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**Reinventing Canada's "National Game:" A History of  
Box Lacrosse, 1931-1932**

Canadian nationalists and social reformers celebrated the sport of lacrosse as their country's "national game" during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately for these enthusiasts, however, working-class spectators, gamblers, and athletes who accepted covert pay for play did not always embrace their middle-class cultural agenda. In the years preceding World War I, professional lacrosse clubs sometimes engaged in bidding wars for star players despite the fact that club revenue rarely justified high salaries. After the war, lacrosse never regained the prominent position in Canadian sport life that it had once occupied. Baseball and softball had become the summer sports of choice for many Canadians. This paper explores how and why professional ice hockey promoters in Montreal and Toronto decided to create a new indoor version of the old "national game" – which they called "box lacrosse" – against the backdrop of the early years of the Great Depression.

Box lacrosse was essentially a modified form of the older field sport. The number of players was cut from twelve to seven and the game was played on an artificial surface laid out over the floors of dried out ice hockey arenas. Played from June to October, the new sport was designed to be a hybrid of traditional

field lacrosse and professional ice hockey. The lacrosse sticks resembled those used outdoors, but the uniforms, timing and penalty systems, referees, team names, and many of the players were directly appropriated from the world of hockey. Indeed, the target audience of "box lacrosse" was idle hockey fans. An examination of the origins of box lacrosse illustrates the authority of commercial promoters in shaping sport, the various cultural belief systems people attach to sport, and the unintended consequences of newly invented sporting traditions. This paper will discuss the motives and plans of the proponents of box lacrosse; initial spectator reactions to the sport; the collapse of pro box lacrosse during its second season; and the effect of the game on Canadian and American field lacrosse during the 1930s. Source materials for this paper include newspapers from Montreal, Toronto, Cornwall, New York, Baltimore and Boston.

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