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Marketing Canadian Interuniversity Sport

A major direction of the national organization of Canadian Interuniversity Sport in recent years has been marketing championship events. In 1994 CIS (then CIAU) opened a Toronto office specifically to market its championship and products. Although the office has since closed, a professional marketing manager still directs activities. In 2001, Lakehead University suited up a hockey team for the first time since 1984. The difference now is that the Thunderwolves' costs will be paid for (\$350,000) entirely by a group of twenty-five local businessmen. Laval and Saskatchewan intercollegiate football programs depend on similar support. Alumni organizations also provided funds to preserve intercollegiate football at St. Francis Xavier and Toronto. Athletic programs financed by the private sector represent a new and rare breed of partnership between amateur athletics and corporate money. Government cutbacks and internal reallocation of university funds have forced intercollegiate sports to explore new sources of revenue, to commercial sport. It was not always so.

In 1967-68 the Ontario and Western associations and the CIAU established their first public relations offices, partly in response to sportswriters' desire for information to fill their

columns. The first response was merely to provide statistical information to the press, establish press liaison officer at each university with regular press releases, and introduce a top ten ranking in major sports. The intention was primarily to increase attention to collegiate sport. In 1968 CIS declared: "It is in the best interests of Canadian intercollegiate sports... that college sports should be given a showcase via television; we cannot discriminate in favor of certain sports." Increasingly, the preoccupation of the committee was directed to televising events as a means to fund national championship competition. The CIAU at first approached sponsors as philanthropists but quickly learned that sponsors had to be sold the product.

The relationship between sport, television and advertisers was symbiotic and dynamic. Intercollegiate sport benefited financially. The networks found sports programming relatively inexpensive to produce, allowing them to meet Canadian content requirements, and attracted good demographics. A contract with of The Sports Network in 1984 cemented the relationship between sport and television because TSN, like all cable networks, needed college sports to fill hours. Having to "sell its product," CIAU initiatives concentrated on high profile male sports and consciously initiated U.S. models. The result was that the public increasingly identified intercollegiate sport with a few male sports.
