

The Development of Ice Hockey on the Walpole Island Indian Reserve

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This paper examines the development of ice hockey on the Walpole Island Indian Reserve in Southwestern Ontario. It traces the development of the game from the early 1890's until 1987. In particular, the paper focuses on the influence of neighbouring Wallaceburg and other outside influences in conjunction with the impact of the native movement toward self-determination. Central to the growth of hockey were certain events, both in the neighbouring community and on the reserve. The building of Memorial Arena in Wallaceburg (1949) and the formation of the Wallaceburg Sport Federation each had a major impact on opportunities for hockey. More important to the growth of hockey on the reserve was the development of the movement for self-determination that gathered strength in the 1960's and was symbolized by the removal of the Indian agent from Walpole in 1965.

The 1970's and 1980's witnessed significant changes in the native community and in hockey. The natives took "control" of their own affairs, both in the larger context and in hockey. For example, in 1972 a group of native hockey coaches organized the Walpole Island Minor Hockey Association. Consequently, many native teams were formed and began to compete in all Indian tournaments throughout the province. These tournaments provided a positive interaction between the various native communities in Ontario. The development of ice hockey paralleled developments in Wallaceburg with the hiring of a recreation director, the offering of coaching clinics and the institution of post-season ceremonies at which outstanding native athletes such as Billy Mills and John Chabot, were guest speakers. In 1987 the Walpole Island Community Arena was opened, which ushered in a new era in the history of hockey on the reserve.

The history of hockey on this reserve provides a vivid picture of the changing faces of both ice hockey and the native community. It illustrated clearly the relationship between sport and the larger social context. Examining the history of hockey on the reserve is enhanced when it is situated within the larger context of the native drive for self-determination.