

# The Sporting Life of West Arkansas Italian Immigrants.

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About 300 hundred Italian immigrant families found themselves in Arkansas, at the turn of the century, as a result of a social engineering experiment gone sour. These immigrants, after a number of bad experiences, settled down in the Ozarks, West Arkansas, and founded Tontitown. From the very beginning sport, became an important part of these immigrants' life. The few inter-race marriages that took place were the result of encounters during the dances, one of the few activities open to outsiders.

These northern Italians had played and enjoyed "bocce" in the old Country and soon enough built their own bocce-ball courts. Initially, participation in this sport was open only to Italians, now there are bocce-leagues open to all the citizens of the surrounding areas.

Baseball too helped enormously in building bridges with the people of near-by towns. The Italian youngsters learned quickly this typical American game and it served as the medium for social relations for people who looked at each other with much reserve.

The Italians of Tontitown continued the American tradition of love of sport; they learned the American activities, taught Americans new activities and contributed in the making of the sporting tradition of the American southwest.