

The Role of Minor Sport in The Development of a Community Sport Model: A Case Study of Chatham, Ontario

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The development of a community sport model is dependent on several factors. Each of these must work in concert in order to ensure a successful programme. Operationally defined, a community sport model consists of the various municipal sporting forms which together represent the sporting milieu of the specific city, town or village. Minor sport, one of the most recently established sport forms in Chatham, a post-World War II phenomenon, has realized a successful programme and has contributed significantly to the development of the community sport model.

Historically, the first recorded “juvenile” sport in Chatham occurred in 1863 with the formation of two youthful cricket teams. Owing to the central geographical location of the city in relation to Windsor-Detroit, Sarnia and London, Chatham sport teams soon realized excellent competition with a minimum of expense. As a result, minor sport, specifically hockey and baseball, continued to prosper, realizing considerable notoriety as, for example, being the home of Ferguson Jenkins, notable Major League pitcher and one of the nation’s authentic contemporary sporting heroes.

The minor sport programme developed essentially as a triumverate. In July, 1946, the Chatham Memorial Community Centre was created as an extension of the City Council to serve as the nerve centre for sport and recreation within the municipality. Two years later, as a result of the pioneering efforts of two Chatham men, baseball became institutionalized with the formation of the Chatham Minor Baseball Association. Sponsored by a Chatham service club, minor hockey mirrored the embryonic baseball example resulting in the 1951 formation of the Chatham Minor Hockey Association. For the most part, these premier components of minor sport were largely originated and managed by personally interested individuals, ensuring motivation and dedication which resulted in an effective programme.

During the initial thirty years of its history, the aims and objectives of the minor sport portrait have been its fundamental strength. Based on a sound, all-encompassing philosophical orientation of character development, minor sport in Chatham attempted: to inculcate in boys certain ideals: to play fairly under all circumstances and all conditions: to give opponents a fair chance and not to take unfair advantage of any opponent: to win modestly and receive defeat with a smile: to give credit to the team that wins: not to question or dispute the referee’s or umpire’s decision. . . . To set the cause above renown: to love the game above the prize . . . Sport for sports’ sake and for the greatest number.

Thus although emphatically idealistic, the initial aims and objectives of minor sport in Chatham regarded the notion of character development through sport as the issue of primary importance. Apparently, the development of a community sport model in Chatham was built with a parental touch in hopes of leading the youth of the city toward “pure, naturalistic ideals.”

Despite several omnipresent problems, including budgeting restraints and both qualitative and quantitative facility shortcomings, minor sport has evolved in the City of Chatham to become an important cog in the machinery comprising a community sport model.