

Reflections on Canadian Sport: Images of Yesterday, The Forecast for Tomorrow

by

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(Maxwell L. Howell Address)

Even though Canada's sporting past has been a largely neglected subject, scholars are presently hard at work investigating that important component of Canadian culture. Early signs from such investigations point to the fact that the nation's sporting heritage is replete with richness of activity, not only in the area of winter sports, as might be imagined, but also in the perspective of summer and autumn sports. Given its population numbers in comparison with those of the United States, Canada's sporting past has been every bit as vigorous and colorful, and just as unique in terms of contributions to the world's sporting mosaic.

IMAGES OF THE PAST

In its infancy, Canada's sport and physical education ethic was underscored most heavily by French and Indian influence. However, after the termination of the Seven Years' War, a focus on the evolution of a British sporting trend took place. Near the end of the 19th century a movement towards adopting the operational models of several American sport forms developed - and not without sound reason. After all, the opportunities to pay witness to and participate in various sport activity schemes were near at hand and more readily available than the same spheres of interest in distant Britain.

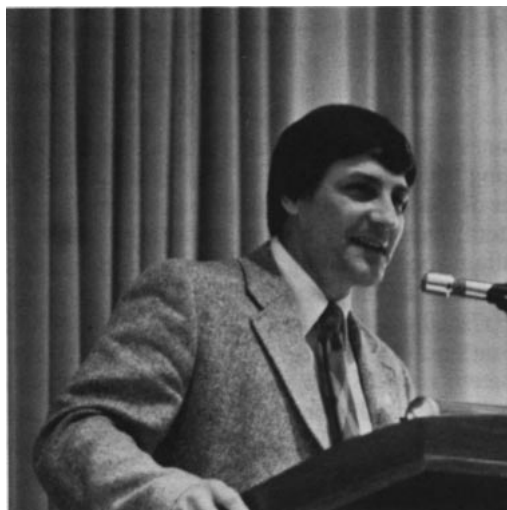
The most evident contribution of the Indians to the sport portrait was lacrosse, a combative, team-type game used for a variety of purposes by native inhabitants. Played in various forms along the geographical perimeters of the Great Lakes and surrounding areas, the Indians used lacrosse: (1) as a means of sport and *recreation* in the true sense of those words, (2) as a means of settling war disputes, (3) as a training program for war, (4) as an agent of gambling activity, and (5) as a function of religion, particularly as related to medicinal agents, a medium of divination or as a means of influencing the elements. Impromptu lacrosse games between Indians and Britons occurred as early as 1843, leading in time to the game being taken up in a serious way by the British residents of Montreal. Other sporting activities of the 19th century, participated in by French, English and Indian, to greater or lesser extent, were: snowshoeing, canoeing, cricket, horse racing, sailing, baseball, rowing, yachting, soccer, curling, ice hockey, cycling, skating, sleighing, dancing, chess, billiards, hunting, fishing, and track and field.

Twentieth century Canadian sport history has been filled with the richness of activity characteristic of urbanization and industrialization. Following the trend noted in the United States, college and amateur sport rose to become formidable components in the nation's sport fabric. Professional athletics, the inevitable sporting plateau in societies permeated by cultural materialism and competition, emerged towards becoming the identical spectacle in Canada as it had in earlier times in the United States.

THE FORECAST FOR TOMORROW

What then, is to be the future of Canadian sport under the imposed conditions of urban and industrial growth. Whatever that future, a safe speculation is that it will be similar in

context to that which will continue to evolve in America. It is a pity, really, that Americans, in general, know very little about their next door neighbors to the north. Actually, it is very difficult to imagine the people of any two countries in the world as being more alike than are Canadians and Americans. There are subtle differences, of course, but the major social institutions of each country are remarkably similar. For example, Canadians are not mystified by American patterns of speech, religion, education, government, and economics because their own concepts and practices of each are roughly the same. Canada and the United States have realized quite similar stages of historical development. For instance, each realized a discordant pre-British history involving the economic interests of other nations, each experienced a period of fundamental British overseership, each underwent large scale immigration of European peoples, each bore witness to the frontier phenomena and the expansion of the West, and each graduated from a deficit economy towards urbanization, industrialization and a surplus economy in the second half of the 19th century. If these commonalities of the past are not enough to pay reference to the future, then can we consider the present for a moment. Canada and the United States share a common and historical geographical boundary, similar social institutions of critical importance, economic frameworks of a like nature, and, indeed national security destinies linked together in solid adhesiveness. Even more critical factors in the increasing Americanization of Canadian sport are related to a consideration of the following: Canada, a country larger than the United States, has a population of roughly 23,000,000 people, approximately 85% of whom live within 100 miles of the Canadian-American border, well within range of American radio and television programming, a fact which, when added to the realities of the influence of American newspapers, magazines, journals and textbooks on a Canadian publications-starved market, leaves little doubt as to the impact of American social and economic institutions on the erosion of Canada's traditional ties to Mother England. A distinct shift has taken place in the foundations of the Canadian way, a shift-drift, so to speak, away from the consuming necessity for the Protestant ethic to be maintained towards a state in which entertainment becomes a key cultural factor. Canadians, as did Americans, once worked with only peripheral regard for play. Today, that ethic has been reversed. Such a reversal presents immense challenges to sport and physical education, of which entertainment of the idle, the mental and physical rejuvenation of the machine-replaced, and the installment of values in the young for personal fitness are, out of necessity, major considerations in the difficult eras of the immediate future.



Bob Barney presents the Maxwell L. Howell Address