
Nineteenth Century Cricket in Nova Scotia

by
ROBERT MOSS

The old English game of cricket only receives fleeting recognition from a dedicated few nowadays, yet was once the most popular game in Nova Scotia and the former “national” game of the Dominion of Canada. Although the game experienced sputtering progress, it was, nonetheless, the singly most popular sport during the nineteenth century in Canada and the Eastern United States. The introduction and growth of cricket in Nova Scotia occurred during the period prior to Confederation at a time when political turmoil, considerable immigration from Europe, and British rule characterized life in the Province. It’s status also increased after the “union” however, and continued to flourish into the twentieth century.

The main exponents of the game were upper class British Gentlemen, and Officers who had either emigrated to Canada, or who were there on military service, and native Nova Scotians who aspired to the same upper class code of social refinement. Participation in the sport was consistently socially exclusive and was played in the spirit of the imported British sporting ideal: that sport would develop more desirable personality and character traits and could improve the carriage of the gentleman! Throughout the century the military personnel provided most of the initiative and support for the sport and served as the main opposition for the civilian teams that took to the field. Whereas the Army and Navy teams maintained a consistent interest and participation in the game throughout the century, the civilian teams were subject to lapses of development and would quite dramatically slip from periods of great enthusiasm to a time of almost total inactivity.

Cricket was played in Nova Scotia as early as 1786 and continued to flourish well into the nineteenth century. By the 1840’s the game was thriving, particularly in Ontario, the Maritime Provinces and the Eastern United States and was undergoing considerable growth in Nova Scotia. The 1860’s brought further developments, with the game becoming the leading sport in Nova Scotia and the number of clubs increasing considerably. As the century continued the rivalry between civilian and military teams became something of a trend and assumed quite highly competitive proportions. In 1874 the City of Halifax staged what was the climax of cricket’s domination of the period - the Halifax International Cricket Tournament, involving international teams from the United States, England and Canada.

The immediate aftermath of this event was a decline in the game which was not overcome until 1882 with the formation of the Wanderers Amateur Athletic Club and a

general resurgence in the game amongst local enthusiasts. Tournaments and tours took place in Nova Scotia, the National Canadian cricket eleven took part in international competition, and a keen interest trailed any local team which played out of Province. The renewed interest in the sport did not last long however and by the early years of the 20th century the halcyon days of cricket were over. Partly due to the withdrawal of British forces in 1906, the “backbone” of cricket in the Province for over a century, and partially due to the emergence of other “rival” sports which attracted more interest, cricket was sent into a decline from which it never recovered.