

Sport and Social Stratification in Montreal, 1840-1901

by

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There were several basic findings arising from this study. In the first place, the predominant place of the British, white collar middle class is first as participants and always as organizers of organized sport. There was no evidence to suggest that the working classes were ever successful in developing and organizing teams with a degree of permanence. Although it is likely that the low income groups and occupational groups did develop clubs, they were short-lived. It was the upper middle class who acted as a stimulus to the growth and development of sport, on a local, provincial, and national level. It was the men with organizational and commercial backgrounds who had the expertise necessary for the long term development of their organization who provided the leadership. This leadership was provided first by the upper levels of white collar workers and increasingly as the century progressed by the clerks, bookkeepers, bank clerks, and cashiers. Increasingly, these were the men who first as participants and later as organizers provided the necessary guidance for the growth of sport.

The second major feature was the predominance of the British of the St. Antoine's ward. Sport in Montreal during the nineteenth century was the history of the English, Irish and Scottish Canadians. French involvement came late and there was never a powerful influence on the development of organized games. This was reflected in the location of clubs, the development of facilities, and the home location of the executives. These all focused heavily on the predominantly British protestant St. Antoine's ward and later Westmount.

Thirdly, if there was a democratization of sport it was at the playing level only and never at the administrative or social levels. There were various methods of social discrimination which varied from sport to sport; golf, hunt and tandem clubs were the exclusive preserve of the monied, commercial and political elite. It was in the competitive team sports that any degree of democratization was to be found and even in this instance there was discrimination by ethnicity, occupation, religion and geographical location. It would appear that there was an increasing differentiation between players and executives as the century progressed. This, of course, led or could lead to a difference of opinion as to the meaning of sport between different levels of the same organization. This was certainly evident in the difference between the objectives of the Montreal Lacrosse Club early in the 20th century and the focus of the parent organization, the M.A.A.A. Finally, there was certainly rigid discrimination in the essentially social clubs in which the boundaries were strictly maintained.

In terms of the social structure of Montreal, the history of organized sport gives certain interesting insights. It would appear that there was a relatively rigid social system based heavily upon occupation and ethnicity. However, the evidence does lead to the tentative suggestion that the barriers of occupational differentiation were greater than those of ethnicity. The limited evidence suggests strongly that the French and the English communicated horizontally between groups of a similar social status rather than vertically with groups of a similar ethnic background. The involvement of the M.A.A.A. in the leading French Canadian clubs in an exclusive bowling league in the late 19th century is concrete evidence of this. If this is the case, it was not language or ethnic background which was the major stumbling block to Canadian identity but rather that of social class.