

Stacy L. Lorenz
Augustana University

Local Teams in A World of Sport: **Sports Coverage and Community Identity in** **Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1850-1900**

The emergence of the mass press - particularly large, urban daily newspapers - during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was instrumental in creating local and national audiences for sport in Canada. Newspaper coverage of local events generated public interest in a city's teams and athletes, and helped to create a sense of community spirit and civic pride around local clubs. At the same time, newspaper coverage of major sporting events occurring outside the city, in other parts of Canada and the world, connected readers to a much wider community of fans and followers of sport. In conjunction with the telegraph and wire services, mass circulation newspapers constructed a community of interest around sport in Canada and the United States. This community of interest was composed of people who discussed, cared about, and paid attention to the same players, teams, leagues, and events, no matter where they lived. A unified "world of sport" was created by the mass media - one that embraced both amateur and professional sports, and included leagues, games, teams, athletes, events, stories, myths, heroes, statistics, equipment, jerseys, and other merchandise. This "world of sport" can also be thought of as a shared pool of "information" about sport — "information" meaning not only news and factual data, but the entire range of ideas, attitudes, symbols, and knowledge that constitutes the common experience of sport. In other words, the "world of sport" is an "information-system" that links people together in a transformational community of interest. With a spread of the daily press and wire services throughout North America, people across the continent gained access to a shared body of information about sport. Thus, through the media, Canadians became involved in a sport information-system that extended across provincial and national boundaries. As this "world of sport" emerged, a broad-based community of interest focused on sport was formed. This community of interest was made up of people who followed the same teams and events, despite living in different places.

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 press between 1850 and 1900. It examines the nature of sports reporting in daily newspapers in Canada during this time period. Most importantly, this study analyzes how the mass press constructed local, national, and international communities of interest around sport in the late nineteenth century. It explores the relationship between sport, the mass media, and popular culture by scrutinizing Canadian press coverage of sport. During the second half of the nineteenth century, mass circulation newspapers emerged in Canada. This developing daily press devoted more and more attention to sport between 1850 and 1900. Because so much of this increase in sports coverage focused on local happenings, the media helped to create local audiences for sport in Canada. At the same time, the daily press played an important

role in building a shared sport information-system throughout the country. As a result, this paper also examines the process by which newspapers, telegraphy, and wire services drew Canadians into a continent-wide community of interest centered on sport in the late nineteenth century.

By 1900, sports coverage was important to mass circulation newspapers across Canada. Urban dailies generally contained regular sports coverage which brought readers reports of local, national, and international events. As a result, media coverage of sport helped to unite people in Canada in new communities of interest in the late nineteenth century - one centred on the local experience of sport, the other on involvement in a wider "world of sport". Through shared media experiences of sport, people became attached to a local community of sports fans within their own city, and to a wide-ranging community of sport enthusiasts across the continent. Involvement in local sporting events connected people in a city together, just as knowledge of the larger "world of sport" linked people in different regions together. With the rise of transnational "world of sport", Canadians could participate in an integrated sports universe that consisted of leagues, players, and matches in cities all over North America. At the same time, heightened local sports coverage strengthened the bonds between cities and their sports teams. As a result, people's perceptions of sport changed with the expansion of sports reporting. Urban residents felt a close connection to local teams, but now those teams were perceived in relation to a larger sporting universe. A city's baseball or hockey club still expressed civic pride and community spirit, but now the club was also seen as part of a broader "world of sport". The rise of the mass press and the growth of newspaper coverage of sport therefore reshaped the cultural identities associated with sport in Canada in the late nineteenth century.