

Hockey violence slammed

By Patrick Callan, Special to The Free Press

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A panel of heavyweights took on violence in hockey Thursday at a conference at the University of Western Ontario.

Former NHL tough guy Georges Laracque, Ron Wicks, former NHL referee of 25 years, Charles Tator, professor of neurosurgery at the University of Toronto and Peter Jaffe, renowned psychologist and anti-violence advocate based at Western's faculty of education took on concussions, the long term effects of head shots and what they say needs to be done to fix hockey.

"When Violence Becomes Entertaining" attracted more than 560 people. The crowd ranged from educators, coaches, parents, students and people working with community agencies. The conference is part of a two-day event discussing violence in sports to raise awareness and to educate the public about the long term effects of sports injuries.

Tator spoke about the problem of repeated concussions. Although they may never be completely eliminated from the game, he said, prevention of head injuries is the main goal.

Tator commended the lead taken by Hockey Canada. "They have developed new penalties, new way of judging for concussions, educational programs.

This is a big step. We are on the cusp of a cultural change with respect to tolerance of head injuries in hockey," he said.

Jaffe agreed. He said awareness and prevention are keys to ultimately changing the culture of silence and removing the stigma against speaking out against violence in hockey.

"We are at the tipping point for hockey. I think the incidents over the last couple of weeks with Don Cherry and Coach's Corner have been a wake-up call," he said.

Cherry was roundly criticized for comments he made on CBC's *Hockey Night In Canada* condemning former tough guys for taking a stand against hockey violence. He has since apologized.

"I think there's going to be an elimination of fighting in hockey,"

Jaffe said. "It is just a question of time. Five years from now we'll wonder why we ever allowed fighting in hockey."

For referee Wicks, the time is now for players to have more respect for their fellow competitors.

"The bottom line is players need to have more respect for each other," he said.

The goal was of the conference, Wicks said, is "to change the whole culture of the game of hockey."

The conference continues Friday with workshops all day and guest speakers on media violence at Althouse College.