

# Sport and Politics in Canada

*FEDERAL  
GOVERNMENT  
INVOLVEMENT  
SINCE 1961*



*Donald Macintosh  
with Tom Bedecki  
and C.E.S. Franks*

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Federal Government  
Involvement since 1961

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DONALD MACINTOSH  
WITH  
TOM BEDECKI  
AND  
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## *Preface*

This book has its origins in the early 1970s when Tom Bedeck and I saw the need to document federal government involvement in sport since the passage of Bill C-131 in 1961. Fortuitously perhaps, this concept never got off the ground, partly because neither of us had the time necessary to carry out the considerable document research needed for such a project. But the idea stayed alive and, in 1980, the two of us teamed up at Queen's University with Ned Franks, a political scientist, and Rick Gruneau, a sport sociologist. This group put together a much more comprehensive proposal to study federal government involvement in sport than was originally conceived. This proposal was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada over two grant periods: April 1981 to September 1982; and April 1983 to September 1984. We gratefully acknowledge this generous support. We also wish to acknowledge the financial support given by the Faculty of Arts and Science and the School of Graduate Studies and Research at Queen's University to assist in the final preparation of the manuscript.

Despite our considerable efforts, this book provides only a broad framework for more detailed study of the many facets of recent federal government involvement in sport. Our major purpose is to explain why the federal government changed its focus from the original intent of the act, which was to encourage participation in amateur sport and fitness, to concentrate on the development of a corps of elite "state" athletes. In order to do this, we first determine what actually happened. Then, in order to understand why, we place this development in the wider political and social changes that occurred in Canada during this period. Finally, we examine some of the outcomes and consequences of this federal government involvement and the issues arising from it. We describe our approach and the analytical framework used in our work in chapter 2.

In pursuing these objectives, the focus of the book necessarily narrows to correspond with the focus of the federal government; thus, the matter of mass sport and fitness programs and recreation receives less attention as our story evolves. Our work also focuses on what used to be known as “amateur” sport, and therefore does not cover in any detail relationships between professional sport and the federal government in Canada. The term “amateur” athlete was replaced in the 1960s by “elite” athletes. By the late 1970s, “high performance” athletes became the buzz word in Ottawa. Since the distinction between professionalism and amateurism in sport has now all but disappeared, perhaps the best term to describe the persons who represent Canada in major international sport events is “state” athletes. It is our hope that the book accomplishes its major purposes and, at the same time, provides a framework from which others may go forward to more detailed analyses of the many events and issues that are raised in our work.

As would be expected in a project of this size, the efforts and co-operation of many people need to be acknowledged. Three full-time research assistants worked successively on the project – Donna Greenhorn, Bob Hollands, and Aniko Varpalotai. They all contributed diligently and effectively, making personal commitments to the project. Ms Greenhorn returned to the project in the final stages to put the manuscript into final form for McGill-Queen’s University Press. Mrs Betty Schieck and Ms Carol Boyle performed miracles throughout the project, making sense out of our scribblings in transcribing the work onto the word processor. Our gratitude goes to all of these people.

Many others were generous of their time in providing information and personal perspectives. All these people cannot be acknowledged here, but our thanks are also extended to them. A few such people made particularly significant contributions: Lou Lefave, a former director of Sport Canada, Bill Hallett, the author of a doctoral dissertation on this topic that we have used extensively in our work, and Bruce Kidd, the sport sociologist and historian at the University of Toronto, all participated in a formal review of the first stage of our work (up to 1969). Lefave and Kidd also were most generous of their time through the second stage of the project, providing information and ideas and reviewing drafts of our work. The final product depends to a considerable extent on these contributions.

The contribution of Rick Gruneau needs particular acknowledgment. He was a member of our original group, but his untimely move to the University of British Columbia half-way through the SSHRC project precluded any further formal participation. He continued,

however, to be a valuable resource in interpreting our findings and placing them in the wider perspective of sport and leisure in Canadian society. In particular, Rick served as a constant source of knowledge and inspiration to the principal author and took considerable time and effort to review the entire penultimate draft of the manuscript. Whatever insights we have about sport in the larger socio-cultural context can be attributed to him.

Finally, I acknowledge the work of the co-authors, Tom Bedecki and Ned Franks. They have worked on the project from its onset in 1981 until the completion of this book. They both contributed to the conceptual framework and to the development of the main themes and ideas. In addition, they reviewed drafts, discussed the implications of our findings, and prodded me to become more analytical and thoughtful. In particular, Ned laid out the analytical framework and put his considerable knowledge of the political scene in Canada to good use in our work. Tom's intimate knowledge of what had happened in Ottawa was invaluable in maintaining the credibility of our study. His extensive knowledge of sport and government and his contacts in Ottawa are central to any insights we have as to "how it happened."

Donald Macintosh  
October 1986

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# *Introduction*

### SETTING THE STAGE

Canada's international sport triumphs in 1984 were unparalleled in her post-World War II history. Gaetan Boucher delighted Canadians by winning two gold and one bronze medals at the 1984 Winter Olympics in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia. Canada's finest hour in Olympic history, however, was to be at the Summer Games in Los Angeles some months later. There Canada won forty-four medals, surpassing its best-ever previous performance in the 1932 Los Angeles Games and placing fourth in the unofficial medal standings. Despite the absence of the Soviet Union, East Germany, and other eastern European communist countries, Canada's performance placed her clearly ahead of such perennial rivals as Great Britain, Italy, Japan, France, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries.

Canada's victory in the Canada Cup Hockey series, only weeks after the Summer Olympic performances, provided a third highlight in 1984. The Canadian team comprised a core of Edmonton Oilers, winners of the 1984 Stanley Cup, emblematic of North American professional hockey supremacy. Bolstered by star performers from other National Hockey League teams, the Canadians managed to finish only fourth in the preliminary round-robin tournament. But Team Canada scored a stunning upset in the sudden-death semi-finals. It defeated the favourites and preliminary tournament winners, the Soviet Union, 3-2 in overtime and went on to beat Sweden in two straight games in the finals of the Cup.

These Canadian sport triumphs were watched on television with pride and satisfaction by millions of Canadians. Sport apparently had fulfilled Prime Minister Trudeau's vision in 1969 as a symbol that could unite Canadians despite regional and cultural differences, and

vindicated the federal government's sport policies in the 1970s and early 1980s. But many Canadians were unaware of the extent to which these sport "successes" were a function of government involvement.

Active federal government involvement in sport is a fairly recent occurrence. For most of Canadian history, federal government participation has been far more passive and indirect and its efforts primarily oriented towards fitness and mass participation. Even after the passage of the Fitness and Amateur Sport Act in 1961, the federal government's activity was limited. It made small grants to national sport governing bodies and entered into cost-sharing agreements with the provinces, leaving the program content and direction largely to these respective bodies. Key members of government held the naive belief that promoting mass fitness and sport programs would produce improved Canadian performances on the international scene. Autonomy of sport governing bodies also was valued highly. But the failure of these measures to produce any improvement in Canada's stature in international sports and the increased importance and significance of sport as a form of television entertainment caused the government to change its posture at the end of the 1960s. Sport gradually became an instrument that could be used to promote national unity. The federal government established arm's-length agencies to bolster the national sport organizations and began to give direct support to elite athletes. The government, however, still gave residual support for mass sport and fitness programs. There also was a growing realization in government circles of the importance of exercise to the health of Canadians.

The high visibility of international sport events, the prominent role that Canada played in hosting the 1976 Summer Olympics and the 1978 Commonwealth Games, combined with the assertion by provincial governments of their responsibilities for mass fitness and sports programs, led the federal government to concentrate on elite international sport. The federal government poured increasing funds into the development of sport, the support of athletes, and the construction of facilities and established itself as a major force in policy making and direction of sport in the 1980s.

What are the consequences of such government intervention in sport? In the first place, it has contributed to a dramatic change in the nature of the dominant form of sport in Canada. "Elite" amateur sport, or what is now known as "high performance" sport, has a high profile in Canada and as such has become highly rationalized. An extensive bureaucracy has evolved to support and direct sport. A large corps of public servants, executive and technical directors, and

coaches not only operate at the national level in Ottawa, but have also become entrenched in most Canadian provinces. The focus of the new dominant form of sport has been on objective measures of performance and record; increasingly efficient athletes are essential if sport is to fulfil its role as a national unity symbol and to legitimize the government of the day. At the same time, professional sport has contributed greatly to the reshaping of sport. In its efforts to increase sport's attractiveness for television audiences, promoters have created a sport myth that focuses on virtuosity and super-human performances by star athletes and teams. This provides the stuff with which viewers can live out their own sport fantasies. These two forces have pushed to the background those traditional values of sport that previously held sway in Canada. Sport is less often seen as a form of play and social interaction and as a source of individual self-fulfilment and self-realization and more often as an instrument that has value as a political tool, as a way to attain health and beauty, and as a path to fame and fortune.

These changes are of interest and concern for those who undertake serious study of the place of sport in society. While it is too much to say that new government policies have been solely responsible for such changes, there can be no doubt about their significance for the development of sport as we know it in Canada today. Yet, what forces and events caused the federal government to embark on this course of action? What were the central issues and critical turning points in this saga? Who were the key actors in the play? Were there viable alternatives along the way? What are the consequences of these actions? Are there any viable alternatives today? If so, what steps can be taken to change the present stance of government?

There are no simple answers to these questions. They are imbedded in the complex social and political forces and events in Canadian society over the past few decades. It is our purpose to trace these events, and identify the critical forces, turning points, and central actors in this drama, and to assess the consequences of federal government involvement in sport. Finally, we wish to examine the broader implications of these consequences for sport in Canadian society, and to make suggestions as to what changes are desirable and possible at this time.

#### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Attention to the federal government's role in sport by social scientists, politicians, and government officials has taken place primarily at two different levels of analysis. In the first instance, a number of

comprehensive manuscripts have been written that trace the federal government's involvement in sport and physical fitness since Bill C-131 was enacted in 1961 (see, for instance, Broom & Baka 1978; Hallett 1981; West 1973; and Westland 1979). These studies have concentrated on the events and facts in regard to federal sport policies and have interpreted these in light of interpersonal relations and of interaction among actors, groups, and organizations that were central to this process. Most of this research has included a great deal of historical detail and has adopted the style of descriptive narrative. This approach treats federal government sport policy in isolation, thereby neglecting to take into account the larger social structural and cultural milieu in which sport functions in Canada. It offers little material that can be used to elaborate upon the complex interrelationships that exist between government policy in sport and broader forces and pressures associated with overall Canadian social development.

A counter-tradition in the literature has focused more directly upon the relationships between sport and broader forces in Canadian society. A few social scientists have speculated about the appropriate role of sport in our culture, what forces are instrumental in determining the nature and direction of sport in society, and the ways in which sport itself influences and changes certain aspects of Canadian life (see, for instance, Gruneau 1982 and 1983; and Kidd 1981 and 1982). In general, these social scientists have undertaken sweeping analyses, often at very high levels of abstraction and ranging over large spans of time. However much this work has contributed to our overall understanding of Canadian sport, and to alternative ways of studying the relationships between sport and society, it does not as yet include any detailed, systematic research on federal government involvement in Canadian sport. Observations and arguments about government and sport in this literature tend to have been limited to only a few specific events and occurrences. Furthermore, the high level of abstraction has tended to direct attention away from the detailed analysis of intra-organizational and personal factors actually involved in the policy-making process.

It is our contention that changes in the scope and direction of federal government policy making in sport can only be understood adequately in the context of an examination of broader social changes in sport and Canadian society. Consideration also needs to be given to the hitherto neglected study of the relationship between federal government sport initiatives and the government's larger political and social goals. Another dimension that has been overlooked in the existing literature is the extent to which the ensuing government-

sponsored programs played a role in influencing future government policy decisions.

In so broadening the scope of this study, a number of underlying themes were fleshed out. First, the changing political and administrative structure that supports amateur sport has been particularly important in the shaping of sport policy in Canada. Here we are interested in the structure and growth of the federal government since World War II, the federal government's changing and stormy relationships with the provinces, and the growth of the sport bureaucracy in Canada. Second, the distribution and shift of power is also critical to any study of federal government sport policy making. Of particular interest is the shift of power from the sport governing bodies to the National Advisory Council, established in the 1961 Fitness and Amateur Sport Act, and subsequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, the consolidation of sport policy decision making at the federal ministerial and senior public-service levels. Such a concentration of decision making in sport policy within the government leads to the third theme, that of the role of sport in the wider goals of government. Here we are interested in the motives that originally caused the federal government to enact sport and fitness legislation in 1961, and the changing political and social events in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s that caused the federal government to use sport in a much more utilitarian manner. A fourth theme is the changes in the significance and meaning of sport in Canada. Here we are interested in the impact of the growing significance of international sport and of sports' affinity for television. These changes were significant factors in the federal government's change of stance towards the promotion of elite sport in the late 1960s. Significant also in this change was the growing commercialization and professionalization of sport in the 1970s and 1980s. These and other socio-economic factors constitute our fifth theme. Changes in socio-economic conditions in Canada after World War II also contributed to an increased significance and importance of sport. Consequently, professional and commercial sport enterprises became more prevalent and thus more influential factors in federal government sport policy making. It is our intention to enrich the story of federal government sport involvement over the last four decades with these themes, giving the narrative meaning and relevance.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The analytic themes that have been developed do not in themselves tell any kind of story. They are substantive, empirically oriented, and

direct our attention to significant areas where one can identify clusters of causal processes that appear to have influenced the development of federal government policy in sport. Yet, any attempt to understand federal government policy making in sport in its broadest context, as a distinctive feature of Canadian social development, must try in some way to show how these themes might be organized into a coherent framework for analysing the particular policies that have been developed. Following is a brief description of the organizational framework developed for use in our work.

We have organized our analytic themes by dividing government activities into several dimensions for analysis. One such dimension distinguishes between a central core of actors and agencies whose behaviour is directed towards various individual, institutional, and social goals, and external forces and agencies with which the central core continuously interacts. It is assumed that government is not a monolith and that different agencies are quite likely to have different, and even competing, views of the role of government, the goals of government, and of the policies, tasks, and administrative procedures for a given program or agency. One of the important parts of the analysis is to identify competing and conflicting viewpoints and concepts of what a program is for, and how it should be carried out.

Conceptually, there are three levels of analyses in this study. First is the level of personalities and individuals in which significant individuals must be identified and both their contributions and the reasons for these contributions assessed. Second is the level of agencies and institutions, in which significant institutions, both inside and outside the central core, must be identified. Their interests as institutions, and the goals and purposes towards which they work, must be identified and examined. The structure and process of interaction between agencies is also part of the analysis. Third is the level of forces outside of institutions, such as changes in opinion, of ideology, and changed international circumstances. It is often easier to argue that these forces are significant than to prove it to be so, but they must be considered and evaluated. At times, we have separated these three levels; at others, they are combined. In the real world, they always interact, and they are easier to separate in theory than in practice.

Concurrent with this study of institutions and individuals, there must be an analysis of the reasoning and thinking that went into programs. One must always ask what different visions of the future are competing, and which ones triumph, and how and why. Further, these arguments and visions must be assessed against what they included and neglected, how accurate they turned out to be, and what their significance was.

A further analysis concerns whether the phenomena being studied fit into a more general theory of society and government, such as "political modernization" or "nation building." The literature dealing with sport and society might introduce some of these themes, but to a large extent, they must be uncovered in the analysis. For this sort of study, the processes of government can be divided into three stages. The first is the policy-making stage. How and why policies emerge must be examined. Second is the policy-implementation and administration stage. Often what actually gets done in a program bears little resemblance to what was intended. Finally, programs and policies are periodically reviewed and reconsidered. How, when, and why assessment happened must be discovered.

It is likely that general patterns of influence and lines of conflict relating program to pressure groups and clientele will develop. These patterns of influence and conflict need to be identified for each period, and the influence of various actors evaluated. These patterns will be altered on occasion by important events, such as the appointment of a dynamic new minister or a major international occurrence. These shift points need to be identified and rationalized.

Finally, there are two types of end products that should be examined: first, the outputs of government policy, which may be classified into regulations and regulatory activity, distribution of funds, and the provision of goods and services; and second, the outcomes of government activity, or the actual changes and results in the real world.

Obviously this organizational framework does not represent a rigorously defined conceptual model. Our preference has been for a more flexible set of organizing concepts and delimiting ideas. We hope that this leads to insights and connections that might be suppressed by an overly structured analytic framework. The organizing framework that has been developed forces us to look further than has been the case in previous studies of federal government involvement in sport. Yet, it allows us to avoid the trap of static categorizations. Emphasis on certain aspects of the framework in one time period may be changed appropriately to other aspects in a subsequent time period.

In dealing with the substance, consequences, and outcomes of federal government involvement in sport, we make some suggestions as to how these issues might be ameliorated to the betterment of sport in Canada.

## *Origins of Bill C-131*

Bill C-131, An Act to Encourage Fitness and Amateur Sport, was passed in the House of Commons with unanimous consent in September 1961. The Act was an uncontentious, non-partisan issue with wide acceptance but, at the same time, of little importance to the government and the public at large. For most of the ensuing decade, this attitude was to persist, and the activities of the federal government were confined largely to entering into cost-sharing agreements with the provinces and making grants to national sport-governing bodies. But certain social and political events were at work in the 1960s that would change all this. These changes had their roots in the forces and events that were instrumental in the creation of the fitness and amateur sport act.

The specific events associated with the passage of Bill C-131 have been well documented elsewhere (see for instance Hallett 1981; West 1973; and Westland 1979) and are relatively well known by students of the history of federal government sport involvement in Canada. For this reason, a brief overview of the role of the advocates of sport and fitness legislation will suffice.

Advocacy for federal government action concerning the perceived low level of fitness of Canadians was spearheaded by Lloyd Percival, director of the Sport College in Toronto, by the Canadian Sports Advisory Council, the Ontario Physical Fitness Committee, and Doris Plewes, physical fitness consultant for the federal Ministry of Health and Welfare. The Duke of Edinburgh's speech to the Canadian

This chapter appeared in a similar form in the *Proceedings of the 5th Canadian Symposium of Sport and Physical Education* (Bruce Kidd, editor, Toronto, August 1982).

Medical Association in June 1959 has been seen by most analysts as the focal point for the physical fitness lobby. In this speech, Prince Philip had decried the state of fitness of Canadians and challenged the medical profession to take steps to rectify this deficiency.

There was a parallel concern about Canadian international athletic performances and in particular, the country's sagging reputation in Olympic and World Cup hockey. This concern was evident in newspapers across Canada and in the House of Commons, where a number of members of Parliament during the late 1950s urged the government to take action to provide support to Canada's elite athletes. One of these advocates, J.R. Taylor, played a further important role in convincing Prime Minister Diefenbaker, who subsequently became a strong advocate of federal government fitness and amateur sport legislation, to visit the Canadian team at the Pan-American Games in Chicago in the summer of 1959.

#### LARGER FORCES AND EVENTS

##### *Post-War Internationalism in Sport*

The advent of sport as a matter of international interest and concern in Western industrialized nations after World War II played a powerful role in creating a favourable climate for federal government intervention in sport in Canada. This growth of international sport can best be understood in the larger political context. The Cold War that developed following World War II between the Soviet-aligned states and the United States and its allies reached its peak politically during the 1948 to 1952 period. It was in this political climate that the Soviet Union's application for membership in the International Olympic Association was approved in 1951. The Soviets realized that sport made an excellent vehicle for propagating its political ideology and, accordingly, took steps to intensify the development of outstanding international competitors. For the first time since 1912, the Soviet Union competed in the 1952 Summer Olympics. In the unofficial U.S.-estimated point standing at these Games, the Americans placed first with 614 points, followed closely by the USSR with 553½ points and eighty-one medals (Chester 1971:104). Canada placed about seventeenth with a total of three medals (Jokl 1956:65-6).

The continued development of elite athletes in the Soviet Union resulted in an even more amazing performance at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 when the Soviet Union compiled a total of 622 unofficial points compared to 497 for the United States. Canada's

total of six medals did not compare favourably with the eighty-five earned by the Soviet team (Chester 1971:127, 133). The British-Israeli-French invasion of Egypt in October 1956 and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in November 1956 precipitated a major political controversy surrounding the Melbourne Olympics. Some teams threatened to boycott the Games and East-West rivalry was heightened.

The Soviet Union participated in the 1956 Winter Olympics for the first time and placed first in the unofficial point standings. They defeated the favoured Canadian hockey team and took the gold medal, while Canada placed third behind the United States (Bass 1971:198). This was only the second time in eight Olympics that Canada had not won the gold medal. A premonition of this phenomenal rise in hockey prominence in the Soviet Union was the Soviet victory over Canada in the 1954 World Hockey Championship. Canada's performance in Summer Olympic competition declined even further in Rome in 1960, when only one medal was garnered.

International sport had become an important factor in the foreign policy of the USSR. Other Eastern European socialist countries soon modelled the Soviet Union plan. The manner in which elite athletes in the Soviet Union had become supported by the state in the pursuit of their training endeavours caused the prevailing Victorian concept of amateur athletes, training and competing on their own time and at their own expense, to undergo substantial further modification. As a result, other countries began to re-examine their attitude toward government support for amateur sport. The ramifications of post-war internationalism in sport could be seen in the correspondence and discussions of the International Olympic Committee in the late 1950s that, despite the defusing of the Cold War in the political sphere, were often related to political squabbles and differences of opinion of amateur status based on traditional Cold War political alignments.

The success of Soviet Union athletes and an all-time low in Canadian performances abroad did not go unnoticed by Canadians. It was also the time of the advent of television in Canada; the exploits of international athletes were often filmed, flown to Canada, and viewed in the living rooms of millions of Canadians. These events created a climate that was favourable for the government to change its attitude toward the support of amateur sport in Canada. But there were also a number of wider political, social, and economic developments that were to influence positively attitudes towards sport legislation. Television in Canada probably was the most directly related of these developments to have such an impact.