

The Rise of Canadian Football and the Decline of English Rugby In Halifax: 1930 to 1954

Robert Kussuth
University of Windsor, Ont.

In the city of Halifax between 1930 and 1954 the popular form of football played changed when English rugby was replaced by Canadian football. Rugby union was the major fall sport played in Halifax prior to the Second World War. The popularity of rugby union in the Maritime provinces and Halifax, the largest city in the region, was unique among Canadian provinces and cities during this time. With the exception of British Columbia, Canadian football was the football game of choice in the country. In Halifax, from the early 1930s to the middle of the 1950s, critical

changes within the football community resulted in the increased popularity of Canadian football at the expense of the English rugby game. This paper identifies the changes which were ultimately responsible for the demise of English Rugby and the rise to dominance of Canadian football in Halifax.

Institutions including secondary and post-secondary educational institutions, sports clubs, and the military organized and controlled football. Individuals and groups functioning within these institutions were responsible for decisions concerning the direction football would follow within the city's organized football. These decisions were, however, also subject to the changes in society at a broader level, including the changes brought about by the war and the resulting increased interaction with the rest of Canada. The relationship between decisions made by football administrators and changes within the city as a result of wider influences, were primarily responsible for the change in the popular form of football played in the city.

The increasing popularity of Canadian football and the decreased interest in English rugby resulted from changes both within the city and influences from the rest of Canada and the United States. An interest in alternative forms of football existed in Halifax before the Second World War. This interest, accompanied by the introduction of a Canadian football playing population during the war resulted in the initial interest in the Canadian game. Following the war, from 1945 to 1950, neither English rugby nor Canadian football had achieved dominance, however interest in Canadian football was growing. By the early 1950s Canadian football was clearly the popular form of football as a result of support from the military bases, Dalhousie University and Saint Mary's College, and the high schools, combined with increasing local interest in Canadian football played in the rest of the country. These influences both from within and outside the city resulted in the rise in popularity of Canadian football and the demise of interest in the once dominant sport of English rugby.