

The Development of Women's Organized Sport in the 1920's — A Study of the Canadian Ladies Golf Union

SHEILA MITCHELL

Sport Canada
Ottawa, Ontario

This study analyzed the growth of the Canadian Ladies Golf Union during its first decade of development from 1919 to 1930 as a means of gaining further insight into the nature of women's sport in Canada during the decade of the '20's. The focus on women's organized sport, in this case the C.L.G.U., is based on the recognition that the growth of women's athletic organizations actually affected the development of sport. The analysis of the growth of the C.L.G.U. was divided into a discussion of the growth of the competitive and administrative developments and the leadership influence within the organization.

The study revealed that the C.L.G.U. did actually achieve national status during this decade and was the only women's sport organization to do so in Canada. This achievement was due to several factors external to the organization and to developments within the organization. The external factors were identified as the social acceptance and popularity of the game of golf and the cooperation and assistance of the Royal Canadian Golf Association and the Ladies Golf Union of Great Britain.

An investigation of the internal growth of the organization revealed that the C.L.G.U. was guided by a central Executive which created a situation in which they were in complete control of their own affairs. Since the majority of them were competitors, they had the interests of the game at heart, and because they had established their autonomy from the R.C.G.A., they were technically free to guide the development of the Union. A further positive feature of the organization was the low rate of turnover of its primary leaders. Key women remained on the Executive during the first decade. They acted as a cohesive force within the Union which kept the Union focused on its major goals.

The development of competitive excellence was clearly a major priority of the association, and it was towards this end that the organization aspired. The actual type of competition which developed was directed in part by the social values influencing women's participation in sport at the time. Indeed, the central feature of competition was the perpetuation of the ideal of sportsmanship. Competition most certainly was promoted, but it was regarded in terms of the many values of sport which were inherent within its framework. On the other hand, the degree to which the organization succeeded in expanding competitive opportunities for its members enables one to conclude that the development of competition within the C.L.G.U. did constitute an integral and significant component of the growth of women's sport in the 1920's and as such actually positively affected the development of competitive sport for women during this period.