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Disunity in the Union: The Amateur Athletic Union of Canada and Its Maritime Affiliate, 1925-27

Canadian sport organizations are composed, typically, of representatives from different regions or provinces within the country. Historically, representatives of certain areas of the country have been more influential than others within these organizations. Roland Lappage has argued that, during the interwar period, sporting organizations from Canada's Western and Maritime provinces often expressed their discontent with the dominance of Ontario and Quebec in national sporting affairs. These expressions of discontent were tied to the frustrations of the West and the Maritimes with central Canadian dominance of national life in general. In addition, Maritimers often felt that the sport leaders of central Canada did not deal fairly with those outside of their geographical area.

During the interwar period, the most influential amateur sporting organization in Canada was the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAU). The self-proclaimed guardian of the amateur sport ideal, it acted as a de facto national federation for sports that had none. It also counted among it members numerous independent national sport federations, and it controlled Canada's National Olympic Committee. By the late 1920s the AAU could boast of having the allegiance of most of the major sporting bodies in Canada. During the 1920s the AAU tried to become a truly national organization and began to call its annual meetings the Canadian parliament of sport, holding some in the West as well as in the Maritimes. Its dominant theme during this period was to 'nation-build' through the medium of sport. While the AAU promoted sports aimed predominantly at middle-class males who would agree to abide by its strict amateur rules, this exclusive focus did not hamper its efforts to expand its influence. Though often antagonistic, provinces to the west of Ontario soon developed a strong relationship with central Canada within the AAU. In contrast, according to scholar Bruce Kidd, the Maritime Branch of the AAU was never influential or perhaps even particularly active. This is an intriguing point since ample evidence exists for an active sporting scene in the Maritimes during the interwar period. Maritime sport enthusiasts participated in many of the same sports as those in other parts of Canada, and did so at comparable levels of ability. Given this situation, even considering the aforementioned dominance of central Canada, why would the Maritimes not have had a more robust level of involvement with the AAU?

Certainly, men concerned about maintaining the amateur ideal controlled many sports in the Maritimes. Individual Maritime representatives appear consistently within the minutes of the annual meetings of the AAU during the 1920s and 1930s both as members of various committees and of the board of governors. Yet, those who guided the Maritime branch of the AAU were unable to make their organization as strong as its counterparts in other areas of the country. Was it because of the perceived injustices by central Canadians? In other words, were regional loyalties stronger than those of class and gender? Or, did the Maritime leaders find that they were unable to consolidate power in their own region because of resistance by others with competing interests?

As part of a broader study, this paper uses one incident to suggest that all these questions may be answered affirmatively. In 1926 the Maritime Branch of the AAU became embroiled in an internal, constitutional dispute because certain maritime sporting groups felt they had not been given the representation they deserved within the Branch. Much as Howell has shown with Maritime baseball, a class-based interpretation of this dispute is suggestive. Then, when the AAU intervened in an attempt to ease the situation, the unrest continued. Indeed, the rest of the AAU leaders antagonized the Maritime Branch when they turned down several requests concerning the reinstatement of some athletes to amateur status. This antagonism is comparable to broader societal controversies between those at the centre and those at the periphery of Canadian national life in the early twentieth century. Indeed, several scholars have documented Maritimers' varying emotions with respect to their place in Canadian affairs in this period.

Scholars have completed significant works on the AAU, but they have not examined the extent of Maritime involvement in this national sport organization. While

Maritime influence within the AAU may have been less prominent than other regions, no one has examined whether the Maritime Branch worked to promote the goals of the national body in its home region. This dearth of studies itself may suggest a bias amongst historians toward sporting events in the central regions of Canada. Thus, stories of the Maritime proponents of the AAU's pan-Canadian ideas remain to be told. Drawing upon minutes of meetings of the organizations, coverage in the popular press, and secondary sources dealing with Maritime relations with central Canada, this paper is a short step towards addressing this gap.