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HEADLINE: 'Culture of violence' decried;
HOCKEY SYMPOSIUM: One panelist says he's abused by fans when he criticizes
fighting in the game

BYLINE: BY CHIP MARTIN

Hockey is too important in Canada to leave in the hands of the Don Cherrys and Dale Hunters, a symposium on violence in the sport was told in London yesterday.

Peter Jaffe, a psychologist and hockey coach, said violence in hockey contributes to violence in society and it must be curbed. He fingered Cherry -- the outspoken co-host of Coach's Corner on CBC's Hockey Night in Canada -- and London Knights co-owner and head coach Hunter as partly responsible for that.

A professor at the University of Western Ontario and director at the Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, Jaffe was one of 16 speakers, panellists and commentators who decried violence in hockey -- particularly fighting -- and called for the game to be cleaned up.

Hockey players, officials, broadcasters, doctors, coaches and others called for an end to violence, saying it has marred Canada's national sport and may be a negative influence on Canadian society.

Jaffe's comments were the most incendiary as he said violence in hockey must be outlawed.

"Hockey is too important an institution to leave it to Don Cherry and Dale Hunter," he said.

He noted London Knights owners Dale and Mark Hunter resisted when asked to show leadership by banning fighting by their players.

"The Hunters said they were preparing players for the NHL," where violence remains a part of the game, Jaffe said.

Jaffe and other participants agreed the NHL must take the lead in stamping out

violence because of its trickle-down effect on minor hockey.

Bruce Dowbiggin, an award-winning journalist and author, also cited Cherry, saying the sport is permeated by "the Don Cherry code of violence."

Dowbiggin said the death of player Don Sanderson, who hit his head on the ice during a fight, should have prompted introspection by hockey officials.

Instead, there has been "the denial culture of hockey."

"A logical response is beyond the tall foreheads of hockey," he said.

Even hockey players famed as fighters don't like to fight, Hockey News writer Ken Campbell said.

He quoted comments from pugilist Montreal Canadiens enforcer Georges Laraque, who admitted: "I fight because it's my job, not because I like it."

Campbell said that because of a macho mindset of readers, he gets abused by hockey fans when he writes articles decrying violence in hockey.

He said he's accused of not understanding the game.

Dave Simpson, a former London Knight, said speed and bodychecks are more effective than fights.

"Get (fighting) out of hockey," he said. "Fighting just slows it down."

Players need to know they're protected by the rules of the game, but they "have a huge responsibility to set the standard," Simpson said.

The day-long conference was sponsored by the Middlesex-London Health Unit, whose medical officer of health, Graham Pollett, said it was intended to get people talking about violence in hockey as a step toward eliminating it.

"There is a culture of violence today," Pollett said. "We want to engage boys and men in the dialogue."