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Going South: **Expansion of the NHL in the 1920s**

In the 1920s modern sports increasingly gained prominence in North America. This was especially true for the growing urban industrial and commercial centers. Their large populations constituted potential markets that demanded products and services. As wage laborers under an industrial capitalist economy, many urbanites sought products and services during their leisure time. During this period, work hours continued to decrease and wages rose for many middle-class people; the leisure industry grew correspondingly. Radio sales boomed in this decade. The movie industry experienced the same kind of prosperity. More Americans owned automobiles. These trends did not escape the promoters of sports.

Sports experienced a similar boom in the 1920s. Yet, the sporting boom was not as neat as the laws of supply and demand for leisure might indicate. In the case of the National Hockey League (NHL), economic models alone could not account for its expansion in the marketplace. The reality was much more complex.

Using newspaper sources, NHL meeting minutes, and other league internal documents, this paper examines the first international expansion of the NHL. Within a decade of its creation, the NHL had expanded from three clubs in three geographically proximate Canadian cities to ten cities that covered the industrial northeast and mid-west in the United States. This process tells not a tale of methodical corporate planning. It is rather a story of a business organization that, like so many other small businesses, had its hands full just in its daily dealings with internal and external crises. For the fledgling NHL, this first expansion, however, was significant. New owners expanded the league's capital capacity. Inclusion of these newcomers essentially raised the stakes and the barrier of entry into the professional hockey business. It effectively curbed any potential franchisee that did not have a deep pocket. For that matter, any urban center that could not provide a return for the higher stakes would be out of the running for a franchise. This shut out all Canadian cities besides the three that were already members. The expanded scale of doing business allowed the NHL to undergo a transformation from a local, small, and uncertain business to a solid enterprise which enabled it to subordinate rival leagues and to weather the Great Depression.