

# The Changing Picture in Nova Scotian Sport

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This analysis attempts to explain the rise and fall of sport in the small Canadian province of Nova Scotia. It is based on my book: *Beyond Heroes-A Sport History of Nova Scotia*.

Notwithstanding the great variety in Nova Scotian sports, there do seem to be some things which had sweeping effects. Nova Scotian sport did not escape the debilitation wrought by war, the strong political effects of "Upper Canadian" dominance, nor the obvious effects of communication and transportation advancement. Demography, religion, organizations, mores and changing work-patterns were also important.

The Nova Scotian countryside offered much to the early hunter, as the waters offered much to those interested in sport fishing. Depleted fish and game stocks have made these sports far less attractive.

Sunday observance laws began with the Lord's Day Act in 1845, which made it illegal to play "skittles, ball, football, racquets or any noisy game" on Sunday (Cox, nd. p. 28). Canadian law continued to limit Sunday recreation until shortly before World War II.

When unions gained shorter work weeks for laboring Canadians in the late 1800s, many used the extra time in sporting pursuits. Before this time, much of sport was limited to the wealthy, who either did not need to work full-time or at least had flexible working hours.

The military might be the single most important influence on the early organization of sport in Canada. The British militia had a profound effect before they withdrew from Halifax in 1906. After 1906, Canadian military personnel from across the country, spent time in Halifax and, through participation, changed much of Maritime sport.

Milder weather in this century has caused too many scheduling problems for skiing and snowshoeing to prosper. The old outdoor sports of broomball, hockey, figure skating and curling have moved indoors.

Covered rinks were a Canadian invention. The first appeared in Montreal in 1852. A decade later, the Halifax Rink was built. A small indoor gym for gymnastics was built in Halifax at about this same time. The eventual move into such indoor facilities meant that the more traditional outdoor winter sports, such as snowshoeing and horse-drawn sleigh racing, became less popular.

The first and primary mode of transportation for early Nova Scotians was water. There was no railroad connection to Montreal until 1876. Because teams could depend on the railroad, the challenge system of inter-city competition gave way to regularly scheduled contests and eventually, leagues. Sports participation and development moved with the railroad, from a local and regional thing, to one more national.

In addition to measuring popularity, media attention has always helped popularize sports. Since the telegraph in the 1840s began to report what appeared to be immediate news of sailing and rowing races, young people would become attracted to the sports about which they constantly heard. When the Atlantic Cable was laid in 1866, the reporting of "important" international events included sports results. Daily sport columns were common in Nova Scotia before the turn of the century. Photographs replaced woodcuts in newspapers after 1895.

Radio became available in the 1920s and remained the prime source of current and world news, until television was introduced to the Halifax area in the early 1950s. By this time, car-radios were common enough that the radio never really lost its place as a public source of news. When the Grey Cup was first televised, for example, it strongly affected the popularity battle that was then raging between rugby and Canadian football.

Long after baseball gloves became commonplace in the U.S., Nova Scotians were playing bare-handed. Things like modern bicycles and sliding seats for rowers, were late coming to Halifax and even later, becoming available elsewhere in the Province. Manufactured equipment has always been more expensive in Nova Scotia. While these things may seem trivial, they are important in all sports and they are of tantamount importance in some sports. In relative degrees, the same thing is true of all the change catalysts here described.