

Indian/White Relations in the Western Canadian Sports World, 1867–1967

John Dewar

University of Saskatchewan

How did the Indian and white cultures of Western Canada perceive sports during the Dominion's first century? What were the sporting preferences for both, and where and how did they interface? How did the ethnocentric policies of government and church reflect on the activities of Western Canada's peoples of native ancestry? Such questions to date have not been a central concern of Canadian historiography.

The huge geographic area inhabited by the various Indian cultures of Western Canada was approximately two million square miles. There were a number of tribes and differing groups of traders, missionaries and settlers who came west to toil for furs, souls and dollars.

How after a hundred years can these two cultures have made such minimal progress? How have the sporting ways of the white and Indian related to this tragedy? What festival and sporting events have shaped the thinking of both cultures? This paper has traversed a great geographical area and has done so in hopes of recording significant happenings and comments that capture the shifting sporting nature of Western Canada's native peoples. This has been more than just an attempt to tell of the potlaches and Sun Dances of the Indian, but to show how the native societal values of cooperative egalitarianism conflicted with the white societal values of competitive individualism. The singleminded parental role of the politicians and the missionary failed time after time to give the Indian culture quality consideration. The white man in Canada during the country's first century could not comprehend the need of blending rather than changing civilizations.

In brief, the paper has outlined certain effects of a policy of colonization adopted by Canadian officialdom. Clearly among the natives an attitude of paternalism was promulgated. Unfortunately for Canada, the father was kind but not understanding.