

Anthony Church
University of Western Ontario

Spreading the Gospel: The YMCA's Creation and Subsequent Use of Men's Basketball to Promote Christianity in Canada

In December of 1891, a YMCA instructor by the name of James Naismith invented the game that would eventually become known as basketball. Because of the Young Men's Christian Association, the game quickly spread throughout North America and the rest of the world. The spread of basketball into and throughout Canada can be linked both directly and indirectly to the YMCA's efforts to attract new members and spread the concept of Muscular Christianity.

The game was demonstrated at a YMCA in Montreal, Quebec, less than a couple of weeks after the game was invented, becoming the site of the first documented evidence of basketball outside of the United States. Though the game would quickly spread to other countries through the YMCA, the YMCA clubs in Canada were responsible for the earliest and most rapid growth of basketball outside of the United States. Through the YMCA, basketball spread throughout Canada and into other Canadian institutions. The aim of this paper is to examine how basketball

reflected the Christian ideals espoused by the YMCA, its role in attracting new members to the YMCA and the notion of Muscular Christianity, and how it, as a vehicle for Christianity, was spread throughout Canada. The paper will conclude by analyzing the effectiveness of basketball as an instrument of Christianity and how eventually control of the game in Canada was wrested away from the YMCA, in effect discarding its attachments to Muscular Christianity. As the focus of this paper will be almost entirely on men's basketball in Canada, the concurrent developments in the YMCA clubs throughout the United States and the rest of the world will receive little attention other than to compare or complement the data on Canadian YMCAs.
