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Recreation North: **Continuity and Change, 1967-2000**

The Northwest Territories (NWT) of Canada was divided into two new territories, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, on April 1, 1999. Until then, the NWT had been the only province/territory to have a majority of native peoples within its population - this continues to be true for Nunavut, but not for the NWT. The political landscape has continued to change in other ways as well. Land claims settlements, in particular, are increasing the power which native political organizations have relative to municipal and territorial governments.

Within this changing landscape, sport and recreation services continued to be provided by the government of the NWT (GNWT) as well as by a variety of non-governmental associations. GNWT services for sport and recreation began in 1967, when the government first moved to Yellowknife from Ottawa. Over the past thirty or so years, a number of approaches have been tried by a variety of associations to ensure that the needs of northern residents, both native and non-native, from communities varying in size from less than 100 people to 18,000 could be met. Conscious efforts have been made to involve participants in such decisions, including major territorial sport and recreation directions conferences in 1983, 1991 and 1996.

In this paper, I explore the history of these services using Anthony Giddens' duality of structure framework. I document the interplay between the various agents involved in creating this history, and the broader structural framework which shaped, and was shaped by those agents, including available rules (both formal and informal) and resources (human, material and financial). Government files and reports, interviews with key agents, and relevant policy documents are used to outline developments in sport,

community recreation, distinct northern activities and special needs groups, culminating in current efforts to create a comprehensive strategic plan for the NWT.

This history details the complexities involved in maintaining traditional aboriginal activities in light of the popularity and naturalized acceptance of mainstream sporting practices. It also reveals the difficulty of generating an indigenous approach toward sport and recreation services in light of mainstream practices which offer a ready (although not always effective) solution to such challenges. Finally, it highlights ongoing attempts to create an indigenous body of recreation professionals in a climate where good leaders of any ilk are recruited for “more substantive” roles in NWT society.

This paper is relevant to sport historians because it documents the efforts of northerners in the NWT to construct a sport and recreation system which is uniquely suited to social and sporting landscape, which, for example, defines sport and recreation’s status in relation to other essential NWT community services and to national sport and recreation services. This history also demonstrates the importance of selecting theoretical frameworks for our histories which are best suited to the question(s) being asked - in this case, the attempts by individual agents to construct their won reality within the possibilities presented by the broader structures within which they exist. Finally, this paper provides information on a little known, yet in many ways unique, part of Canadian, and native, histories.



The boys of summer.