

**Sport and Athletics:
A Case Study of Lacrosse
In Canada, 1840-1889
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INTRODUCTION

Much of sport history examining the last one hundred years has been concerned with the chronicling of the growth of organized sport in clubs, colleges, and throughout the western world. At the same time, sport historians have recognized the existence of a dichotomization between amateur and professional sport. However, attempts to explain this dichotomization have come to naught usually degenerating into value-laden judgments as to the evils of professional sport. These differences have been accentuated by the apparent contradiction between the stated objectives of amateur sport and the perceived behaviour of players, coaches and spectators. The observation of these differences has crystalized in the academic arena, around attempts to differentiate between "sport" and athletics. Keating analyzed the basic attributes differentiating sport from athletics while Weiss concerned himself with the pursuit of excellence.¹ Vanderzwaag, in an attempt to synthesize the writings on the topic, discussed it in terms of amateurism and professionalism, motivation and organization.² This leads to the nearly self evident proposition that 'sport' and 'athletics' are multi dimensional concepts embracing a variety of independent yet interrelated levels. Therefore, attempts to understand these concepts by a simple definition of single entities is doomed to fail, as it has in the past. In fact, "sport" and "athletics" can be present at the same time in the same game depending upon the entity by which one defines the concepts.

Throughout all the writings on "sport" and "athletics", a basic thread can be discerned which gives a focus as a point of departure for the discussion of these concepts. The basic thread is that athletics is concerned with winning. Therefore, if one arbitrarily defines athletics as WIN AT ANY COST and sport as A COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY IN WHICH VALUES

¹James Keating, "Athletics and the Pursuit of Excellence," *Education*, 85 (March, 1965), pp. 428-31; James Keating, "Winning in Sport and Athletics," *Thought*, 38 (Summer, 1963), pp. 201-10; Paul Weirs, *Sport: A Philosophic Inquiry* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

²Harold J. Vanderzwaag, *Toward a Philosophy of Sport* (Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 51-74.

OTHER THAN WINNING ARE TO BE ACHIEVED THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN AN ATHLETIC COMPETITION, it is possible to analyze any single contest on several levels. The commonality that the different levels have is that each level has a tendency towards emphasizing or producing behaviour that is indicative of an attitude of win at any cost.

Sport		Athletics					
		Emphasis on Winning			Components		
A	Conditions Extrinsic to the Game	Competitive Structure	Pick Up Games	Intra Club	Exhib. League	Champ League	
		Rewards	Importance to Player, Club, Spectators, Public				Extrinsic Intrinsic
		Administrative Structure	Increased Bureaucratization				
B	Determinant of Nature of Game at Commencement of Contest	1. Attitudes				I Players	
		2. Value				II Team	III Club
C	Determinant of Nature of Game Itself	Behaviour				V Spectators	
						I Players	II Officials
						IV Spectators	

FIG. 1 THREE LEVELS OF "SPORT" AND "ATHLETICS"

The tendency towards an emphasis upon winning in any game is increased by certain external circumstances, each of which can be placed on a continuum of sport/athletics (see fig. 1, level A), the competitive structure, the nature and importance of the rewards, and the administrative structure. Therefore, it is possible to define a game as "sport" or "athletics" independent of the game itself and the behaviours of the players. However, a contest can also be judged to be "sport" or "athletics" in terms of the attitudes and values a variety of individuals and groups bring to it. (see fig. 1, level B). Finally, the game itself can be assigned to one of the categories solely on the grounds of the behaviour exhibited by players, officials, coaches and spectators (see fig. 1, level C). At each level, the move towards "athletics" signifies an increased emphasis upon winning. The simple categorization of any individual contest to a particular category is an exercise in futility — professional sport by external definition is "athletics", yet players, sports writers and others can and have defined it philosophically and attitudinally as "sport"; while on the field of play the behaviour

can fluctuate between outright violence and gentlemanly play or between “sport” and “athletics.”³

This paper, therefore, has two basic objectives. First, to examine the history of lacrosse in Canada, 1840-1889, in terms of the variables outlined in figure 1 in order to understand more fully the exact nature of its development. Second, to throw light on the concepts of “sport” and “athletics”, which explicitly, or more often implicitly, underlie the whole history of organized sport.⁴

HISTORY OF LACROSSE

The first recorded lacrosse game between whites and Indians was held at Montreal in 1843.⁵ During the next twelve years infrequent games took place in Montreal but it was not until 1856 that the Montreal Lacrosse Club (M.L.C.) was formally constituted. Local opposition was provided for the M.L.C. with the emergence of the Hochelaga and Beaver Clubs in 1858 and 1859.⁶ Throughout the early 1860's teams were formed in eastern Ontario and there was spasmodic competition between Ottawa, Cornwall and Montreal. This flickering interest was fanned into life in September, 1867 when 42 delegates of 27 lacrosse clubs from Ontario and Quebec met at Kingston, Ontario to establish a National Lacrosse Association (N.L.A.).⁷ Throughout the 70's lacrosse experienced many ups and downs and it was not until the early 1880's that sustained growth took place. During this period it spread from coast to coast with clubs being formed from the Maritimes to British Columbia. The growth of various championships in Ontario and Quebec under the auspices of the N.A.L.A. and the C.L.A. exemplified both the increase in clubs and the development of sophisticated organizational structures. In 1884 there were Canadian, District of Ontario and District of Quebec Championships; local contests for area supremacy were held in southern, eastern, western and central Ontario; western Quebec, Manitoba and

³The paradigm (Fig. 1) was, in fact, an outgrowth of this study. However, in order for the paper to make sense it was deemed necessary to provide the conclusions first. This then gives a focal point and structure to the discussion that follows. This framework is a descriptive rather than theoretical model. It is possible indeed probable, that theoretical relationships between the different levels and sub-levels do exist but at this stage of development the framework simply describes relationships.

⁴The use of models in historical writing raises a question as to the nature and function of history. In this instance, a framework is employed to give structure to the discussion and a focus to the examination at “sport” and “athletics”. In fact, all historians use models; for the most part these are implicit rather than explicit. An increasing number of historians, however, are using this approach. For a brief but pertinent examination of the question of the use of theories and models see Ellen W. Gerber, “Methodology in Historical Research” in Jack Wilmore (ed.), *Exercise and Sport Sciences Reviews* (Academic Press, 1974) Vol. 2, pp. 350-353.

⁵H. W. Becket, Scrapbook, *Montreal Amateur Athletic Association. 1877-1880.*

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Toronto Daily Globe*, 30 September, 1867.

the northwest. What was in effect the first lacrosse league was created in 1885 when the N.A.L.A. abolished the old championship system and replaced it with a series system involving two teams from Montreal and two from Toronto. The *Montreal Daily Star* contained the first league standings on September 1st, 1885. By 1889 there were three lacrosse leagues in Montreal ; championships were played throughout Canada ; various levels had been established — Junior, Intermediate and Senior; and professionalism was an ever present although unpopular reality. Lacrosse had developed from a game for a relatively small, select group to a highly developed spectator sport.

Although lacrosse manifested significant changes in terms of number of teams, competitions, participants and spectators, it faced persistent problems which apparently defied solution. From 1866-1889 the leading clubs accused each other of rough, violent play and officials of biased, incompetent officiating. As early as 1869 the President of the Prescott Lacrosse Club wrote to the *Montreal Daily Star* complaining that in a match with the St. Regis Indians, "The Indians slashed, cut and fouled continually . . ." ⁸ Ten years later, a reporter commenting on a Montreal Shamrock vs Indians game stated:

"I have never witnessed such rough, in fact almost brutal play as was indulged in today, so far from it being sport, they might as well put down their sticks and fight at once." ⁹

In 1888 the championship series of the N.A.L.A. collapsed amid a barrage of accusations and counter accusations over dirty, foul, unmanly play. Unnecessary and over enthusiastic slashing, tripping, fighting and wrestling were an ever present aspect of lacrosse.

Paralleling the concern over rough and violent play were disputes over the scoring of goals and the standard of officiating. On Saturday, 17 September, 1870, a game between the Shamrocks and Montreal was marred by two lengthy altercations over whether the ball had passed through the goal or not. ¹⁰ In several instances, matches were abandoned when a team walked off the field refusing to continue play because of a disputed decision. ¹¹ Arguments over the appointment and competency of the officials were reported in 1876, 1877, 1879, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1887 and 1888, while disputes over the scoring of goals,

⁸ *Montreal Daily Star*, 9 July, 1869.

⁹ *Ibid*; 25 August, 1879.

¹⁰ *Ibid*; 19 September, 1870.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 30 August, 1875; 2 July, 1872; 28 June, 1880; 3 July, 1871; 7 September, 1874; 21 June, 1880; *Toronto Globe*, 2 July, 1872.

the “ruling off” of players,¹² and the interpretation of what constituted a foul caused delays in games of up to 30 minutes.

TABLE I
Number of Games Played, Roughness and Disputes
in Montreal Papers, 1869-1888¹³

Period	Total Games	Roughness	Disputes	Total
1869-72	21	4 (19%)	3 (14%)	7 (33%)
1873-76	23	8 (34%)	1 (4%)	9 (38%)
1877-80	50	7 (14%)	9 (18%)	16 (32%)
1881-84	72	7 (10%)	7 (10%)	14 (20%)
1885-88	92	21 (23%)	6 (6%)	27 (29%)
Total	258	47 (18%)	26 (10%)	73 (28%)

The continuity and persistence of some of the problems facing lacrosse is clearly illustrated in an analysis of games played in Montreal between 1869 and 1888; of 258 games reported, 72 (28%) contained references to foul play and/or disputes (see Table I).¹⁴ The complaints over violence and ungentlemanly conduct were spread evenly over the 20 year period rather than increasing from 1869 to 1888. In fact, the same complaints were being voiced and the same observations made as to un-sportsmanlike conduct in 1869 and 1888. Although lacrosse had become more highly structured and more popular, it had not changed in terms of the behaviour exhibited on the field.

Throughout the period 1869-1888 executives of the N.A.L.A. and C.L.A., individual clubs, some players and newspaper reporters were very much aware that lacrosse was not being played in the way they believed it should. In their eyes, it was “athletics” rather than “sport”. This concern led to a series of actions designed to remove the problem — progressive de-

¹² “Ruling Off” simply means sending a player off the field for the remainder of the game.

¹³ These statistics were derived from accounts of games involving first class clubs. Throughout the period 1866-1888 this was, in the main, concerned with 9 teams — 2 Indian teams of St. Regis and Coughnawaga, Montreal Lacrosse Club, Montreal Shamrocks, the Torontos and Ontarios from Toronto, Cornwall, Brockville and Ottawa. These teams accounted for over 95% of the statistics.

¹⁴ Of critical concern to this study is the validity and reliability of the data; in other words, did the measurements actually measure “sport” and “athletics”? In fact, the data simply measures the occurrence of acceptable or unacceptable behavior which is defined as “sport” or “athletics”. This behavioristic definition of “sport” and “athletics” is fraught with dangers. The critical point lies in the understanding that the definition only applies to behavior. Obviously, the lack of violence outbursts does not mean that in terms of attitudes the players were involved in “sport” — quite possibly they were involved in athletics. However, in terms of behaviour they were engaged in lacrosse within the defined boundaries of rules as interpreted by the officials and writers. As soon as the players moved beyond the boundary, in a significant way, the behaviour was related to increasing emphasis being placed on winning. Care was taken to ensure that the behavior was, in fact, unacceptable, and thus accounts of violence and disputes left no room for doubt that this was undesirable. There is little doubt from the sport writers, letters to the editor, and the Minutes of Montreal Lacrosse Club that this behavior was equated with an overemphasis upon winning. In terms of reliability, whenever possible accounts in the *Montreal Daily Star* were checked against similar accounts in the *Toronto Globe*.

lineation of rules to control behaviour on the field and the exclusion of professionals.¹⁵

Prior to the formation of the N.L.A. in 1867 there were no generally accepted rules of lacrosse.¹⁶ At individual contests rules were agreed to at a meeting before the game. On the formation of the N.A.L.A. in 1867 a set of rules was adopted to govern play. These were concerned with defining positions, equipment, method of scoring, number of players and the appointment and functions of referees; only two rules were concerned with behaviour on the field of play — one spelling out behaviours that were “not authorized” and the other defining “penalties for foul play”. Within one year it was deemed necessary to spell out in greater detail offenses which constituted foul play. Three clearly related to undesirable behaviour — Rule XVIII Rough Play, etc.; Rule XIX Threatening to Strike; Rule XX Foul Play.¹⁷ In 1877 the N.L.A. established a committee to revise the Rules of Lacrosse. As a result of their report, six new rules were incorporated into the rule book — Rule XVIII Rough Play, Rule XIX Threatening to Strike, Rule XX Deliberate Charging, Rule XXI Crosse Check, Rule XXII Interfering and Rule XXIII Foul Play.¹⁸ Rule XVIII on Rough Play clearly illustrates the extent and nature of the undesirable behaviours.

“No player shall grasp an opponent’s stick with his hand, hold it with his arms, or between his legs, nor shall any player hold his opponent’s crosse with his crosse in any way to keep him from the ball until another player reaches it. No player with his crosse or otherwise, shall hold, deliberately strike or trip another, nor push with the hand, nor must any player jump at, or shoulder an opponent from behind while running for or before reaching the ball, nor wrestle with the leg entwined so as to throw an opponent.”¹⁹

The necessity to define offenses in such minute detail was an explicit recognition of the existence of undesirable conduct. By 1882 the rules controlling foul play on the field covered most

¹⁵The development of rules can be seen as the normal growth of sport. In fact, it is suggested that the normal growth of sport is from “sport” to “athletics”. The development of large scale competition and bureaucratic structures removes the primary relationships which were so important an aspect of the early sport and so critical to the development of attitudes and values which emphasized how one played the game. “Sport” could only thrive in a milieu in which everyone accepted the values of muscular Christianity or athleticism. “Athletics” is natural, “sport” unnatural.

¹⁶ W. K. McNaught, *Lacrosse and How it is Played*, (Toronto: Rose Belford Co., 1881) p. 11.

¹⁷ Beers, *op. cit.*, p. 255-56.

¹⁸ *National Lacrosse Association, Rules, 1878.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

contingencies.²⁰ Attention now turned to the enforcement of the rules. At the Annual Convention of the N.A.L.A. in 1882, an amendment was passed to the effect that there was to be no appeal against the decision of the referee.²¹ In the ensuing years there were repeated calls for strict rule enforcement and in 1890 the referee's authority was extended when he was empowered to reverse the decisions of the umpires. Even though the focus had changed from one of definition to one of control, the basic problem remained the same — control of undesirable behaviour on the lacrosse field. What had changed was the number of teams, the form of competition and the social composition of the players.

The “lacrossists” of the 70's and 80's were convinced that they knew the most important single cause of the problems besetting lacrosse — professionalism. From the birth of the N.L.A. in 1867 professionalism was a perennial concern to the administrators. At their first meeting the white teams were classed as amateurs while the Indian teams of Caughnawaga and St. Regis were adjudged to be professionals. During the late 1870's the arguments over professionalism culminated in the withdrawal of the prestigious Montreal Club from the N.L.A. in 1880. The reasons given by the club executive were simple and to the point.

“They consider it inconsistent with the constitution of the Montreal Club to form part and parcel of an association numbering among its members semi-professional clubs, or clubs having in their ranks, players paid for services in the field.”²²

At the 9th Annual Convention of the N.L.A., prompt action was taken to rectify this question when an amendment was passed which defined “an amateur very rigidly”,²³ and Indians were “barred from membership in the Association on account of their being professional.”²⁴ What was thought to be the definitive answer — the elimination of professionals — turned out to be little more than a stopgap measure. By the late 1880's the premier amateur clubs were embroiled in a battle over the use of professionals. In 1887 the M.L.C., the only club untainted by accusations of professionalism, claimed that the Brockville Lacrosse Club “employed professional players in utter disregard

²⁰ These are basically the same rules as used in 1911.

²¹ *Toronto Globe*, 3 June, 1882

²² *Annual Report of Montreal Lacrosse Club*, 1881.

²³ Becker, *op. cit.*, p. 315.

²⁴ *Ibid*; p. 314.

of the amateur clauses of the constitution.”²⁵ Both the N.A.L.A. and the C.L.A. were forced to deal with the question of professionals at their annual meetings in 1889. The N.A.L.A. considered 6 cases on 4 of the leading teams while the C.L.A. expelled 9 players from 5 different teams. In fact, during the next 30 years both organizations were never able to adequately deal with the professional question and in the early years of the twentieth century the premier clubs of the Shamrocks (Montreal), Toronto, Capitals of Ottawa and Cornwall became unabashed professionals.

It is apparent from this brief survey of lacrosse that two processes were involved in its development, one of change, the other of stability. The increase in the number of clubs, the changing focus of competition from exhibition to championship, the codification of rules, and the development of complex organizational structures were all symptoms of normal growth patterns. However, the one fact that remained constant was the existence of undesirable conduct and rough play. A reading of the newspaper accounts and club minutes indicates clearly that both “sport” and “athletics” existed throughout; this was clearly recognized by contemporaries. However, they failed completely to recognize the relationship between the normal growth patterns and their consequences for the way in which a game was played.

DETERMINANTS OF “SPORT”

In the “disastrous” year of 1888 the N.A.L.A. championship series collapsed amidst a cacophony of accusations and counter accusations over foul play, ungentlemanly conduct, use of professionals, and the bribing of players and referees — the importance of winning had become so great that the clubs who believed in playing a game for more than victory found it impossible to reconcile the observed behaviours with their held values. Why had the players and administrators who believed implicitly in “sport” failed to recognize the sickness which was destroying lacrosse? In simple terms, they identified a symptom as the fundamental cause. For the most part, professionalism was identified as the sole cause of the problems.²⁶ In fact, the real causes lay in a complex interaction of different variables which individually were not sufficient to cause a shift

²⁵H. W. Becker, *Scrapbook, Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, 1886-1891*.

²⁶This belief has not died; there is still a tendency to blame professionalism for all the evils underlying amateur sport. The late Avery Brundage is the classic exponent of the sole cause theory.

from “sport” to “athletics” but which, in conjunction with each other, produced conditions conducive to “unmanly” and “un-sportsmanlike” behaviour. This behaviour was the end product of a number of changes which facilitated a shift from “sport” to “athletics”. These lay in the nature of the game, the attitudes and values of different groups, the competitive structure, the extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for victory, and the growth of complex administrative structures (see Fig. 1). Each of these contained a potential for shifting the focus of a game towards winning.

Lacrosse, from the outset, was a game in which violent behaviour was condoned and legitimized. The nature of the game promoted conduct which could lead to undue roughness and unfair play. This potentiality towards violence was accentuated by the fact that *one* player could turn a sporting contest into “athletics” whereas *one* player could not reverse this trend. Added to this, the individual player’s “threshold” as to what constituted acceptable conduct made any lacrosse contest a powder keg.²⁷ The viability of this hypothesis is given credence when the games in which there was undue roughness are examined. Throughout the local rivalry between the Montreal Club and the Shamrocks, there were several instances of violence. In 1875, the Montreal Club, commenting on the Shamrocks, stated that the “Shamrocks are a splendid team . . . most play fair except for *two* or *three*.”²⁸ On Friday, 9 July, 1875 after a championship game, the *Gazette* reported that it was an excellent game except for “the butcher-like proclivities displayed by Moffatt in the body check.”²⁹ Ten years later after a particularly rough game between the two clubs, the *Star* placed the blame squarely on three of the Shamrocks and Michaud and Louson of Montreal.³⁰ For the most part, until the 1888 season, violence in a particular game was restricted to two or three players although there were times when the individual thresholds of all players were reached and “a melee in which both sticks and fists were used by the players.”³¹ Therefore, in any particular game one violent or rough player could turn a game played for the demonstration of “gentlemanly” qualities to an “athletic” contest in which the blood flowed freely.

²⁷ The idea of “threshold” was derived from the same physiological concept. In this instance each lacrosse player had a tolerance level as to what was acceptable conduct — as soon as this level was reached he retaliated. Obviously, the “threshold” of each individual was different.

²⁸ H. W. Beckett, *Scrapbook*, 1872-76.

²⁹ *Montreal Gazette*, 9 July, 1875.

³⁰ *Montreal Daily Star*, 17 June, 1885.

³¹ *Ibid*; 14 September, 1885.

Lacrosse, because of its physical nature, was particularly prone to outbreaks of violence; the surprising thing is that so many games were played in a “gentlemanly” manner.

Any particular game of lacrosse never took place in a vacuum; the actions of players on the field were influenced by the attitudes which they brought to the game and the actions of officials, coaches and spectators, each of which could influence a contest towards “sport” or “athletics” (see Fig. 1, level B). The championship game between the Montreal and Brockville lacrosse clubs on Saturday, 13 August, 1887 at Brockville, Ontario, is a classic illustration of the interaction of various influences which coalesced to produce attitudes which were not conducive to “sport”.³²

The climate of opinion and attitudes towards this championship game had been established earlier in the season. On the visit of the Brockville Club to Montreal on the 18th June, 1887, the game was marred by numerous disputes over the referee’s decisions. As a result of this, the Brockville Club felt that they had been unfairly treated by the Montreal Lacrosse Club. Added to this was the unpopularity of Cleghorn, a leading “physical” Montreal player, who had aroused the ire of the opposing team due to his refereeing of a Brockville vs Cornwall game earlier in the year. The attitudes, therefore, of the Brockville Club and followers towards their opponents were something less than friendly. This was accentuated by the interclub argument over the appointment of a referee for the forthcoming contest. Montreal submitted nine names, all of which were rejected. On the Saturday morning, Brockville, in a “fait accompli”, presented a Mr. Danaher, who the Montrealers claimed was “unacquainted with the rules of lacrosse, unknown in lacrosse circles, and has a pecuniary interest in the game.”³³ The Montrealers, therefore, stepped onto the playing field to play the game under protest. A potentially explosive situation had been created prior to the commencement of the game by actions that lay essentially outside the powers of the players. However, both players and spectators were aware of this antipathy and thus their own mental approach to the game can well be imagined.

The stage was set for the explosion that followed, an incompetent referee and two teams suspicious of each other’s

³² Information for this account was taken from the *Montreal Daily Star*, 15-20 August, 1887 and *Toronto Globe*, 15-20 August, 1887.

³³ *Montreal Daily Star*, 19 August, 1887.

actions and motivations. In the first game Cleghorn, already unpopular in Brockville, deliberately cross checked and tripped a Brockville player; referee Danaher failed to award a foul or send him off; thus, the die was cast. In the second game, Cleghorn and Louson of Montreal became involved in a physical confrontation with McBrearty, Bennett and Kennedy of Brockville. It would appear from the accounts of the game that although both teams participated in the ensuing melee, it was this group of five players who instigated the violence. They were aided and abetted by the spectators who raised "reproachful and contemptuous cries" and incited "the players to violence."³⁴ In the third game when Mr. F. C. A. McIndoe, the non-playing Montreal field captain, moved to separate Cleghorn and McBrearty, the crowd rushed onto the field and attacked him. Throughout the rest of the contest there were clashes and disputes between the two teams. The ultra amateur Montreal club, the epitomization of the game for the game's sake, had become involved in warfare, in pure "athletics". That they lost 3-1 only added insult to injury.

This account illustrates clearly the interrelationship of the behaviours of different groups. In this case, club officials, referee, spectators, and players all exhibited behaviour which was representative of "athletics". Even though in each instance it was most likely a minority of each group, 5 out of 24 players, the game was identified clearly as "athletics". In fact, for some the game ceased to be a contest for the demonstration of sport skills and became out-and-out warfare. The importance of this incident lies in the fact that the M.L.C. were the undisputed upholders of pure amateurism, of playing the game for the game's sake.³⁵ That they could be provoked to engage in a mass melee is a clear indication of the powerful forces which promoted the shift from "sport" to "athletics".

Of critical concern as to whether a lacrosse game became "sport" or "athletics" were the attitudes that various groups brought to the game. There is little doubt that for the many players, administrators, and newspaper reporters, there was more to the game than winning.³⁶ The ongoing concern of the N.A.L.A. over the question of rough play, the stated objectives

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19 August, 1887.

³⁵ During this period the action of the M.L.C. were predicted on the belief that how one played the game was more important than victory. Thus, their action at Brockville is one of the clearest examples of the power of "athletics" and the weakness of "sport". "Sport" can only thrive under certain conditions which required the tacit consent of the players. The amazing thing is that such a lot of "sport", defined in the behavioral sense, was played.

³⁶ This evidence comes from numerous newspaper reports, the Minutes of the M.L.C. and letters to the editor.

of the Montreal Lacrosse Club, the letters to the editor abhorring rough play and advocating athleticism, the generally fair way in which most players played the game and the sportsman-like attitude of many crowds attested to an implicit belief that how one played the game was as important as winning and therefore games provided more than a victory or a defeat. This value claim for sport thrived in a homogeneous social group where consensus could be more easily attained. Lacrosse in its earlier years achieved this because the majority of players were drawn from a similar social and educational background; thus, the likelihood of achieving unanimity of purpose was far greater.³⁷ As long as lacrosse remained the exclusive preserve of this homogeneous social group, it was possible, by exerting group pressure, to enforce adherence to the values of athleticism. However, three of the most successful teams were composed of players drawn from different social groups.³⁸ Between 1869 and 1879, the Indian teams of Caughnawaga and St. Regis were involved in 11 of the 31 championship games. 7 (66%) of these games involved rough play or “unmanly” conduct. This was greater than the occurrences of violence and disputes in championship games not involving Indian teams (55%). It would appear reasonable that this difference could be attributed to a difference of attitudes towards lacrosse between the whites and the Indians. The expulsion of the Indian teams from membership in the N.A.L.A. in 1880 was one of the steps taken to destroy professionalism and thus undesirable behaviour on the playing field.

Prior to 1885 and the end of the championship challenge system the most successful lacrosse team in Canada was the Montreal Shamrocks who played in 44 of 47 championship games, 25 (57%) of which involved disputes and/or rough play.³⁹ The fact that they were, in the words of a Chicago writer, “horny handed sons of toil”⁴⁰ gave support to the conclusion that the origins of the players accounted, in part, for the observed differences in behaviour. Rather than looking elsewhere for the cause of the rough play, it would appear logical that the social origins of a team drawn from Irish

³⁷ This embraces the concept of primary and secondary relationships.

³⁸ This reinforces the argument that “athletics” is the natural development of “sport”. At the outset, both the Indians and the Shamrocks were homogeneous social groups which brought values that apparently were different to those of the M.L.C. This caused conflict in that the game of lacrosse meant different things to different people. The actions of the M.L.C. during this period support this. Professional sport is thus “athletics” in that social boundaries disintegrate in the face of the desire to win. This had taken place in lacrosse by 1901.

³⁹ Most of this data was compiled from the *Montreal Daily Star*, 1869-1869 and the *Toronto Globe*, 1869-1889.

⁴⁰ H. W. Becket, *Scrapbook*, 1877-1880.

Catholic working men was the cause of the problem. It is quite possible, indeed probable, that both the Shamrocks and the Indians were more committed to winning than the exclusive Montreal and Toronto teams but this in itself was not sufficient to explain the occurrence of violence.⁴¹

The possible consequences of different social origins has been noted in the example of the Indians and the Shamrocks; however, it is also possible that different values existed within the same clubs. As long as the active players controlled the executive of the clubs and the N.L.A., an identity of purpose was probable. However, when the players and executives were drawn from different groups (age or social origin), the possibility of a difference of group attitudes was present. In 1860, at least 7 out of the 9 man executive of the Beaver Lacrosse Club were active players. Similarly, in 1870, the same ratio pertained to the Crescent Lacrosse Club. However, by 1881, only 1 member of the executive of the Montreal Lacrosse Club was an active player. Although this evidence is fragmentary, supporting evidence does suggest that there were differences of opinions between the executive and players.⁴² At the Annual Convention of the N.A.L.A. in June, 1881, the President, S. C. Stevenson of Montreal, commenting on the absence of the Montreal Lacrosse Club stated, "sometimes people who did not play had more to say in the club than those who did."⁴³

During the 1870's, a number of perceptive observers identified one of the major causes of the ongoing problems of rough, violent behaviour. In 1872, in a lengthy letter to the *Montreal Star*, a writer, analyzing the reasons for the decline in popularity of lacrosse, stated that "the championship matches undoubtedly damaged the game."⁴⁴ A year later the Montreal Lacrosse Club decided not to challenge for the championship because these games "had been a deep injury to the game"⁴⁵ and in 1875 a "Lover of the Game" attributed the temporary decline of the "national game" to "the championship contests between the Montreal and Shamrock."⁴⁶ By 1877, writers were advising the delegates to the N.L.A. Convention:

⁴¹ This supports the contention of the power of homogeneous social groups. Both the Indians and Shamrocks were homogeneous groups with values different to the M.L.C.

⁴² This difference was clearly demonstrated in the Minutes of the M.L.C. in the early 1900's when professionals were employed. There were many references to undesirable conduct on the part of the players.

⁴³ *Montreal Daily Star*, 4 June, 1881.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*; 21 May, 1872.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*; April, 1873.

⁴⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, 6 July, 1875.

“That lacrosse in the future have no championship but, like cricket clubs have nothing but friendly games between various cities and clubs — promote a more kind and friendly spirit among the clubs and players . . .”⁴⁷

This was a conscious recognition that the creation of an extrinsic reward system whether it be a championship, a trophy, or money inevitably changed the focus of the game to winning. The more valuable the extrinsic (or intrinsic) reward was in the eyes of the player, administrator, spectator or public at large, the greater the pressure placed upon the player to ensure a successful outcome to the game and thus the tacit acceptance of previously defined undesirable behaviour.⁴⁸ It was the inauguration of the championship in 1866 that led to an increased emphasis upon winning. Within three years behaviour which illustrated this change began to appear; clarification of rules, foul play, disputes over officiating.⁴⁹ An analysis of games played by the first class clubs during the period 1868-1888 illustrates the difference between exhibition games and those in which the championship was at stake (Fig. 2.)⁵⁰ A total of 258 games were reported in the Montreal papers during the period; 73 (28%) involved disputes and/or rough or violent play. In the 142 exhibition games only 21 (15%) were adjudged to be “athletic”. However, of 116 championship contests, 51 or 43% reported rough play and unmanly disputes.

The differences in the two types of contest — exhibition (challenge) and championship — is clearly illustrated in the case of the Montreal Shamrocks, perennial champions between 1869 and 1884. During this period they played 44 championship games of which 25 (57%) involved rough play and/or disputes. In 55 exhibition games against roughly the same teams, in only 9 (16%) was there evidence of ungentlemanly conduct. Apparently, the same teams were involved in games in which radically different forms of behaviour were exhibited, sometimes on consecutive weekends.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*; 1 August, 1877.

⁴⁸ Extrinsic rewards are simply the visible rewards for playing — money, trophies, etc. Intrinsic rewards are the benefits an athlete perceives he/she obtains from participation. In a general sense, such things as status within the community, physical benefits, etc. lie under this category.

⁴⁹ This could be seen as normal growth. Once again, I suggest that the normal growth indicates measures taken to remove “athletic” behaviour. The development of rules was a reaction to conditions which indicated a shift to “athletics”.

⁵⁰ In collecting data care was taken to bias the data against finding the hypothesized independence. Championship games were only defined as containing disputes and/or unmanly behaviour if there was indisputable evidence of it — lengthy accounts of actual conflict, cross checking with *Toronto Globe*. At the other end, in the case of exhibition games, any reference to disputes or violence was taken to represent its occurrence. The differences obtained were significant at the .01 level.

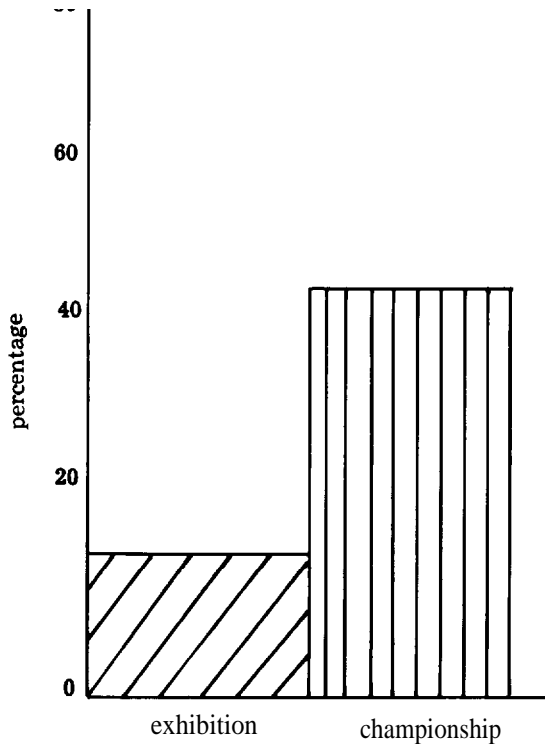


FIG. 2 Incidence of Rough Play and Disputes in Championship and Exhibition Games, 1867-1888.

The insidious influence of championship games and the lack of understanding of the change in focus wrought by the creation of a league or championship is clearly illustrated by the example of the Montreal Lacrosse Club, the epitomization of sport for sport's sake. Their concern over unsportsmanlike conduct, violence on the field, and unmanly behaviour led them to refrain from challenging for the championship in 1871-74, 1876, 1878, 1880-81 and 1888, even though they continued to play the champions in exhibition games. In 1880 the club withdrew from the N.L.A. over the question of professionalism. Coincident with these anti-"athletic" actions, the *Annual Reports* were reporting behaviour which indicated the fragile nature of the balance between "sport" and "athletics". In 1879 the secretary commented, "Our players had not the amount of practice that was necessary to win."⁵¹ Two years later the president stated that "the success of a team depends upon three things: the first is practice, the second is practice, the third is practice."⁵² The conflict during the 1887 championship series led them to

⁵¹ *Annual Report, Montreal Lacrosse Club, 1879.*

⁵² *Annual Report, Montreal Lacrosse Club, 1881.*

resign from the series in 1888. After the “disastrous” year of 1888, Mr. Stevenson of the Montreal Club, President of the N.A.L.A., observed that:

“I think that Saturday’s game was the last of the series system If the system falls through, I do not know whether they will go back to the old challenge system, but I am sure that the present one will be discontinued.”⁵³

Yet, less than a year later Montreal, in conjunction with the four premier clubs, Shamrocks, Torontos, Cornwall, and Ontarios, met at the Windsor Hotel, Montreal, to establish a league. The success of this league, which differed from the old series only in the composition of the members, was duly reported in the Annual Report of the Montreal Lacrosse Club in 1890.

“This departure proved very successful and never in the history of the game has public interest in each match and the ultimate result reached such a pitch during the season, the attendance at the matches being much greater than ever before, and the uncertainty as to who would be the victor was kept up until the last scheduled match was played.”⁵⁴

Here was the leading *amateur* club in Canada extolling the virtues of the system which essentially spelled the end to true amateur sport — a game which could be played purely for the sake of the game.⁵⁵ They did not perceive that whether a game was “sport” or “athletics” depended upon a complex of independent attributes which singly or together could cause a shift towards either “sport” or “athletics”. With the creation of the league, the die was cast; there was no turning back.

Not only did the value attached to money and trophies influence the nature of the game but the more subtle, but just as important, intrinsic value attached to any particular contest could shift a game to “sport” or “athletics”.⁵⁶ Both society and individuals attach a degree of importance to victory in any contest and the greater the status ascribed to success the more likelihood there is that the game will move from “sport” to “athletics”. Certain conditions provide reinforcement for the shift; regular games, social differences, and public recognition

⁵³ *Montreal Daily Star*, 21 August, 1888.

⁵⁴ *Annual Report, Montreal Lacrosse Club, 1890.*

⁵⁵ “True amateur sport” was used by contemporaries to signify what I have defined as “sport”. Here were the M.L.C., the truest of all amateur clubs extolling the practices which made it increasingly difficult to maintain “sport”.

⁵⁶ Intrinsic values refer to the perceived values of participation in sport. In this instance, it refers particularly to the status of the individuals and the group within the larger society. For instance, the status of leading baseball and ice hockey players today.

of the importance of the contest. The interaction of these variables is illustrated clearly in the case of the rivalry between the Montreal and Shamrock Lacrosse Clubs. From the commencement of the rivalry in 1868, there appears to have been an antipathy between the elitist Anglo-Saxon, protestant Montreal Lacrosse Club and the working class, Irish-Catholic Shamrocks. Their yearly competitions became the most important sporting contests on the Montreal lacrosse scene, outweighing other championship contests.

TABLE II
Incidence of "Athletic" Behaviour, 1870-1887
in Exhibition and Championship Games
Between MLC, SLC, and Others

		Games Played	"Athletic" Behaviour	Per- centage
Championship	Montreal vs Shamrocks	18	10	55%
	Montreal vs Others	22	5	23%
	Shamrocks vs Others	53	24	45%
Exhibition	Montreal vs Shamrocks	14	4	28%
	Montreal vs Others	50	6	12%
	Shamrocks vs Others	50	6	12%

Table II illustrates the difference between the games, both championship and challenge, involving the two teams and those with other teams. There was a greater incidence of "athletic" behaviour in those games involving the two Montreal teams than in those with other teams, both in championship and exhibition games. The difference is even more glaring when it is noted that the incidence of "athletic" behaviour was greater in Montreal vs Shamrock exhibition games than in the other Montreal championship games. Certainly, a reasonable hypothesis would appear to be that the intrinsic value, status, ascribed to the outcome of these contests was greater than that ascribed to the outcome of other contests. This gives support to the suggestion that the intrinsic value ascribed to a particular contest has the potentiality for shifting a contest from "sport" to "athletics" and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

The creation of the Championship Series (League) in 1886 indicated that lacrosse was, on one level, "athletic". A league structure, highly valued extrinsic and intrinsic rewards, and a

depersonalized bureaucratic structure all, to a greater or lesser extent, increased the likelihood of winning, becoming the only thing. By 1887 great prestige was attached to the winning of the “National” championship; no longer was it a matter of single games between different teams but rather a continuous set of games each of which had a future importance — the determination of the National champion.⁵⁷ Therefore, on this level of championship competition, lacrosse was “athletics”.

The nature of any particular game is to a large extent dependent upon the attitude a player (spectator, official, administrator) brings to a game. This, of course, is impossible to determine, our knowledge of the attitudes coming from the values held for sport which were expressed in club and organizational objectives and the writings of sports reporters. By the late 1880’s, conditions were such that it was becoming increasingly difficult to expect general adherence to the values of “muscular christianity”⁵⁸ The relatively homogeneous social group of lawyers, businessmen, bank clerks and professional men had given way to a wider base of white collar workers. An increasing number of young men without high school education were playing lacrosse. This meant that they had not been exposed to the teachings of muscular Christianity. The working class Cornwall and Shamrock teams represented a different set of values. It would appear that for increasing numbers of players winning was becoming increasingly important.

It is on the field of play that the most explicit signs of “sport” and “athletics” are to be observed. Although the absence of violence does not mean they are playing sport, it does signify that the players are competing within the boundaries defined by the collectivity. The catastrophe of 1888 clearly demonstrated that for significant numbers of players in the championship games winning had become, if not the only thing, a very important thing — how one played the game was not relevant.

Lacrosse, or for that matter any game, holds within it the potentiality for “sport” or “athletics”. A set of external conditions developed during the period 1840-1888 that made “athletic” behaviour a likely occurrence. In conjunction with this the attitudes and values held by players, administrators

⁵⁷ From 1901 on lacrosse become more professional. Paralleling this change was an increase in violent behaviour on the field. This led to the demise of field lacrosse in Canada.

⁵⁸ Muscular Christianity relates to the fulfillment of Christian attitudes and values through participation in sport. This movement developed in England during the 1850’s and was influential in the justification of physical activities by such groups as the churches and the Y.M.C.A.

and spectators which in the early 1860's espoused the ideals of "athleticism" were subject to change by the widening base of support of both players and spectators in the 1880's. Finally, lacrosse by its nature was a game in which outbreaks of violence were likely to occur. However, the behaviours exhibited on the field of play were in the end determined by the relative importance each individual placed upon the importance of playing the game for the game's sake or winning.