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Long before Orr: Old-Time Hockey in Boston, 1860-1929

While other cities and regions support professional franchises and develop some playing talent, Greater Boston and Minnesota are widely recognized as America's two major hotbeds of hockey. For years, players from these two areas dominated the American Olympic teams. This paper is a case study of Boston's hockey "tradition," which has roots in folk games, but which was fully in place by 1929, when the Bruins won their first Stanley Cup. Hockey was not a natural success in Boston. Hockey, not basketball, became the number three team sport in Boston because of a congruence of culture, climate, topographic conditions, chance, and careful promotion. The paper traces the development of hockey's precursors (roller polo and ice polo), the introduction and promotion of the "Montreal game," the centrality of the Boston Arena (built in 1910), the structure of local leagues (especially school and college rivalries), and the Bruins' early years. It looks closely at the efforts of entrepreneurs and promoters to "brand" hockey as a particular kind of sport. This branding process included two core components – skill or craft and violence – which have been the yin and yang of hockey ever since.
