

# The Development Of Women's Hockey In Canada An Explanation of Structure and Change within the Canadian Hockey System

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For a nation which is only 125 years old, the century long history of Canadian women's hockey presents a valuable case study in sport organization. The traditional female game existed independent of the larger male-dominated hockey network. Consequently, a separate philosophy was established to direct the unique style and format of the game. In this way, female hockey was able to maintain a set of inherently different values which evolved from the circumstances of its development.

Historically, female hockey has relied upon an informal volunteer-based structure to coordinate activity. Early accounts of women's association to the game focused on their inspirational roles for male players. However, the overwhelming desire of many women to participate gradually gained playing privileges. Since 1892, community and university leagues have provided the main competition forums. During the early 1900's, play was comprised of local pockets of activity. Provincial and Interuniversity titles were established in the 1920's and Dominion Championships were held throughout the 1930's. However, as participation grew and the calibre of competition improved, formal organizations began to emerge to govern, coordinate and develop the female game.

Although Canadian Amateur Hockey Association (CAHA) female registration has only been maintained since 1983, these records show a 66% increase in participation since that time. However, for the past thirty years, the active female hockey subsystem has serviced this growth by expanding programs and providing administrative support. During the 1960's, local associations emerged to organize female hockey within communities. The seventies witnessed the formation of the Ontario Women's Interuniversity Athletic Association women's hockey league and the Ontario Women's Hockey Association. Each of these represented the first provincial level organizations either regulating or governing female hockey activity. By 1982, the CAHA finally provided bureaucratic support by establishing a national female council.

The many challenges now facing the contemporary female game stem from both internal and external forces. Within the network, the diverse stages of development throughout the country must be considered when designing appropriate registration and classification schemes. Outside complexities

involve interaction with other social components such as the mass media, education, and economic forums. However, the greatest challenge rests in the ability of the self-acting female hockey network to integrate with the well-established hockey bureaucracy without losing its unique identity. The historical division between the two systems must be narrowed through a collective initiative to include female hockey within all formal programs. Such an objective would legitimize female hockey participation and provide greater opportunity and access for women and girls in the sport. However, it is vital that the specific character of the female game be preserved if the quality of such opportunity is to be guaranteed.