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# Working Class Recreation in Nineteenth Century Montreal

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An analysis of the living, working and economic conditions of the workers makes it difficult to see how physical recreation could have played any role in working class life. These conditions in conjunction with the availability of facilities, lack of space, and the private nature of the available facilities, present a dark and depressing view of life. Notwithstanding these nearly insurmountable odds, there is substantial evidence of working men being involved in organized inter-club competition, professional sport, commercial sporting entertainment and spasmodic sporting activities. This paper is concerned only with their involvement in organized amateur interclub competition.

The first evidence of the lower socio economic groups participating in sport occurs in the 1860's in lacrosse. During the ensuing thirty years they became involved in baseball, soccer, and perhaps cricket and rowing - all, except rowing, sports requiring a minimum of equipment and expensive facilities. Few of the teams were of a permanent nature, the vast

majority existed for brief moments and then disappeared. This meant that they did not influence the growth and development of the sports.

There were, however, two groups that had a relatively permanent existence; the Montreal Shamrock Lacrosse Club and a number of teams formed by workers of the Grand Trunk Railway. The Shamrocks illustrate the nature of working class involvement in sport; the club was created and run by middle class Irish Catholics - a Q. C., J. Curran, and some upper level clerical workers - bookkeepers, head cashiers. Throughout the nineteenth century this group controlled and administered the clubs. It was at the playing level and as spectators that the more broadly based workers were involved - the mechanics and lower level clerical staff. The clubs associated with the G. T. R. exhibit roughly the same characteristics - organized and played at first by the white collar workers and eventually permeating down to the industrial workers in the various shops.

By far the greater number of clubs were "fly by night" organizations. These organizations fell into two categories; those sponsored by the firm they worked for and those arising out of the working class themselves. There were several clubs that were sponsored by firms, often by men who were active in the prestigious middle class clubs. For the most part these teams were composed of the more lowly clerical staff and rarely of mechanics or the industrial working class. A more broadly based set of clubs developed in the 1890's whose leaders were from the working classes, usually the young children (12-18) of workers.

There is little doubt that increasing numbers of workers were becoming involved as players by 1900. However, a distinct pattern of development could be discerned. They were started by middle class white collar workers, permeating down to the lower clerical level and eventually to the mechanics. The promotion and stimulus came from the top. Laborers, artisans, carpenters, bricklayers, etc., were noticeable by their absence. At no time was there any involvement by the old traditional working class; it was the workers associated with the new factories who became involved in sport. Organized sport the creation of industrialization first reached that segment of the working class who were most intimately associated with the industrial process.

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