

# Sport in Canada During the Depression

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The era of the 1930's was born in disaster, lived in turmoil and expired in a whimper. The severity of the depression varied from region to region in Canada, but its devastating impact was felt in all parts of the country. It was inevitable that such an all-encompassing social and economic trauma would also affect the development of sport in this vast country.

During the depression when unemployment rates were as high as 23 per cent, Canadians had an abundance of leisure time and sport became a favourite pastime for both the participant and the spectator. As Howell has stated, participation in sport greatly increased during the depression years. The type of sports played depended largely upon the size of the person's pocket book. The unemployed and farmers tended to choose games like baseball, softball, curling, hockey, rigger, and soccer — sports that required a minimum of expense. Those who could afford to do so gravitated towards sports such as tennis, golf, badminton, sailing, and skiing while usually only the wealthy could afford to participate in sports like yachting and polo.

Provincial governments recognized the value of sport in occupying the leisure time of the unemployed, and British Columbia with its provincial-recreation program was the first to institute a government supported program in 1933. The provincial-recreation program was so successful in British Columbia that other provinces soon followed suit, and in the ten years following the inauguration of the "pro-rec." program in British Columbia inquiries were received about the plan from all provinces in Canada.

The depression did not deter Canadians from watching or listening to sport. Sports-writer Ted Reeves speculated that as long as people had a few extra quarters they seemed to be willing to spend them on a game that might help them to forget their troubles for a while. The popularity of professional wrestling and six-day cycling increased during the 1930's, and strange as it may seem, horse racing continued to draw large crowds. Professional sports such as hockey and baseball did suffer at the gate, but at the amateur level where admission prices were lower, these sports thrived. Those who were unable to attend professional sports spectacles often could still listen to the events on the radio.

Throughout Canadian history, the Western provinces have resented the domination of the East in most aspects of Canadian life. The extreme hardships of the depression experienced in the West kindled this spark of resentment. In the realm of sport the depression acted as a catalyst in intensifying the rivalry between the East and West, particularly in the game of Canadian football. It seems that through sport Canadians were able to release their pent-up emotions in a socially acceptable manner.