

# Changes in the Governance of Sport in Canada

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(Maxwell Howell Address)

Since the late nineteenth century, organized sport in Canada has been governed by volunteer agencies that develop and administer programmes of competition. This system, inherited from Britain and modified to meet the demands of Canadian geography and population, has been in operation for well over a century. The system has changed as sport competition has become more complex, and a number of difficult and awkward obstacles have been overcome. But it faces its most difficult task today, as the pressures of international sport and government involvement compound and demand new approaches to the governance of sport.

Many sports administrators are unaware of what has happened in the past and are therefore unable to fully appreciate the significance of what is happening today. One of the most important features of the history of Canadian national sport governing bodies has been the evolution of their attainment of independence. This evolution can be viewed in three time periods: 1867 to 1919, 1920 to 1948, and 1949 to 1970.

Highlights of the first period included the 1867 formation of the Canadian Lacrosse Association, as the first national sport governing body; the establishment of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association, the first multi-sport club; and in 1885 the creation of the organization that eventually became known as the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAU). During this period the AAU established itself as the controlling group for amateur sport and as the Canadian authority for participation in the Olympic Games. Therefore, growth in the number and independence of national associations must be examined in relation to the AAU. Seventeen separate national governing bodies had been formed, and approximately one-half of these were affiliated with the AAU. Five sports were directly controlled by the AAU, and three by the Canadian Amateur Swimming Association.

The second period, from 1920 to 1948, encompassed the rise of the AAU to its peak of prestige and power, as well as the start of its decline and loss of control over amateur sport. In 1937 ice hockey and basketball withdrew from the AAU because of conflict with policies. Then, in 1948 the Canadian Olympic Association declared itself autonomous, and a serious blow was dealt to the AAU. During this period three new sports joined the AAU, and synchronized swimming joined the Canadian Amateur Athletic Association. Seventeen new sport governing bodies were created, bringing that total to thirty-four.

The last historical period opened with the beginning of the AAU's demise, that is, with the withdrawal of the Canadian Olympic Association, and ended in 1970 with the dissolution of the AAU and the resultant independence of all national sport governing bodies. Developments that contributed to the end of the AAU were numerous. In 1951 the Canadian Sports Advisory Council, an organization of national associations that served as a lobbying group, assumed the role of the AAU in pressing the federal government to support sport. In 1961 the federal *Act to Encourage Fitness and Amateur Sport* authorized grants to sports governing bodies, and thus provided both the incentive and

the opportunity to achieve independence. Also, the establishment of the Canada Games, the first phase of the federal government's own sports programme, further encouraged sports to organize nationally and provincially after 1967.

In 1953 the AAU lost control of the British Empire and Commonwealth Games Committee, the sport of volleyball, and Canada's entry into the Pan-American Games. Track and field, the principal AAU sport, withdrew in 1968, and that signalled the end of the AAU; it dissolved in 1970. The Canadian Amateur Swimming Association had given up its control over aquatic sports in 1969. Therefore, all sports were now autonomous and directly affiliated with their international federations.

The increase in national sports associations during this period was startling. By 1970 the number of single-sport governing bodies had doubled, from thirty-four to sixty-eight. In the period from 1962 to 1970 twenty such organizations had been created. Multi-sport and service organizations and agencies had increased at an even higher rate, from three in 1948 to eighteen in 1970. Suggested reasons for these developments included a massive growth in sport in Canada after World War II; increased international competitions; post-war immigration; the impact of wartime technology, the establishment of jet airline schedules; and, most important, the advent of government funding of sport.

Since 1970 government agencies and arms-length organizations have assumed effective control of many aspects of national and international sports programmes. The volunteer sector, in the form of sport governing bodies, is in jeopardy because of the increased complexity of sport governance, the need for a higher level of expertise in administration, and the enormous demands of time that are made on sport leaders. Increasingly, government bureaucrats and the paid employees of sport governing bodies are making policy decisions that were once made by volunteers.

If this trend is to be reversed, and if the hard-won independence of sport governing bodies is to be preserved, volunteer leaders must assume a more active role in the decision-making process. An awareness of the history of the volunteer sector in Canadian sport is an important part of the education of effective sport leaders, and historians of Canadian sport can make a significant contribution by conducting research in this important area.