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At least he made a good point

EDITORIAL

WE'LL NEVER KNOW what caused Don Cherry to turn a valid criticism of those he saw walking about in downtown Toronto without wearing a poppy into what seemed to most Hockey Night in Canada viewers to be a rant against immigrants.

However, we do know that all Canadians should don a poppy as a vivid recognition of the valour of our soldiers in both warfare and peace-keeping over the years, and that Mr. Cherry's Hockey Night employer, Sportsnet, moved too hastily in firing him seemingly without any idea of who should replace him on Coach's Corner.

All the cable TV network would say in announcing the firing was that ?following further discussions with Don after Saturday night's broadcast, it has been decided it is the right time for him to immediately step down.?

In the circumstances, it will be interesting to see what, if anything, will be done in terms of a replacement. Sportsnet will have a major job on their hand to find someone who entertains so effectively, or dons such colourful apparel.

Interestingly, Mr. Cherry has since given interviews to several newspapers and TV stations in which he didn't really apologize, but did admit he had used a poor choice of words when he followed up his basic complaint that too few people were wearing poppies by seemingly shifting the blame to new Canadians, referring to them as ?you people? and suggesting that it wouldn't be too much for them to celebrate their arrival in this land of ?milk and honey? by spending $2 to buy a poppy.

Mr. Cherry, at 85, a Hockey Night in Canada staple since 1981, had always been known for his flashy suits and outlandish opinions, but his brief diatribe on Saturday caused a national uproar.

In announcing the firing, Sportsnet did acknowledge that the former Boston Bruins coach had become ?synonymous with hockey and has played an integral role in growing the game over the past 40 years,? adding, ?We would like to thank Don for his contributions to hockey and sports broadcasting in Canada.?

Unlike Mr. Cherry, his Coach's Corner co-host Ron MacLean did apologize for his inaction during the broadcast, when he simply stared in seeming disbelief.

The first post-show comment Mr. Cherry made was to the Toronto Sun, when he said, ??I know what I said and I meant it. Everybody in Canada should wear a poppy to honor our fallen soldiers,? adding, ?I speak the truth and I walk the walk. I have visited the bases of the troops, been to Afghanistan with our brave soldiers at Christmas, been to cemeteries of our fallen around the world and honored our fallen troops on Coach's Corner. ... I would have liked to continue doing Coach's Corner. The problem is if I have to watch everything I say, it isn't Coach's Corner.?

By Monday he went further, finally acknowledging that he should have addressed his remarks simply to all Canadians.

In one interview he told of ?talking to a veteran. I said, I'm not going to run the poppy thing anymore because what's the sense? I live in Mississauga, nobody wears ? very few people wear a poppy in Downtown Toronto.?

He may have been right about that. We know of no public opinion survey that would back up or debunk his observation, and we do suspect that if a poll were taken it would confirm that the wearing of poppies is more common in small town Canada than in big cities.

And we also know that the poppy flower is the official symbol for November 11 as Remembrance Day, the Canadian equivalent to Veterans Day in the United States. It comes from the poem In Flanders Fields by John McCrae, a lieutenant colonel in the Canadian

Expeditionary Forces during World War I.

Following that ?war to end all wars? the flower was adopted in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand as the official symbol of remembrance, paying tribute to veterans and others who sacrificed their lives during times of war.

Sadly, the Orangeville Legion's poppy campaign was marred by two incidents in which a local drug addict apparently saw the proceeds in poppy boxes as a means of feeding his habit, succeeding in his first attempt and fleeing in the second only when he was spotted by a store employee.

Let's hope that the current controversy will have a positive outcome next year, with a record number of Canadians donning a poppy.