

Canadian Governmental Intervention In Sport: Why 1970, Why Not Before?

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On February 20, 1945, Ian Eisenhardt, Director of Physical Fitness, announced that the National Physical Fitness Branch would serve as the link between sport organizations and the government. This was met with considerable criticism by the press. During the following years, the government tried to stay out of direct contact with sport organizations.

A parallel proposal was put forth on March 20, 1970 by John Munro, Minister of National Health and Welfare. This was the first time that the government had ever taken such a stand since Eisenhardt's remark of 1945. However, although parallel in design, there was one distinct difference, that of outcry. Apparently times had changed, for the Canadian press and people were not bothered by this new announcement.

The purpose of this paper was to examine those two similar incidents through a perusal of the Parliamentary Debate Journals and from newspapers. It was hoped by examining these two incidents historically, that general insights may be gleaned as to the role of the federal government in Canadian sport. Perhaps, since at both times the government wanted to gather the sport organizations of Canada together for effective administration, the problem could be seen in a better light if one assumes these two incidents were similar. Then the question becomes not one of similarity and difference but one of "Why 1970, why not before?"

Much can be inferred as to reasons why the Canadian people were not perplexed by the 1970 Federal Government's intrusion into sport. Sport cannot exist in a vacuum; it is part of society; and thus being part must suffer the consequences of being affected by many different aspects, some minor, others major, but all playing a role in its development and function.

The outcry of 1945 seemed to have been in direct disagreement with any kind of government intervention in sport. After the war, the government had just begun to become involved in the living conditions of the Canadian. *The National Physical Fitness Act* was only the beginning movement that showed the awakening of government interest in a diluted socialistic approach to the future of Canada. In 1970, after 25 years of increased government involvement in all aspects of life, the Canadian people no longer had their original bias towards government. In its place was a growing Canadian identity, in the sense of a pride in nationalistic feelings which sport fosters.

Along with a welfare government, the impact of sport and its new importance was finally being recognized. Most countries had seen and used sport as a political tool much earlier than Canada. It appears that Canada was just a slow starter. The one main factor that probably led Canada to recognize this loss of sporting prestige was Canada's involvement in International Hockey. It was unheard of for Canada to lose in international hockey competition. The losses in track and field, swimming and the other areas could be tolerated as long as Canada remained supreme in hockey. However, after 1961, when the Trail Smoke Eaters won the World Championships,

Canada never again did regain a semblance of hockey supremacy in World or Olympic competition.

Another aspect that was important in the examination of government intervention was its concern over physical fitness. It appeared that as early as 1945, Canada saw physical fitness as an excuse for promoting sport. Canada's concern for physical fitness in the 1960's became its disguise for operating organized sport. Until the importance of sport grew, physical fitness appeared to be the vehicle which carried sport. It was not until the "White Paper Report," in 1970, that the term physical fitness was not used as a screen for sport. Sport, like old cheese, had come of age; and now the government had caught its smell.