

'We're almost the same country'

Americans think aggrieved Canadians are being a little over-sensitive

BY JONATHON GATEHOUSE

Abby Hoefler is waiting to find out what kind of vegetable she is. Sitting on the edge of a small stage in a suburban Detroit mall, the University of Michigan graduate says she will soon be appearing as one of the characters from *VeggieTales*, a popular children's television show, though she's not sure if she's playing the carrot or the tomato. A reporter quizzing her about Canada, the country that's just a 20-minute drive down the freeway, is a bit of a surprise, but Hoefler's game to try. Did she know there are Canadian troops fighting alongside Americans in Afghanistan? "No." Did she know that four Canadian soldiers were killed by an errant U.S. bomb? "No." Have you heard that Detroit basketball fans booed the Canadian national anthem? "No." Can you name the prime minister of Canada? "You're going to make me look stupid, aren't you?" Hoefler asks, giggling. "But it's not even just Canada. I don't know much about anywhere else."

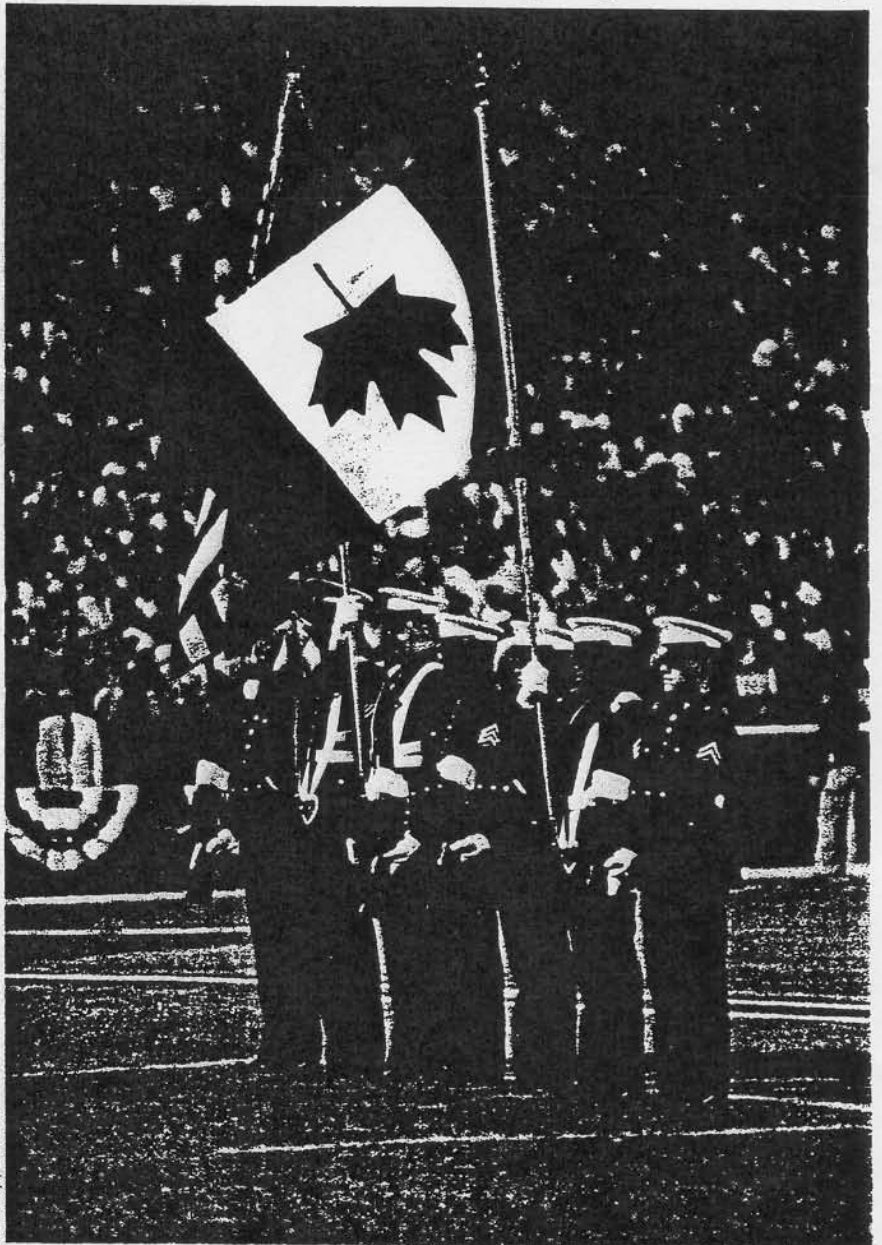
It's easier than shooting fish in a barrel. Surely, there must be millions of Americans who know the *tit gars* from Shawinigan, millions who can talk at length about free trade, NATO, softwood lumber or even the tulips in Ottawa. It's just that you don't meet them in shopping malls, coffee shops and sports stadiums.

Jill Burstein and three of her co-workers are sipping lattes in a Starbucks. To be fair, they all have "kind of heard" something about the soldiers in Afghanistan, and one says she caught the tail end of a radio talk show about the impolite Pistons fans. What about George W. Bush waiting more than a day to make a public statement about Canada's war dead? "I think you guys are over-sensitive," says Burstein. "If the White House didn't make a statement it's because we didn't think we needed one, because we thought of them as being our own guys. It's a courtesy that's not ex-

tended because you don't think you had to. Kind of like how you don't send a thank-you card to your aunt if she has you over for tea." The prime minister of Canada? "I want to say Trudeau," she says.

It's still a half-hour before game time at the Palace of Auburn Hills, home of the Pistons. The home team and their first-round playoff opponents, the Toronto Raptors, are lofting soft practice shots to-

ward the baskets and chatting amiably in small bunches on the court. Ron Harbaugh, wearing the red, white and blue No. 42 jersey of Jerry Stackhouse, the Pistons' marquee player, is sharing a pizza with his friend Myles Wohl. They were both at the first game of the series, when the crowd lustily booed *O Canada*. (Hockey fans at the New York Islanders playoff game against the Toronto Maple



They couldn't get it right at the 1992 World Series, and not much has changed

Hans Deryn/CP Archive