

**A Colony Within a Colony: The Western Canada  
Baseball League of 1912 or  
Imperialistic Rhapsodies in D Minor**

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The history of Canada like the history of minor league baseball has much to do with colonialism. Both Canada and minor league baseball during the latter portion of the nineteenth century unabashedly embraced colonialism and proclaimed allegiance to the ideological tenants of imperialism. Canada became

a country at about the same time as minor league baseball began. The birth of minor league baseball took place during the apex of global imperialism.

Western Canada, like minor league baseball approaches the ideal of a 19th Century imperialistic model colony that is dependent on the heartland's demand for commodities (players); in turn the heartland supplies the necessary labour, technology and some, if not all of the capital and entrepreneurship. Western Canadians have been nurtured and rebelling, at the same time, at the necessity of being a productive hinterland for the central heartland axis of Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa. While in baseball the idea of an imperialistic structure has gained favour much more readily than with other professional sports.

At the beginning of the 20th Century the notion that the retention of permanent colonies was both uneconomical and immoral began to gain acceptance. Yet despite apprehensions about social imperialism neither major nations nor major league owners could seem to resist the idea of empire. The *Washington Post* complained that despite the rules to the contrary, few major league clubs now try to maintain the "bluff" they do not have farms teams.

World War I is recognized, by many, as a turning point in the history of social imperialism; similarly, a baseball turning point occurred with the infamous 1919 Black Sox scandal. Yet there were several events just prior to the outbreak of the war that foreshadowed the demise of nineteenth century imperial policy. The obscure Western Canadian Baseball League of 1912 offers an interesting case study of the failure of baseball's thinking on the verge of the collapse of imperial doctrine.

Western Canadian League in the Spring of 1912 produced great hopes for a novel baseball experiment. An experiment that was to test the limits of the colonial relationship of dominant cities over subservient ones. The Western Canadian League concocted a league schedule that was to allow the two cities in the league to become almost exclusively 'home' teams at the expense of two small towns.

The Western Canada league promised (as did imperialism), the triumph of the heartland over the hinterland; city over town, an opportunity to exorcize, the frustrations of colonial subservience over those perceived to have even less influence. Nineteenth Century imperialism was coming to an end for the world, baseball and Canada. The failure of Western Canadian League imperialism perhaps helped to lead to subtle and more benign colonial baseball arrangements.