

# SPORT AND THE CITY

Tony Joyce  
Kingston, Ontario

## **Sport, State and Capital Accumulation in Toronto, 1845-1886**

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the emerging Canadian polity created the necessary conditions for capital accumulation. Public money funded the building of canals and railroads which facilitated the transportation of raw materials to production centers and finished products to markets. Immigration and land-granting policies created a surplus labour market of proletarianized workers in the cities. The state also enacted tariffs to counteract the free-trade ideology that had swept through Britain in the 1830s and 1840s and controlled and legislated fiscal matters and banking—all of which served the accumulation function. Political scientist Leo Panitch suggests that “confederation itself was produced by the desire to facilitate capital accumulation by guaranteeing loans from London to build the railways.”

Sport developed in Toronto alongside a burgeoning and consolidating mid nineteenth-century Canadian state. Time and the opportunity to recreate away from work became major issues of class contention as an emerging bourgeoisie concerned itself with the threat of working-class organization. The tavern, workers’ traditional centre of associational life, became the focus of legislative control. In addition, activities associated with taverns became the target of reformers who masked their intentions of producing and reproducing manageable labour behind pious rhetoric and nationalist dogma. Activities that might incite insurrection or threaten the existing social and economic order were banned or curbed. Others, less threatening and with revenue potential, were licensed. From the early restrictions of the Lord’s Day Act in 1845, and early legislation banning prize fights, blood sports and street games, to the official endorsement of “manly sports” in the 1880s the state in its many guises banned, curbed, permitted, endorsed and promoted various forms of sport. State legislation channeled recreational activity in acceptable directions and thus constructed leisure’s many meanings and facilitated capital accumulation.

This paper applies a Marxist theory of state to argue that a complex, symbiotic relationship existed between class interests and the state in nineteenth-century Canada. This relationship motivated the passage and enforcement of legislation which prescribed the development of sport and shaped it into appropriately bourgeois forms.