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Sport and the People's Journals: **The Impact of the Popular Press on** **Sports Coverage in Canada, 1840-1900**

During the second half of the nineteenth century, mass circulation newspapers emerged in Canada. At the same time, this developing daily press devoted more and more attention to sport. As a result, daily newspapers were instrumental in creating local, national, and international audiences for sport. This paper looks at one crucial stage in the development of media coverage of sport in Canada—the expansion of sports coverage in the Canadian daily press between 1840 and 1900. In particular, it focuses on the role of the popular press—the new “people’s journals”—in this process. How did Canada’s urban daily newspapers develop during the second half of the nineteenth century? What was the nature of press coverage of sport at this time? Why did the prominence of sport in the pages of Canadian newspapers increase significantly between 1840 and 1900? How was this increase in sports coverage related to the overall development of the daily press—especially the rise of the people’s journals—during this time period?

By examining the nature of nineteenth-century sports reporting, this study aims to shed new light on the cultural history of sport in Canada. While some of the best recent studies of sport in Canada have focused on what could be called the social history of sport, the cultural history of sport has not received sufficient attention from scholars. Most importantly, the relationship between sport, the mass media, and popular culture remains largely unexplored by historians. This paper seeks to rectify this situation, at least in part, by scrutinizing the first phase of the growth of media coverage of sport in Canada.

Early newspapers in British North America were directed at the small, literate elite in each colony, and most were directly affiliated with one of the major political parties. But, in the late nineteenth century, the pre-eminence of the party press was challenged by a new breed of “people’s journals”—newspapers which abandoned traditional news coverage in favour of reports on crime, gossip, scandal, and sports. By 1900 even the more highbrow newspapers had followed the lead of the “people’s journals” and provided a blend of news, entertainment, features, and opinion.

Media coverage of sport in Canada received a major boost with the development of the popular press. The total amount of space devoted to sport in the pages of Canadian newspapers rose dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century and by 1900, the sports page had blossomed into one of the most important parts of the newspaper. Most mass circulation newspapers in Canada had established separate sports departments, and reporters were hired specifically to cover local athletes and competitions. Detailed

summaries of sporting events appeared in the paper almost every day. Rather than scattering sports reports at random throughout the newspaper, editors and publishers also began grouping all sports news together on the same page. Moreover, the advent of the telegraph and wire services allowed papers to carry more national and international sports coverage. While reports on local events generated public interest in a city's teams and athletes, newspaper coverage of significant sporting events occurring outside the city, in other parts of the country and the world, connected readers to a much broader community of fans and followers of sport. As a result, media coverage of sport helped to unite people in Canada in overlapping communities of interest in the late nineteenth century—one centred on the local experience of sport, and the other on involvement in a wider "world of sport" that spanned provincial and national boundaries.