It was so right, that victory. Not only did it do more for race relations than any number of human rights committees, but it came as a triumph over Carl Lewis, a superb athlete whose arrogance, glitter and artifice reminded so many Canadians of what they find objectionable in their mighty neighbour to the south. (*Globe and Mail*, 1988: A-6).

The previous quote reveals how Carl Lewis had emerged as the personification of what many Canadians resented about the United States. Moreover, reference is made to the fact that Johnson's victory may have contributed more to the improvement of race relations than numerous official state policy initiatives. Indeed, in 1988 Canada became the first nation to officially institute a Multicultural Act, formally known as the Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada. On the one hand this signalled the Canadian state's progressive initiatives towards recognizing cultural diversity within the national formation. However, despite its intentions, the Act also embodied the capacity to demarcate and exclude racial/ethnic 'others'. As such, it could be regarded as a hegemonic device that could be strategically employed to serve particular interests. Thus, in contrast to the assertion made that Ben Johnson's initial victory facilitated better race relations in Canada (*Globe and Mail*, 1988), there is some evidence to suggest that the post-disqualification backlash against him reveals the selective evocation of the principle of multiculturalism within Canada. For example, consider the charge of one Jamaican-Canadian member of the public, June Eyton:

Multi-ethnicity as a Canadian ethos more than ever seems to be a mere artifice of necessity. . . . We employ the concept only when it suits us, and we discard

it at will . . . [this] is . . . the kind of attitude that will retard harmonious race relations in this country for years to come. (1988: D7)

Eyton's comments reveal that state social policies, such as Canada's 1988 Multicultural Act, operate within the existing hegemonic domain. Consequently, they are negotiated within certain constraints resulting in such policies being conspicuously highlighted when they serve dominant interests but, as Eyton puts it, 'discarded at will' when they do not (1988: D-7). To understand the nature and significance of Ben Johnson's legacy it is important to gain some perspective on how Canadians, and in particular the Canadian media, reacted to and represented his success and failure. Consequently, the next section briefly outlines some of the Canadian responses to Johnson's disqualification at Seoul and their role in creating the *anabolic apparition*.

Ben Johnson and the politics of Canadian racial and national identity

Though there were sympathizers as well as those who denied the very significance of the steroid scandal (Brehl, 1988; Lautens, 1988), within the ongoing media discourses there was overwhelming resentment towards Ben Johnson, revealing both racist and ethnocentric attitudes and practices within Canada. The emergent racism was expressed in several different ways, including a shifting signification of Johnson's racial and national identities and the use of various racist stereotypes (Jackson, 1998b).

Although it is an admittedly oversimplified characterization it would appear that prior to Johnson's rise to fame he was simply referred to as a 'Jamaican immigrant' or 'Jamaican' (Jackson, 1998b). Gradually, as his athletic achievements began to multiply he was re-labelled 'Jamaican-Canadian'. Then, upon recording a landmark world record setting victory over Carl Lewis at the 1987 World Athletic Championships in Rome, and in anticipation of the Seoul Olympics, Johnson was more consistently referred to as 'Canadian'. Finally, upon his disqualification at Seoul he was once again being represented in terms of his 'Jamaican' identity. Steroid use notwithstanding, Ben Johnson, of course, was the same person. However, his 'national' and 'racial' identities were socially constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed and reproduced through the media (Jackson, 1998b).

The late Canadian actor/comedian John Candy effectively characterized the identity politics of Ben Johnson stating that: 'At first, he was closely related to Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada. The moment he was disqualified, he came from Jamaica' (*US Magazine*, 1989: 6). In addition, *Sports Illustrated* writer Michael Farber both confirms

Candy's remarks and links them to Johnson's role in haunting those who dare follow in his footsteps. Describing how the nation had *exploded* with the initial victory and then *imploded* with news of the positive steroid test, Farber notes that:

. . . the most identifiable Canadian in history was not a politician or musician or hockey player. He was a cheat. There was a disqualification at Seoul, a qualification at home. Johnson was now a 'Jamaican-Canadian'. In losing the gold, he had gained a hyphen, and a silent legacy was established. (1996: 145)

Thus, in many ways Johnson's 'Canadian' identity, which temporarily displaced the hyphenated racial signifier, that is, 'Jamaican-Canadian', was contingent upon translating his personal achievements into national sporting pride. Notably, the 'hyphen' plays a strategic role in the signification process. Hyphenated signifiers such as 'German-Canadian', 'Italian-Canadian', 'Ukrainian-Canadian' and 'French-Canadian', are not only common but often celebrated in Canada, which considers itself to be among the most multicultural nations in the world. However, as Mackey (1999: 20) notes: 'While all these hyphenated forms all have their own histories of constitution, some groups are widely considered more "ethnic" than others. Others have the privilege of being simply "Canadian".' Notably, several authors have argued that, with respect to 'Jamaican-Canadians', the hyphen is both a 'national' and a 'racial' signifier; in other words 'Jamaican', despite the existence of white Jamaicans and blacks who are not Jamaican, is a euphemism for 'black' in Canada (Foster, 1996a, 1996b; Levine, 1988a, 1988b).

The use of the 'Jamaican' and 'hyphenated Jamaican' signifiers was one way in which Johnson's racial and national identity was represented. However, the aftermath of Johnson's disqualification also witnessed the advent of seemingly more blatant racist discourses structured largely within the framework of racial stereotypes. These discourses played an important role in defining his identity and in reinforcing his 'otherness'. Various racial stereotypes linked to animal imagery (Janofsky, 1988; Levin et al., 1988), intelligence (Siegel, 1989) and derogatory humour (see Boyd, 1988; Farber, 1996) emerged following the Johnson affair at Seoul.

For example, consider nationally renowned editorial columnist Alan Fotheringham's (1988: 64) remarks which, although not intended to condemn Johnson, arguably frame him within a racist discourse: 'Ben – poor, dumb Ben . . . he's stupid, but he's not a criminal . . . more stupid are those who have used him, doctored him like a racehorse with strange substances, hoping to cash in on a \$4 million bonanza.' Here, Fotheringham links two racist stereotypes: intelligence and animal imagery (and, indirectly, a third through his reference to criminals). Admittedly, any insinuation that these discourses are racist simply because they use animal imagery could be challenged given that many athletes, including white

athletes, are referred to in such terms. However, it must be emphasized that it is the historical assumptions and ideologies underlying such racist discourses that not only allow them to be articulated in the first place but, further, enables them to be re-articulated at different conjunctural moments (Callinicos, 1993).

Another form of racist stereotyping that arose after Johnson's disqualification operated under the guise of racist humour (a contradiction in terms). Remembering his own immediate response to the steroid scandal, fellow black Canadian sprinter Bruny Surin recalls that:

. . . all the stories referred to a 'Jamaican-born sprinter'. . . . What the hell was that? It makes you wonder if it could ever happen to us if anything bad happened. Not drugs, but anything. The radio, TV, all you were hearing was jokes about Ben Johnson. Proud Canadian one day. Jokes the next. (Farber, 1996: 145)

While examples of the hegemonic use of the hyphen have already been presented there is evidence to support Surin's observations about racist-based jokes. One insensitive 'joke' involved 'Has-Ben', 'Bennie' Johnson, responding to Olympic drug testing authorities: 'Hey mon, I didn't take no steroids.' Another referring to the adjusted placing and redistribution of medals in the 100 metre final described it as: 'Uncle Ben's Converted Race' (Boyd, 1988: A-3). The first example, articulates Johnson's presumed ignorance of what steroids are with notions of criminal activity, itself articulated to race and deviance. The second example links Johnson's disqualification with 'Uncle Ben's' converted rice, a product whose advertising symbol is a black male represented in a traditional service role as a cook. The significance of these examples is that 'humour', as a particularly potent aspect of popular discourse, perpetuates, reinforces and naturalizes the assumptions underlying racial stereotypes.

In combination, the use of stereotypes and other racist discourses provide ample evidence of the backlash against Ben Johnson which serve to both dehumanize him and to question the authenticity of his Canadian identity. However, the nature and extent of racism is not always obvious in Canada. For example, writer Meredith Levine argues that, win or lose, Canadians would never have accepted Johnson as their Canadian ambassador, noting that it is important to understand how racism operates in Canada, that is, 'subtly, covertly and insidiously. . . . In Canada . . . your enemies do not make themselves known to you' (1988b: 8). Likewise, Foster (1996b: 320) describes this Canadian version of oppression as 'racism with a smile on its face'. As Foster further notes:

It does not matter how much we protest; how much we might wrap ourselves in the Canadian flag and sing the national anthem. For, as is generally the case, when most Whites see Blacks in Canada, they see visitors or people who have not graduated to becoming fully accepted citizens. (1996b: 69)

Notably, in 1995, in the midst of fighting his lifetime ban for a second positive steroid test, Johnson directly charged racism arguing that: 'My life ban stems from a white people's campaign. I was getting too powerful as a black athlete. Every time a black man tries to succeed in life they try to put him down' (*Sunday Star Times*, 1995: B20). In sum, the case of Ben Johnson confirms that racism manifests itself in differing forms and intensities within Canada (Bannerji, 1996; Bissoondath, 1994; Cannon, 1995; Foster, 1996b; Lazarus, 1980; McLellan and Richmond, 1994; Satzewich, 1992; Walcott, 1997; Wilson and Sparks, 1996, 1999).

The racist responses to the Ben Johnson scandal in Seoul reveal several aspects of his haunting legacy. First, he brought the end of the innocence to Canada's highly self-idealized reputation as the 'fair play' nation. Canada's response was strategic damage control initiated through the Dubin Inquiry, which not only demonstrated Canada's willingness to seek the truth about its domestic steroid problem but, perhaps more importantly, revealed the epidemic of performance-enhancing substance abuse within international sport (MacAloon, 1990). Second, Johnson left a legacy for black Canadians who were suddenly being viewed in a new light, illuminated by an array of displaced racial signifiers. And, third, Ben Johnson left a legacy for black Caribbean-born sprinters who were henceforth going to live under a microscope and always be compared to 'you know who'. This pressure worked in two ways. Not only were 'black' Canadian athletes scrutinized so they would maintain a clean, drug-free reputation, they were also compelled to win given that Ben Johnson had proven that Canadians could beat the Americans and could be the fastest in the world. In sum, there is considerable evidence to support the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson with respect to black people in general and other black, Jamaican-born Canadian athletes, such as Donovan Bailey, in particular. Consider some of the following examples that constitute but a sampling of the many media quotes referring to the past, present and future influence of Ben Johnson on contemporary Canadian existence.

Ben Johnson has been erased as Olympic champion everywhere but in his own heart. . . . he remains a challenge to his country's forgiveness and a phantom who haunts Canada's men of speed. (CBC Television, 18 July 1996)

A country forgot about whatshisname. Those demons are exorcised for good, fading like Bailey's jet stream down the straightway. (Young, 1996: D3)

Canadians have much to cheer. Donovan Bailey, with his gold medal in the prestigious 100-metre race, has erased the national shame still lingering from the Ben Johnson scandal. (*London Free Press*, 1996: B6)

Bailey exorcises ghost of Johnson in 100m sprint. (*Otago Daily Times*, 1995: 29)

Donovan Bailey and the ghost of Ben Johnson

To begin to explore the impact of Ben Johnson on Donovan Bailey it is worth noting some of the parallels between the two men. First, both are black Jamaican-born Canadians, who immigrated to Canada in their early teens, Johnson in 1976 and Bailey in 1981. Second, both grew up in single-parent families in Canada, and were late starters in their careers as sprinters. In fact, Bailey did not begin training as a serious sprinter until 1991 when he was 23. Third, both individuals have won World Championships, an Olympic gold medal (albeit temporarily in Johnson's case) and set new world records. And a fourth similarity is that both competed in a context that featured an American rival. For Ben Johnson it was Carl Lewis. For Donovan Bailey, despite the fact that they only faced each other directly in one race, it was Michael Johnson. While all of these factors may have contributed to the never-ending comparisons between the two athletes, clearly the most salient feature is that they are both black, Jamaican-born Canadian sprinters who put the nation on the international sporting map.

Yet, we should not overlook the differences. For example, Bailey is a much more charismatic individual with relatively more refined verbal, and arguably, people skills. No doubt these qualities enhanced his attractiveness to potential sponsors such as Adidas, Air Canada, Maple Leaf Ltd and many others. In addition, Bailey was a successful businessman prior to his entry into elite athletics. And, perhaps most significantly, he beat the Americans, in two Olympic events (100 metre and the 4×100 metre relay), without cheating. Nevertheless, Bailey cannot escape the reflections, references and comparisons to the man in whose footsteps he has been forced to run.

A cursory review of the media coverage indicates that Bailey is repeatedly looked upon as a sort of saviour who is expected to cleanse Canada's international sporting reputation and in the process erase the memory of Ben Johnson. Repeatedly, though without ever being asked directly, Bailey's integrity is questioned with respect to his possible steroid use. And, repeatedly Bailey is asked to proclaim his allegiance to Canada, often in the form of a forced choice question, such as, 'Do you consider yourself a Canadian or a Jamaican?' To this extent Donovan Bailey (and others) is truly haunted by Ben Johnson. Notably, just prior to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Bailey expressed this sentiment in his own words when he stated: 'I got irritated for a long time because Bruny [Surin] and I were compared to . . . the ghost' (Donovan Bailey quoted during the CBC documentary *Athens to Atlanta: The Olympic Spirit*, 1996).

For the purpose of this analysis, three key events are examined that demonstrate the ongoing Canadian struggle over Donovan Bailey's racial and national identities, and, in turn, his own sense of agency in constructing those identities. The specific events analysed include: (1) the Canadian

response following his *alleged* remarks published in *Sports Illustrated* concerning racism in Canada just prior to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics; (2) Bailey's public statements following his 1996 Olympic gold medal victories; and (3) Bailey's controversial actions following his victory in the 1997 'One-to-One' challenge against American Michael Johnson, a race promoted as determining who was 'the world's fastest human'.

First, just prior to the commencement of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, Bailey was embroiled in a huge controversy as a result of an interview conducted with Montreal-based *Sports Illustrated* writer Michael Farber. In the interview Bailey was reported as stating that:

Canada is as blatantly racist as the United States. . . . We know it exists. People who don't appear to be Canadian – people of color – don't get the same treatment. They associate you with your parent's birthplace or your birthplace. . . . Look at our [sprint] relay. It's an issue. (Farber, 1996: 145)

Bailey's remarks were met with shock and surprise in some corners, and with heavy criticism in others. The Canadian sprinter's condemning statements were even more stinging given that the United Nations had just declared Canada the best place in the world to live for the fourth time in the past ten years. Consider the reaction of Carol Anne Letheren, former CEO of the Canadian Olympic Association and a member of the International Olympic Committee in Canada (as well as being the Chef de Mission for the Canadian Olympic team during the Ben Johnson scandal at Seoul). She expressed extreme disappointment in Bailey's accusations:

I'm surprised by Donovan's statement. . . . If there's a tolerant country anywhere, it's Canada, a melting pot of many nationalities. Sure, we had some difficulties since the big influx of immigrants to Canada during the past 40 years, but we've always been able to deal with it. We have certainly not discriminated against any of our athletes, no matter where they were born. In fact, we're all looking forward to the 100-metre sprint in which Donovan Bailey and Bruny Surin are our big medal hopes. There's a special excitement in our camp that Bailey and Surin will do the job and we'll redeem ourselves by proving that the Ben Johnson affair was just a fluke. (Gross, 1996: 12)

Here, Letheren takes quite a defensive stance against the insinuation of racism in Canada. Although she acknowledges that there have been some difficulties due to the 'influx of immigrants' into the country, she is forthright in proclaiming that there is no racism against black athletes. Strikingly, like many others, she too refers to Bailey (and Bruny Surin) as potential vehicles of redemption for the Ben Johnson affair. Notably, Letheren's statements are fraught with contradictions and are even more surprising given her role as official spokesperson following the Ben Johnson disaster at Seoul. In 1988, in conjunction with then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, she contributed to the process of redefining fall-out from the Seoul Olympics as a 'personal tragedy' for Ben Johnson and subtly

identified his Jamaican roots (McMartin, 1988). Once again, the very attempt to proclaim Canada's cultural diversity and progressive race relations reveals traces of ethnocentrism and racism.

Returning to Bailey's original alleged remarks in *Sports Illustrated*, it is suggested that if the article had simply reported that Bailey claimed there was racism in Canada, the chances are it would have received much less attention. This contention is based on the fact that Bailey, Surin and other black Canadian athletes have occasionally expressed their personal experiences and frustrations with racism in Canada, though usually with little public reaction, or sympathy. However, by *allegedly* claiming that Canadians were as racist 'as the Americans' Bailey appeared to be offering the worst possible insult to the Canadian public. In hindsight, it is quite possible that there was an error in Farber's quote, one which he freely admits is conceivable given that he was using handwritten notes and that he wrote the piece some time after the actual interview (*Globe and Mail*, 1996: E12). Bailey argued that Farber had omitted the word 'not' in the passage 'Canada is [not] as racist as the United States' and a careful reading of the article certainly seems to support the sprinter's position. Yet, it is the response to the article rather than its overall content that is most noteworthy. As Klein indicates:

The real issue is not whether Bailey told *Sports Illustrated* that Canada 'is as blatantly racist as the United States' or whether he was misquoted and actually said that racism here is less blatant, but still present. What is at issue is that Bailey dared to speak about race at all. . . . Donovan Bailey's crime was letting the reality of North American racism seep in through the cracks of the sanitized Olympic bubble. (1996: H3)

Thus, Klein suggests that Bailey tainted the sanctity of the Olympics by politicizing them through an accusation of racism within North America generally. However, from the media coverage examined, there appeared to be a fairly strong backlash within Canada, whereas there was only a minor, and largely ambivalent, response in the US.

In a second key event, it is worth examining the candid statements of Donovan Bailey immediately following his 1996 Olympic gold medal performance in the 100 metres. Though he donned a Canadian flag during his victory lap, when Bailey was later questioned at the post-race press conference about whether he would consider sharing his victory with Jamaica he stated: 'It's not even Jamaica sharing. I'm Jamaican, man. I'm Jamaican first. You gotta understand that's where I'm from. That's home. That you can never take away from me. I'm a Jamaican-born Canadian sprinter' (Christie, 1996: C2). Bailey's response expressed a form of resistance to those Canadians who had questioned his loyalty throughout his career although he has repeatedly proclaimed pride in his dual citizenship and identity. By consistently acknowledging his Canadian

citizenship 'and' his Jamaican homeland throughout his career, Bailey appeared to have learned a valuable lesson from Ben Johnson. Well aware of how particular factions of the Canadian public had redefined Ben Johnson into a Jamaican-Canadian following the 1988 disqualification, Bailey empowered himself by deliberately and strategically proclaiming a dual identity; or, as Jackson and Meier (1999: 184) put it, he *hijacked the hegemonic hyphen* in 'Jamaican-Canadian'. As Klein explains:

Perhaps because he knew that Canada would disown him if he failed, he would not let It own him completely in his moment of triumph. Because he would have been Jamaican had he stumbled, Bailey forced Canadians to see him as Jamaican when he won. . . . So when Bailey's moment came, he didn't erase the Ben Johnson legacy – he flipped it on its head and threw it back at the Canadian public, with all its lingering implications. (1996: H3)

Thus, Bailey invoked a sense of agency and control over his mediated identity by deliberately defining himself through his Jamaican roots and his adopted home in Canada. Yet this was only a temporary victory for Donovan Bailey, as evidenced in the aftermath of the third key event under analysis, one that once again brought Bailey's identity into question.

On 1 June 1997, Donovan Bailey faced American sprinter Michael Johnson at the Toronto Skydome. The race, which was compared to both a Don King boxing match and the 'World Wrestling Federation of track and field' (see Christie, 1997: D12), was part of the Challenge of Champions and was billed as determining 'the world's fastest human'. To put the race into context, it is important to note that segments of the Canadian public, not to mention Bailey himself, felt that the American media had displayed its renowned ethnocentrism and arrogance by naming their own Michael Johnson as the fastest man in the world following the 1996 Atlanta Olympics (Longman, 1997; Patrick, 1996). The US proclamation was made despite the fact that historically the title of the world's fastest man has always gone to the winner of the 100 metre event. Moreover, the American media had also predicted a US victory at Atlanta in the men's 4×100 relay, which, without much recognition, was won by the Canadians anchored by Donovan Bailey. The post-Atlanta resentment was certainly being used to feed into the Challenge of Champions race in 1997. For example, Canadian newspapers reported on *USA Today* columnist, Tom Weir's remarks following the American relay team loss: 'Just as when the Toronto Blue Jays had help from the Dominicans when they won Canada's first World Series, so did its relay have a distinctive Caribbean flavour' (Houston, 1996: C9). In short, Canada was being accused of using 'ringers'. In addition, pre-race hype was cultivated when it was announced that Las Vegas bookmakers were offering three to one odds in favour of Michael Johnson (Houston, 1996). Furthermore, the million-dollar race slowly

became personalized when Michael Johnson questioned Bailey's willingness to really put the 'fastest man' title on the table (see Fish, 1997: 16E).

Arguably, the ghost had returned, for Michael Johnson became the embodiment of Carl Lewis from the 1988 race against Ben Johnson; once again, it was Canada versus the United States. The stakes were high: both Johnson and Bailey were to receive a \$500,000 race fee just for showing up, but the winner also earned an additional \$1 million. The race distance was set at 150 meters, a halfway point between Johnson's 200 and Bailey's 100 metre specialties.

The actual race was over in seconds with Michael Johnson pulled up with an injury at a point during the race when Bailey was clearly in the lead. At the conclusion of the contest, before a worldwide television audience, a very emotional Bailey asserted that:

He didn't pull up, he's a chicken . . . he didn't pull up at all, he's just a chicken. He's afraid to lose. I think what we should do is we should really run this race over again, so I can kick his ass one more time. (CBC Television, 1997)

Bailey later apologized both to Michael Johnson and to the public for his uncharacteristic remarks. Nevertheless, many Canadians celebrated the victory as confirmation of *their* 'fastest in the world' status, and some even condoned Bailey's unsympathetic attack on Johnson, revealing a deep contempt for the American media that had denied them their desired recognition in 1996. However, there were also many Canadians who were shocked and dismayed by Bailey's poor display of sportsmanship (Christie, 1997: D12). Perhaps, the worst criticism of all, at least from a Canadian standpoint, was expressed when Bailey was accused of having 'lowered his standard to the Americans' (Christie, 1997: D12). Moreover, Brunt (1997: D12) describes how Bailey transformed a moment of nationalistic pride into a moment of shame through his actions as an 'unquiet Canadian'. According to Brunt:

When he crossed the finish line at the SkyDome, Johnson having pulled up lame, it was an occasion for one of those rare surges of patriotic emotion from a people not prone to let it all hang out. Not quite Paul Henderson. Not quite Ben before the fall. But close enough to do the trick. . . . And then, with the flags waving, with the anthem playing, Bailey had to go and act, well, so un-Canadian. (1997: D12)

Thus, for one moment in time, Donovan Bailey may have been a 'Jamaican-Canadian-American'. To be clear, this specific tri-hyphenated signifier was not actually employed in any of the media discourse examined. What is important is the fact that Bailey, despite his achievements, was once again defined as the 'other' within the Canadian popular imaginary. Moreover, this example demonstrates how racism and particular

signifiers of 'otherness' do not have to be explicit, they are often subtle and may lie dormant. As Klein put it: 'Bailey may haul in \$5 million in sponsorships next year, but if history is any indication, he could get pulled over on the streets of Toronto for being a black man in a car' (1996: H3).

Since the height of his career in 1996–7 Bailey has been struggling to maintain race form. He suffered a career-threatening Achilles' tendon injury in 1998 and although he made a major recovery, a flu forced Bailey out after the second round of the 100 metre event at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. He did win the 100 metre final of the 2001 Canadian Games, but ended his career in Edmonton with an injury in the 100 metre semi-final at the 2001 World Championships. Yet, while there is some sympathy for him, the public's affection for Bailey seems to have changed. It might simply be that he is no longer the world champion and that Canadians are demonstrating a bit of fair-weather fan syndrome. It might be the 1998 car accident that Bailey neglected to report or his more recent well-publicized speeding ticket. It might be the controversy surrounding Bailey's reported illness at the 2000 Olympics and his being spotted, subsequently, at a Sydney nightclub. It may have been the open display of tensions between him and Bruny Surin over who should run anchor in the relay at the 1999 Worlds, culminating in the Canadian relay team dropping the baton and being disqualified. However, within the context of this study there seems to be at least some reason to suspect that there is more to it than that. As noted through this analysis, Bailey has continually been hounded by the legacy of Ben Johnson. Moreover, even after winning two gold medals 'for Canada' his loyalty, and hence identity, remained suspect. Ever since his rather arrogant, unsportsmanlike behaviour at the 1997 'One to One' Challenge, there seems to be increasing scrutiny and criticism of Donovan Bailey. For example, Canadian journalist Allan Fotheringham described him as 'the poster boy for today's arrogant and selfish jock millionaires' (1999). Likewise, Canadian discus champion Jason Tunks has been highly critical of Bailey's prima donna attitude noting that: 'He just talks too much and doesn't perform like he's supposed to be doing. He should just keep quiet and start running well or just retire' (Starkman, 2001). Moreover, as Starkman asserts 'Tunks' views could be dismissed as sour grapes if there weren't so many other Canadian track athletes and officials who hold the same opinion' (2001). Even on the eve of his final race Bailey faced controversy. Upset that some critics were sceptical of his injuries, Bailey claimed that his achievements were not appreciated in Canada (Maki, 2001; Wharmnsby, 2001).

This analysis of the media discourses surrounding Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey indicates that they represent broader debates about racial and national identity in Canada. In order to better understand the articulations between such discourses and the broader debates of which they are a part, I have emphasized the significance of *context* throughout

our analysis. For example, in the case of Ben Johnson it was noted that his accelerated rise to the status of national hero in 1988 was predicated on several factors, including the emotional exodus of Wayne Gretzky and the intensified cultural insecurities of the nation in light of a pending Free Trade Agreement with its powerful neighbour, the United States. Likewise, it was suggested that the Canadian backlash against Ben Johnson following the steroid scandal can only be understood within the contextual specificities of a nation that was in the midst of a seemingly forged crisis of identity (Jackson, 1994). The alleged crisis was articulated through an apparent threat of Americanization, and anxieties about the future of a particular image of Canadian identity as a consequence of immigration and the emergence of the Multicultural Act. Arguably, this combination of factors (and no doubt others) contributed to the rather dramatic dissociative discourses and practices that became a dominant feature of the Canadian response to Ben Johnson's fall from grace in 1988.

Evidence has been presented of racist and ethnocentric discourses surrounding Ben Johnson, a Jamaican immigrant whose achievements elevated him to the status of a Canadian national icon, but whose subsequent transgressions rendered him a virtual persona non grata in his new homeland. Yet, as indicated with respect to the politics of identity in Canada, the implications of the Ben Johnson affair reach far beyond one individual's shameful involvement in an international athletic drug scandal. Indeed, it has been argued that the affair became a defining moment in Canadian race relations, one that seems to have left a haunting legacy for the years that followed. From this analysis of three key events in the career of Donovan Bailey there is little doubt that there is, at least figuratively speaking, a ghost that is haunting both him and other black Canadians.

Yet, this ghost cannot solely be defined in terms of Ben Johnson, for the lingering presence of racism could only be sustained by virtue of both an existing and an emerging struggle for a particular version of Canadian national identity, one which, by default, privileges some groups and individuals and marginalizes others. It is important to recognize that there are ongoing points of conflict, or what Appadurai (1990) refers to as *disjunctures*, that occur when the hegemonic, idealized image of a national identity, in this case Canada's, is challenged. Certainly the 1988 ascent and descent of Ben Johnson, as the most internationally renowned black athlete in Canadian history could be considered a point of disjuncture that required some negotiation and accommodation. We see accommodation occurring through both the Canadian public's, and Johnson's personal efforts to proclaim and define his identity as 'Canadian' at the height of his success. Conversely, there is an apparent disjuncture following the steroid scandal, given that some of the Canadian public dissociated itself from Johnson, whereas, he continued to identify himself as Canadian. In fact, Johnson used his loyalty to Canada as part of his explanation for using steroids, that

is, he was driven to succeed for his country. Judging by the contemporary identity politics of Donovan Bailey, the struggle to accommodate racial/ethnic 'others' as national heroes continues in Canada albeit within a different and shifting cultural context.

For example, unlike Johnson, Bailey appeared to attempt to empower himself by deliberately and strategically defining his own identity within certain contexts. And, though the evidence reveals that he was able to gain some sense of agency, that agency was only able to win him a temporary victory. Despite rising to the top of the world, Bailey could not escape the media discourses that continue to define and construct his identity as a Canadian 'other'.

Notably, at the time of this writing another controversy linked to a black Canadian athlete has broken. At the 2001 World Track and Field Championships Venolyn Clarke, a 100 metre runner, tested positive for stanozolol, the same steroid used by Ben Johnson in 1988. The opening lines of two newspaper articles reporting the story suggest that the ghost has not yet been exorcised: 'In a steroid story that has disturbing similarities to the Ben Johnson scandal . . .' (Christie, 2001) and 'The fifth day of the world athletics championships was bleak for Canada, bringing back ugly memories of Ben Johnson's positive test for steroids 13 years ago' (Smith, 2001). It would appear that Clarke, like Bailey will need to suffer the consequences of her actions, but it is likely she will do so within the context of Ben Johnson's shadow. As a consequence, Bailey's rhetorical question still stands: 'Will Canada ever love a Black man [person]? (Farber, 1996: 145).

Conclusion

To conclude, this article returns to, and expands upon, the opening quote from Ibsen's *Ghosts*:

It's not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning to us. It's all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren't alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can't get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it's as if I could see ghosts slipping between the lines. They must be haunting our whole country, ghosts everywhere – so many and thick, they're like grains of sand. And there we are, the lot of us, so miserably afraid of the light. (Ibsen, 1970: 76)

Clearly there is some evidence to suggest that the ghost of Ben Johnson continues to haunt Canadians and black Canadians in particular. As indicated, there are numerous discourses that both anticipate and/or celebrate the successes of Donovan Bailey and other elite black athletes (such as the men's Olympic gold medal relay team: Bruny Surin, Robert

Esmie, Glenroy Gilbert), with respect to their role in *erasing* the memory of Ben Johnson, and cleansing and redeeming Canada's reputation. Yet, the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson can also be traced to the existing politics of racial and national identity in Canada. Thus, like Ibsen's ghosts, perhaps Canada is afraid to acknowledge and confront its own history of racist attitudes and practices, and is therefore haunted by its own past.

According to Bairner, 'throughout the twentieth century, sport has been one of the most valuable weapons at the disposal of nationalists, whatever their situation and respective aspirations' (2001: 177). As a consequence it is not surprising that Canada, like most nations, capitalizes on the opportunity to highlight the achievements of its internationally successful athletes, especially racial/ethnic minorities. The celebration of such sporting achievements, and the corresponding public displays of support, serve to show the relative superiority of a nation's social and political system, and serve as demonstrable proof of the equality of all citizens. However, as Hargreaves argues: 'it is extremely unlikely that media sport counteracts chauvinist, ethnocentric, and occasionally racist-tinged conceptions of national identity' (1994: 172). In fact, he suggests that these very sentiments are often encoded into the ongoing media discourse such that 'sport is but one aspect of a multi-layered process, whereby an exclusionist sense of national identity is reproduced by the media' (1994: 172). The contemporary Canadian crisis of identity as constitutive of, and constituted by, the identity politics of Donovan Bailey and Ben Johnson supports this contention. In light of the increasingly international flow of economic and human capital in the 'global sports arena' (Bale and Maguire, 1994; Maguire, 1999), the struggle over nationhood, citizenship and the meaning, basis and authenticity of national identity are likely to remain among the most central fixtures of contemporary social theorizing, both within and outside sport.

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