

The Native Presence in Sport History: Frozen in Time

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A serious error is made in sport history classes when information on native people is omitted or confined to the early eras of North American history. This restricted viewpoint effectively “freezes” the student’s view of native people to a frontier period prior to European control of North America.

A review of past NASSH proceedings, the five Canadian *Symposia on the History of Sport and Physical Education*, the *Journal of Sport History*, and the *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* identified thirty-four papers on native people in sport or physical activity. These were examined to identify the time span covered, and the major concepts addressed.

Four specific time periods emerged: pre-contact (various ages), early European contact (1500-1840), contact through organized Caucasian sport (1840-1920) and contemporary studies (post 1970). Native sport involvement after the early 1900s was obvious by its absence. Research concepts common to North American sport history, including single sports, biographies, government involvement, specific issues (i.e., gambling, Western concepts of natives, and exploitation), sport and demographic groups, sport and social control, new frameworks for the study of sport history, and sport and the city, were evident in the literature.

The largely ethnocentric nature of sport history could clearly be enhanced by the inclusion of research on native people. Their involvement in mainstream or alternate forms of sport during the twentieth century warrants examination. Examples from native people could be incorporated into present areas of sport history inquiry. The “truth” of the native experience in sport could be corrected, and the continuity of their involvement in sport over time chronicled. Sport historians need to collectively “thaw out” their view of native people, repositioning them into a more prominent presence in research and teaching.