

# Enter the Canadian Mentally Handicapped Participant: 1950-1980

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During the first part of the twentieth century retarded people were socially ostracized and given little or no opportunity to participate in physical activities and sports. The scene began to change slowly during the 1950s when parents of moderately and/or trainable retarded children formed associations in order to find ways of improving the life chances of their children. The parents' cause was enhanced immeasurably when John F. Kennedy became President of the United States in 1960. The report of the President's Panel on Mental Retardation recommended sweeping changes in all aspects of services for the mentally retarded. Recreation was identified as a component or special need. By 1968 attention turned to sports and in July at Soldiers Field in Chicago the First International Special Olympics was held with a Canadian Floor Hockey team taking part, and Harry 'Red' Foster present.

In 1967 the Canadian Association for Retarded Children had marked Canada's Centennial with a Centennial Athletic Program, and Local and regional field days were held in many areas of the country.

The social change which occurred in both countries during the 60s gave many young people a new and a more optimistic view of mental retardation. In addition a new approach to service delivery which originated in Scandinavia was influencing the model of human service delivery across the North American continent. This approach which centered around the 'Normalization Principle' stated that culturally normative means should be utilized to establish and/or maintain normative behavior and characteristics.

Against this changing scene, under the direction of Harry 'Red' Foster, the Canadian Special Olympics grew as did its Floor Hockey Tournament. This game was not only the first team sport in the Special Olympics, it also had a resemblance to the game which was so close to the hearts of Canadians, Hockey. Formal links were made with the NHL and NHL players, to the delight of athletes, acted as coaches to the Floor Hockey teams. Both the Special Olympics and the Floor Hockey Tournaments provided the athletes with much needed physical activity and the opportunity for struggle and self-expression.

The Canadian Special Olympics developed as an autonomous body with its own national identity. Gradually provincial chapters were formed coast to coast and in 1979 all provinces and territories were represented at the Fifth International Special Olympics at Brockport, New York. The development of the organization occurred in the face of opposition from the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded, as many parents preferred an integrated approach to recreation services.

The growth of integrated recreation services in the community was hastened by a number of nation-wide recreation projects.

The conflict which developed between the CAMR and the CSO, in retrospect, was thought to have clarified issues and increased program development.

By 1980 the retarded person had programs which were varied and year round. Canada's dependency upon the U.S. which grew during the 50s and 60s produced clear benefits for retarded people: The CSO with its own national identity and autonomy became a second organization, in addition to the CAMR, whose concern was also one of advocacy for people known now as mentally handicapped.